



ILLICIT ECONOMIES

SHELTERED BY CORRUPTION

Transparencia Venezuela

Transparencia Venezuela
Editorial Coordination

Correo del Caroní
Ecoanalítica
Espaja
Fundación Vortex
Runrunes
Transparencia Venezuela
Investigation and writing

Transparencia Venezuela
Edition and diffusion

Transparencia Venezuela's Design Team
Design and layout

**ILLCIT ECONOMIES IN VENEZUELA
SHELTERED BY CORRUPTION
AMONG GOLD, DRUGS, GASOLINE SMUGGLING AND EXTORTION ON PORTS**
Edition ©Transparencia Venezuela - 2022

The content on this work may be quoted and diffused by any means, provided it is for non-commercial purposes.

Please cite the source.

Transparencia Venezuela
Av. Andrés Bello Avenue with 1era transversal of Los Palos Grandes, Multicentro Empresarial building. Los Palos Grandes, 6th floor. Chacao municipality. Caracas. Venezuela
Phones: (212) 286.24.10 / 286.49.47



TransparenciaVenezuela



@NoMasGuiso



nomasguiso



Transparencia Venezuela



TransparenciaVenezuela

INTRODUCTION	5
1 ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN VENEZUELA	9
1.1. From submerged economy to illicit economy	
1.2. Collapse on formal economy and raise of illicit activities in Venezuela	
1.3. Gasoline smuggling	
1.3.1. A story with a foreseeable end: gasoline crisis	
1.3.2. Covid-19 pandemic, a detonator	
1.3.3. Reversion of smuggling flow and new opportunities	
1.4. Drug traffic: Venezuelan role on the most lucrative activity of the world	
1.4.1. New neighbors: groups of organized crime settle in the country	
1.4.2. Past experiences: the Walid Makled case	
1.4.3. Judicial proceedings and sanctions for alleged drug traffic	
1.4.4. An approximation to the size of opportunity on drugs market	
1.5. Control of ports: the fight over an important artery of Venezuelan economy	
1.5.1. Authorities on ports	
1.5.2. Paradigm shift on the coasts: port dynamics of delicatessen stores economy	
1.5.3. New mechanisms of extortion in the modern Venezuelan economy	
1.5.4. Reduction of market does not imply reduction of extortion appetite	
1.5.5. Dimension of robbery on ports	
1.6. Probabilities of extortion on street control points	
2 ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES	33
2.1. Ciudad Bolívar and Ciudad Guayana, the capitals of a mining state	
2.2. Mines, south and mining illicit activities	
2.3. Illicit activities and violations deepen during Covid-19 pandemic	
2.4. Gold production and levels of smuggling	
2.4.1. Regulations that continue to be unaccomplished	
2.4.2. The gold lost by smuggling	
2.4.3. Production stages, its actors and bleeding ways	
2.5. New strategic alliances and lixiviation plants, but same irregularities	
2.5.1. New mechanized and opaque artisanal alliances	
2.5.2. The companies behind strategic alliances	
2.5.3. More processing plants than gold sands	
2.6. The state involved in a world of illicit activities	
2.6.1. Orinoco Mining Arc State structure	
2.6.2. Omnipresence of the Venezuelan Mining Corporation	
2.7. Instauration of criminal co-governments	
2.7.1. From "labor unions" to " <i>the system</i> "	
2.7.2. The State and irregular groups	
2.7.3. Criminal organizations which share the mines	
2.7.4. Massacres and disappearances. Red numbers behind the fight for mines	
2.7.5. Impact on indigenous communities	
2.8. Gold does not shine on Orinoco Mining Arc towns, economic, social and environmental impact	
2.8.1. Attracted by gold	
2.8.2. Gasoline in the south	
2.8.3. Gold or cash in bolivars. Dollar is worth less in the south	
2.8.4. Signs of environmental impact	

