

THE AMERICAS

Venezuela Joins the Great Climate Con

Maduro wants rich-world reparations for the environmental damage he caused.

By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro showed up at the annual United Nations climate summit in the Egyptian seaside resort of Sharm El-Sheikh last week blaming capitalism for environmental degradation in the developing world. Naturally Mr. Maduro's solution is for rich countries to hand over money to poor ones—like his.

It's tempting to dismiss the 27th

Conference of the Parties, or COP27, as little more than an international convention of John Kerry-type gas bags letting off hot air. Not good for the world's emissions score but otherwise meaningless.

Nevertheless, those who work for a living in the developed world might want to pay attention. Mr. Maduro, who is an egregious polluter, is asking the U.N. to help him and his fellow socialists in Colombia and Brazil pick your pocket in the name of the environment. As he put it in comments to journalists on his arrival in Egypt, he wants the “powerful” nations to commit to a plan “to finance the recuperation of the Amazon.”

Mr. Maduro had already left the gathering of global grifters when President Biden—who wants the U.S. to buy Venezuelan oil—arrived on Friday. But video circulating on social media showed Mr. Kerry shaking hands and politely engaging, via a translator, with the Venezuelan earlier in the week.

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[French President Emmanuel Macron not only greeted Mr. Maduro warmly but chatted with him briefly about](#)

France's interest in helping the region. Mr. Macron came off looking small and, frankly, foolish.

If human lives matter at all to the international community, Mr. Maduro ought to be barred from its meetings. Under his rule, dissidents are imprisoned in dungeons, student protesters are beaten and sometimes killed, and food supplies, controlled by the government, are used as a political weapon.

A U.N. human-rights report released in July 2019 found that detainees were subjected to torture, including "asphyxiation, electric shock, broken bones, being hung by their limbs, and being forced to spend hours on their knees." They are frequently denied medical care, it said.

In March 2020 the Justice Department charged Mr. Maduro and 14 other current and former high-ranking Venezuelan officials with having "partnered with the FARC to use cocaine as a weapon to 'flood' " the U.S. The U.S. is offering a reward of up to \$15 million for "information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of" Mr. Maduro.

Nevertheless, the Venezuelan gangster flitted around COP27 with an air of legitimacy. This was all the more surprising because Mr. Maduro's criminality extends to the environment.

In Canaima National Park, a designated World Heritage site,

mining is prohibited, as it is in all of Venezuela's national parks. Yet according to World Heritage Watch Report 2022, the Maduro regime is promoting resource extraction there, "within the framework of a strategic policy known as the Orinoco Mining Arc."

The mining operations, the report says, use poisonous mercury "during crushing, grinding, and washing the gold ore." It adds: "Washing with mercury is the most polluting stage, since more than 90% of it ends up released directly to the ground." The report estimates that "the dragging effect and accumulation of mercury in water bodies can reach distances of up to 120 km from the site of use."

Communities, wildlife, soil and the wider ecosystem throughout the area are affected. So is the rest of the nation. The effects of the mining "seriously endanger the operation of the Guri hydroelectric plant, the major provider of electricity for most of the country" as "sediments cause a decrease in the incoming flow and have a high erosive power on the blades and other components of the hydropower turbines."

This sounds downright evil. But with the state-owned oil and natural gas company—known by its initials as PdVSA—in ruins and energy prices off their peak until this year, gold has become a new source of income and a way to launder drug-trafficking profits. Far from trying to stop the criminal mining groups in the Orinoco that use mercury and

destroy the environment, the Maduro regime—which took over in 2013—has encouraged them.

Environmental disaster is the hallmark of Venezuelan socialism. Residents increasingly burn their household rubbish or leave it on public roads. Rodents and unsanitary conditions are pullulating. Water-treatment systems have collapsed, sending wastewater running into streams, rivers and the sea.

Once beautiful Lake Maracaibo is a dumping ground for trash and untreated water. Hugo Chávez made things worse in May 2009 when he expropriated 76 transportation and oil-service companies (yes, capitalists!) that did work on the lake. Since then the pipes below the water increasingly break, leak and spill, turning the lake black, killing fish and producing a miasma of petroleum.

If the U.N. wants its environmental confabs to be taken seriously, it should disinvite clowns like Mr. Maduro.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.