

Bolivia: Presidential plane forced to land after false rumors of Snowden onboard

By Catherine E. Shoichet, CNN
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(CNN) -- Bolivian officials say their country's presidential plane had to land in Austria on Tuesday after false rumors circulated that former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden was aboard the plane.

Portuguese and French authorities wouldn't let President Evo Morales' plane land in their territories, Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca told reporters.

"We cannot lie ... by carrying ghost passengers," a Bolivian official said of rumors Edward Snowden was on the plane.

"We are told that there were some unfounded suspicions that Mr. Snowden was on the plane," Choquehuanca said. "We do not know who has invented this lie. Someone who wants to harm our country. This information that has been circulated is malicious information to harm this country."

Snowden's asylum options dwindle



Snowden running out of options



PHILIPPE LOPEZ/REUTERS/GETTY IMAGES

The plane had been flying from

Where could Snowden go?

Moscow back to Bolivia. The foreign minister said authorities from the South American country are investigating the source of the false rumors about Snowden.

Bolivian Defense Minister Ruben Saavedra told CNN en Español that he believed the United States government was behind the rumors.

"This is a lie, a falsehood," he said. "It was generated by the U.S. government."



Edward Snowden breaks his silence

an explanation," Choquehuanca said.

'Unbowed' Snowden seeks new havens

Morales had been in Russia for a conference of gas-exporting countries, where he told the Russia Today news network that he would be willing to consider asylum for Snowden.

But Bolivian officials stressed that accusations that an official aircraft would harbor Snowden were baseless.

"We cannot lie to the international community by carrying ghost passengers," Choquehuanca said.

The situation drew a swift rebuke from Ecuador's foreign minister, who told reporters he planned to call a regional meeting of the Union of South American Nations, known as UNASUR, to discuss it.

"We consider this a huge offense, and I will call for a UNASUR special summit with foreign secretaries to discuss this issue," Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino said.

CNN's Claudia Rebaza, Rafael Romo and Matt Smith contributed to this report.

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Bolivia's air travel rights were violated, he said.

"It is an outrage. It is an abuse. It is a violation of the conventions and agreements of international air transportation," he said.

Bolivia's foreign minister told reporters that the move had put the president's life at risk.

"Portugal owes us an explanation. France owes us