

Bolivia joins countries offering Snowden asylum

Katharine Lackey and Peter Wilson, USATODAY 12:40 p.m. EDT July 6, 2013



(Photo: AP)

Bolivia has joined a growing number of South American countries offering asylum to NSA leaker Edward Snowden.

Bolivian President Evo Morales said Saturday that Snowden is welcome in his country. He did not say whether he had received a formal petition from the 30-year-old.

The decision comes after Morales' plane was abruptly rerouted to Vienna last week after being denied permission to fly over France on suspicion Snowden was on board. Morales said he is making the asylum offer as a protest against the U.S. and European nations he blames for the incident.

Snowden, who is wanted by the U.S. for leaking classified information about a number of secret surveillance programs, has asked for asylum in more than 20 countries. A number of countries have already rejected applications.

On Friday, President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela said they were willing to grant asylum to Snowden.

"We have decided to offer humanitarian asylum to the American Edward Snowden to protect him from the persecution being unleashed by the world's most powerful empire," Maduro said at the start of a military parade in the Venezuelan capital celebrating the 202nd anniversary of the South American country's declaration of independence.

Maduro has repeatedly said that the fugitive leaker was being unfairly attacked by the U.S. government.

In Nicaragua, Ortega said Friday he was willing to make the same offer as Maduro, "if circumstances allow it." Ortega didn't say what the right circumstances would be during a speech in Managua.

He said the Nicaraguan embassy in Moscow received Snowden's application for asylum and that it is studying the request.

"We have the sovereign right to help a person who felt remorse after finding out how the United States was using technology to spy on the whole world, and especially its European allies," Ortega said.

Contributing: Wilson reported from Caracas; The Associated Press