3	CRIMINAL GROUPS BEHIND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES	89
	3.1. Tren de Guayana (The Train of Guayana)	
	3.2. Banda de "Totó" y "Zacarías" (Toto and Zacarias Band)	
	3.3. Organización R (R Organization)	
	3.4. Banda del "Negro Fabio" (Negro Fabio Band)	
	3.5. Banda del "Juancho" (Juancho band)	
	3.6. Tren de Aragua y aliados (The Train of Aragua and allied)	
	3.7. El Cartel de Paraguaná (Paraguana Cartel)	
	3.8. Megabandas de "El Koki" y "Richardi" (El Koki and Richardi bands)	
	3.9. Cuadrillas de Paz, Red Elco y Fuerzas Especiales Cívico Militares Patria Nueva (Peace Crews, Elco Network And Patria Nueva Civic-Military Special Forces)	
	3.10. Grupo armado Yeico Masacre (Yeico Masacre armed group)	
	3.11. Sindicato de Barrancas (Barrancas labor union)	
	3.12. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)	
	3.13. Disidencias de las FARC (FARC Dissidences)	
4	ILLICIT ECONOMIES BY REGION	167
	4.1. Incidence of illicit economies on regions	
	4.2. Amazonas	
	4.3. Anzoátegui	
	4.4. Apure	
	4.5. Barinas	
	4.6. Carabobo	
	4.7. Delta Amacuro	
	4.8. Lara	
	4.9. Mérida	
	4.10. Nueva Esparta	
	4.11. Táchira	
	4.12. Yaracuy	
	4.13. Zulia	
5	MISINFORMATION AT THE SERVICE OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES	205
	5.1. Illicit activities on the Mining Arc, between denial of denounces and deviation from the subject	
	5.2. Evasion of responsibilities in drug traffic	
	5.3. Half-truths on ports corruption cases	
	5.4. Distort reality about gasoline smuggling	
	5.5. What president Maduro's order brought	
6	"LICIT" BUT IRREGULAR SOURCES TO OBTAINING FUNDS	214
	6.1. State Actives handover in 2021	
	6.1.1. Central Azucarero Sucre C.A.	
	6.1.2. Gas service stations transferred to others	
	6.1.3. Hotel Venetur Alba Caracas	
	6.1.4. Refinería Dominicana de Petróleo (Refidomsa)	
	6.1.5. Estimations of some actives transferred in 2021	
	6.2. New exports: scrap as an escape valve	
	6.3. Dark schemes of oil commercialization	
	6.3.1. Who are they negotiating with?	
	6.3.2. Between sanctions and discounts	
7	ILLICIT ECONOMIES AND ITS CONNECTION TO TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL NETWORKS	277
8	ILLICIT ECONOMIES CITIZENS HELPLESSNESS	233
9	ANNEXS	240

During more than 10 months, Transparencia Venezuela has analyzed the illicit economies with biggest operation volumes, in which participate the most powerful criminal groups in the country for 2022. The first confirmation is that we are before organizations who have managed to knit important national and international networks, thanks to the support of a group of corrupt public officials that coexist, support and promote such actions to obtain personal benefits.

For investigators, it has been complicated to separate activities and licit benefits obtained by the State through taxes, royalties, sales and production, from activities and benefits obtained by corrupt officials, not only due to the typical opacity of what is illegal and regrettable from the Venezuelan State, but also due to the thin line separating both operations, the quantity of participants switching ranges of power and the different national and international actors participating.

From our investigation, it can be highlighted that organized crime in Venezuela is on a Symbiotic phase, according to the classification made by Steir and Richards (1997), adapted by Edgar Gutiérrez. It is produced “when interdependence of organized crime with politic and economic system comes to the point in which boundaries are thin and actors participate as a political-bureaucratic-economic-criminal corporation. This is the highest risk phase for democracy, because the organization appropriates symbols from liberal democracy in a context of electoral legality and social legitimacy, including the ones that can be transferred from traditional economic and allied emergent elites”.

