

UK court denies Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro access to \$1.45 billion in gold



About five dozen governments — including the UK, US and Australia — do not recognise Nicolas Maduro as the legitimate president of Venezuela. (AFP: Juan Barreto)

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A British judge has refused to give control of more than \$US1 billion (\$1.45 billion) in gold stored in London to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro amid a dispute over the legitimacy of his leadership of the country.

[Mr Maduro has demanded the return of the gold](#) to help his cash-starved nation fight the coronavirus pandemic but the Bank of England — which is storing it in a vault — has refused to hand it over.

The court ruled on Thursday that it was unlawful to give the gold to Mr Maduro since Britain does not recognise him as president of the Latin American nation.

The bank offers gold custodian services to many developing nations, but since 2018 it has delayed the transfer of 31 tonnes of Venezuelan gold stored there to Mr Maduro's Government.

The sale of Venezuela's gold reserves has become one of the Maduro administration's few options to raise funds due to US sanctions.

The UK recognises [Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido as his country's legitimate leader](#).

Mr Guaido has sought to preserve the gold stash at the Bank of England to keep it out of the hands of the Maduro Government, which it contends is illegitimate and corrupt.

His lawyers reiterated during a recent four-day hearing their stance that the National Assembly leader became Venezuela's rightful leader under provisions of the country's constitution.

The dispute hinged on the British stance toward Venezuela, a country in economic and political crisis where both Mr Maduro and Mr Guaido have been claiming presidential powers for more than a year.

The Banco Central de Venezuela sought to release the gold, which it now says it wants to sell for food and medical equipment that is desperately needed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. But it had also sought the gold before the pandemic began.

In a statement, a lawyer for Mr Maduro's side promised to appeal saying that the judgment "entirely ignores the reality of the situation on the ground" in Venezuela.

"Mr Maduro's Government is in complete control of Venezuela and its administrative institutions, and only it can ensure the distribution of the humanitarian relief and medical supplies needed to combat the coronavirus pandemic," the statement said.

"This outcome will now delay matters further, to the detriment of the Venezuelan people whose lives are at risk."



Juan Guaido, head of Venezuela's opposition-run congress, declared himself interim president following the 2019 election he claims was rigged. (AP: Fernando Llano)

The UK recognises the claim of Mr Guaido, who heads Venezuela's congress, as does the United States and about five dozen other governments, [including Australia](#).

Mr Guaido proclaimed himself the interim president in early 2019, months after Mr Maduro declared victory in an election that his critics say was rigged in his favour.

Despite its support for Mr Guaido, the UK continues to have diplomatic ties with Mr Maduro's Government.

The British have not granted diplomatic credentials to the envoy that Mr Guaido has named ambassador to the UK.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-03/uk-refuses-venezuelan-president-nicolas-maduro-access-to-gold/12418458>