



# Bolivian president's plane diverted over suspicion Snowden onboard

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As an international round of asylum rejections piled up Tuesday for Edward Snowden, a plane carrying Bolivia's president home from Russia was diverted to Vienna because of suspicions the NSA leaker might be onboard.

Bolivia's foreign minister David Choquehuanca denied Snowden was on the plane, which had to land in Vienna after France and Portugal refused to let it cross their airspace.

"We don't know who invented this lie," he said, "but we want to denounce to the international community this injustice with the plane of President Evo Morales."

He said the decision by France and Portugal "put at risk the life of the president."

Morales had said in an interview with Russia Today television that Bolivia would be willing to consider granting asylum to Snowden.

There were no reports of Snowden being spotted at the Vienna airport.

Morales was reported meeting there Tuesday night with the plane's crew to reprogram his return to Bolivia.

Snowden has faced an international round of rejections after frantically applying for asylum in a bid to extract himself from the Moscow airport, finding himself increasingly relying on a handful of Latin American countries that may or may not help him.

His best chance for leaving the transit zone at the Moscow airport could still hinge on the president of Venezuela -- who was in Moscow on Tuesday meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela was coy on the matter, but voiced support for the NSA leaker.

"Who must protect Snowden? This is the question. This young man of 29 was brave enough to say that we need to protect the world from the American imperial elite, so who should protect him?" Maduro said.

Maduro was scheduled to spend Wednesday in neighboring Belarus before returning to Venezuela.

According to WikiLeaks, which is aiding Snowden, the NSA leaker has applied to a total of 21 countries, though Snowden has apparently withdrawn his application to Russia after Putin demanded he stop leaking U.S. secrets as a condition for refuge.

But a string of countries on Tuesday either rejected Snowden or said his application would only be valid if he was already on their soil. Among the countries that told him "no" were Brazil, India and Poland.

Speculation, then, centered on those countries that have not yet provided a definitive response. These include China, but also Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Bolivia's president also met with Putin during a summit of major gas exporters in the Kremlin.

Putin on Monday was mum about the possibility of another world leader whisking Snowden away.

Snowden is facing diminishing options, without a valid U.S. passport or any country that so far has agreed to take him.

India's External Affairs Ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin said Delhi has carefully examined the asylum request and decided to turn it down. Akbaruddin said Tuesday that the government has "concluded that we see no reason to accede to that request."

Amid the roadblocks, Snowden broke his weeklong silence on Monday, defending his "right to seek asylum" while separately claiming he remains "free and able" to publish sensitive information on U.S. surveillance.

In a statement issued on the WikiLeaks website, Snowden attacked the Obama administration, saying, "On Thursday, President Obama declared before the world that he would not permit any diplomatic 'wheeling and dealing' over my case. Yet now it is being reported that after promising not to do so, the President ordered his Vice President to pressure the leaders of nations from which I have requested protection to deny my asylum petitions.

"This kind of deception from a world leader is not justice, and neither is the extralegal penalty of exile."

He continued, "Without any judicial order, the administration now seeks to stop me exercising a basic right. A right that belongs to everybody. The right to seek asylum."

Separately, in a letter in Spanish sent by Snowden to Ecuador President Rafael Correa and obtained and translated by Britain's Press Association, he declared, "I remain free and able to publish information that serves the public interest. No matter how many more days my life contains, I remain dedicated to the fight for justice in this unequal world."

It was the first known statement from Snowden since he flew out of Hong Kong into Moscow more than a week ago.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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