In the last two decades, control systems and justice organs in Venezuela allowed hundreds of great corruption cases to take place, which implied an unprecedented defalcation to the nation, also provoking great violations to human rights. Even though there are not official numbers regarding the plunder suffered by the Venezuelan public patrimony, given the impunity and high opacity, investigations from Transparencia Venezuela reveal that tribunals of more than 22 countries have opened 116 causes linked to Venezuelan corruption, involving more than 64.000 million dollars.

From data systematization made by the organization¹, it is shown that most corruption cases had their origin in the State Company Oils of Venezuela, Pdvsa, the source of more than 90% income in currency received by the country till six years ago. The corrupted network installed took advantage of the State structure and used diverse mechanisms to fill up their own pockets with the rent generated by the company in the most recent boom of oil price (2004-2014) and performed clientelist practices to ensure their remain in power positions.

Besides the volume of resources from Pdvsa activities, the corrupt structure also benefitted from rent generated by the exchange differential, among other sources. Ever since in February 2003 the then president, Hugo Chávez, installed a ferreous exchange control that restricted the sale of foreign exchange and imposed its value, then groups with privileges to access great amounts of foreign currency at subsidized prices ended up turning those currencies to the parallel market, obtaining great earnings due to the breach between both prices.

¹ A register of corruption cases identified by Transparencia Venezuela can be consulted in the El Corruptómetro database, an interactive tool created by the organization and Alianza Rebelde Investiga, formed by Runrunes, El Pitazo and Tal Cual media outlets. Available in: <https://corruptometro.org/>

However, before the economic asphyxiation caused by the destruction of oil industry, the economic crisis, disappearance of exchange subsidies, lack of investment and international sanctions, the corrupted network encrusted in state entities have chosen to spread their participation in a combination of illegal economic activities developed far and wide the national territory. On this report, the main characteristics and implication of these illicit activities in the last years are addressed, those that work for the involved to keep earning and compensate groups of interest implicated.

Despite the assemble of illicit economic activities is wider, this work is centered on revision of deviation and illegal sale of gasoline, drug traffic, illicit practices given in handling of Venezuelan ports and gold smuggling.

On the first chapter are presented the estimations of magnitude of the three main illicit activities in Venezuela: gasoline, drug traffic and ports. According to calculations made for this report by the economics and finances consultant, Ecoanalítica, yearly the corruption network is capable of generating at least 1.900 million dollars with activities related to gas smuggling; 4.919 million dollars on drug traffic in the national territory and around 825 million dollars on ports extortion. Only amounts reported by these three illicit activities represent around a fifth part (18%) of total income of the country, given that the internal gross product is ranked in about 43.440 million dollars.

This section also includes a revision to probabilities of extortion existing in Venezuelan street points of control, which constitute another opportunity to generate earnings illegally and causes great impacts on population.

Despite the great limitations to obtain information in the country, the firm estimated the impact on illicit activities, starting from revision of official statistics of third countries, systematization of reports from government organisms, interviews to sources from public entities who declared non-officially, besides the use of statistic and approximation methods.

On the second chapter, it is deeply explored the dramatic and accelerated exploitation of gold on the denominated Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO), where several illicit economies converge with atrocious social and environmental consequences, as well as important changes during the last two years on mechanisms and structures of power, formal and informal. This work describes how, despite the mining exploration and exploitation activities are allowed in a surface of 111.843 square kilometers (12% of national territory) and laws establishes that all gold must be sold preferentially to the Central Bank of Venezuela, actually most of auriferous reservoirs are exploited illegally, with the use of prohibited substances and with only a minimum portion entering national treasury. According to estimations, around 2.000 million dollars are exported yearly in gold, but in average only more than 500 million dollars are entered into the national bank accounts. It means, more than 75% is commercialized illegally, with support and participation of State officials and security and defense corps. The work also shows that in spite of mobility limitations imposed by the government during Covid-19 pandemic, devastation on the area increased, as well as internal migration and violation to human rights.

The current situation on AMO was verified with visits to mining towns in south Venezuela, Bolívar state, and interviews to key actors of the zone. Also, data was

compared through a wide documentary revision and consultation to open and closed data bases over directives of companies installed on the area and its networks. During five days of January 2022, a journalistic team of Runrunes and Correo del Caroní covered 850 km. of Troncal 10, which communicates Venezuela with Brazil and goes through municipalities such as Roscio, El Callao and Sifontes, corresponding to area 4 of AMO, delimited for exploitation of gold, quartz, coltan and granite. Towns visited were: Guasipati, El Callao, Tumeremo, El Dorado, Las Claritas and Kilómetro 88, as well as the beginning of La Gran Sabana and the indigenous community San Miguel de Betania. Afterwards, members of Transparencia Venezuela investigation unit visited Bolívar state during one week, went inside gold mines and mills in one of the most dangerous areas of El Callao, and complemented with interviews to small scale miners, in charge of mills, workers of the state company Minerven, sociologists, directors of civil society organizations, as well as academy representatives and members of the catholic church.

On the third chapter of this report, thirteen of the main criminal organizations present in Venezuela are described, who also participate on the economic illicit activities described before. Specifically, it is presented a profile of Tren de Guayana; “el Totó” and “Zacarías” band; La organización R; “Negro Fabio” system; “Juancho” band and his lieutenants; the collectives; Barrancas Labor Union; Cartel de Paraguaná; armed group Yeico Masacre; Tren de Aragua; the mega-bands of El Koki and Richardi; as well as of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It is deeply studied how these bands are formed, who are their leaders, what is their modus

operandi, as well as their alliances or relations with other criminal groups.

To gather information, reviews from regional, national and international media were compiled; publications from civil society organizations with experience on the subject inside and outside Venezuela were consulted; social media from criminal organizations members were identified and checked and interviews to sources from the Ministry of Defense, who declared unofficially, also interviewed defenders of human rights, journalists, social leaders, among others.

On the fourth chapter, it is analyzed the incidence of illicit economies and the presence of criminal bands in thirteen of the biggest states of Venezuela, which enables the design of policies or strategies to revert the situation.

This chapter was made from interviews to academics, defenders of human rights, social leaders, businessmen, community and union leaders, public officials, police officers and members of organizations of civil society in different areas of the country. An instrument of information gathering and validation was used, which included questions related to the type of illegal economic activities and actors, relevant cases, impacts of irregular groups and the submerged economy, and solutions proposed to face this problematic situation.

On the fifth chapter of this report, the role played by misinformation around illicit economic activities and participation of members of official structures in Venezuela are analyzed. Revision on communicational handling from official channels, stand out several patterns: there is almost total opacity in regards to activities developed on the Orinoco Mining Arc. Same situation is present on subjects related to irregularities on Venezuelan ports. There is manipulation

on declarations about drug traffic, it is normal to deviate focus on the problem and pass it to third parties. There flourish half-truths and propaganda, by publishing only part of the story in cases of gas smuggling and the procure to look like justice paladins.

On the sixth chapter of this report, there is approach to new “licit” but irregular sources to obtain resources brought by the Venezuelan government to maintain government operations, such as the very opaque re-assignment of State actives and scrap exports.

Even though there are many gaps of information related to delivery of companies of the State or state actives to private, at effects of quantifying the magnitude of these operations, the fourth more representative cases of each nature were chosen, which negotiation was made between 2020 and 2021, such as the sale of a Pdvsa filial in Dominican Republic, negotiations with diverse Pdvsa service stations and Hotel Alba Caracas and Central Azucarero Sucre cases. Ecoanalítica calculations indicate that the Venezuelan State relinquishes around 148,2 million dollars due to the irregular delivery and not registered of those companies.

Finally, in seventh and eight chapters, the connection between illicit economies with transnational criminal networks are analyzed, also its reflection regarding defenselessness in which citizens are immersed in front of these crimes and before the absence of an impartial and transparent justice system.

Transparencia Venezuela sent requests of information to the Sectorial Vice-presidency of Economy, Oils of Venezuela, the National Integrated Service of Customs and Tax Administration, Bolivarian of Ports, the Ministry of People’s Power for Defense,

the National Anti-drug Superintendence of Venezuela, the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) the Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development and the Venezuelan Mining Corporation, but as of the date of publication of this report, no responses had been received.

CHAPTER 1



ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN VENEZUELA



1.1. From submerged economy to illicit economy

A better comprehension of the current economic, political and social situation in Venezuela needs to go over the weight gained in the last years by illicit economies originated in the national territory, or the ones that find in the country the perfect passage to get to other destinations.

To understand this phenomenon and its magnitude better, it is important to know what **submerged economy means, that group of non-declared economic activities that escape the State's Administration control and official statistics¹, and comprehend the sum of informal and illicit economy**, distinguished by the nature of the activities contained.

Informal economy is a licit commercial activity, even though it is hidden for the purpose of registers for reasons of fiscal evasion or administrative control. Regularization of this sector represents the bulk of work of institutional bodies such as Treasury or Labor inspectors. However, in Venezuela, the most recent National Survey of Life Conditions (**Encovi**)², **shows an important increase on informal sector between 2014 and 2021 and a reduction of formal employment in 21,8 percentual points (equivalent to 4,4 million of employments, 1,3 million only last year), of which 70% are from the public sector and 30% private).**

Data consolidated on the study reveal that only 40% of employed are formally enrolled, against an informality that, gathering all non-registered on social security services, would incorporate independent workers (51.7%), domestic services and family helpers (4.6%) and union members (0.6%), reaching a total of 56.9%. These numbers are aggravated by the fact that, according to the same study, 50% of available working population

is inactive, an element that may mean a bigger implicit informality (mainly by the group of employees who work less than 15 works a week), and that may also be associated to income received by **family remittances, estimated in USD 2.000 million to 2021 closure.**

On its part, the illegal economy subject of this study, is different from informal economy due to the nature of activities incorporated. An example of it is drug traffic and goods smuggling. Unlike work inspectorates operating with the aim to reduce informality, illicit activities are fought by organs of national justice and specialized intergovernmental organizations, such as the International Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

For the purpose of this study, we will define as **"black economy" all flow of activities that comprehend deviation and illicit sell of gas, drug traffic, gold smuggling, as well as illicit activities in handling of ports.**

Beyond the differenced nature of both activities, the informal economy, as well as illegal economy allow the accumulation of "submerged" money, which afterwards must enter on the economic system through some informal and illegal mechanisms and in fact represent one of the main problems all around the world respect to quantification of the main indicator of economic activity, GDP (gross domestic product).

This indicator considers the total of economic activities developed, which includes submerged production transformed in National Rent that ends up integrating to aggregated demand. In some cases, the statistics authorities identify the weight of some part of submerged economy in its estimation of GDP, to subsequently define if it is or not adequate and that way justify a

1 Dornbusch, Fischer and Startz. (1982). Macroeconomía Intermedia.

2 Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida. (2021). "Condiciones de vida de los venezolanos: entre emergencia humanitaria y pandemia". Available in: https://assets.website-files.com/5d14c6a5c4ad42a4e794d0f7/6153ad6fb92e4428cada4fb7_Presentacion%20ENCOVI%202021%20V1.pdf



discretionary adjustment to rise or decline, with or without support from international accounting standards existing, to finally become a discretionary argument of political matter, which gains relevance in the Venezuelan case, where estimations of its volume represent more than a fifth part of total economy size.

1.2. Collapse on formal economy and raise on illicit activities in Venezuela

During the first fourteen years of Hugo Chávez government (1999-2013) Venezuelan oil prices kept on the high and exceeded USD 100 per barrel, representing an increase of 525% approximately (Ecoanalítica, 2018). This behavior allowed a disproportionate raise of public expense on social programs, with the aim to keep political support and propitiate a sense of loyalty among population and government.

Furthermore, in the midst of the oil boom, it became common that most parts of the political, military, judicial and administrative structures took advantage to evade national and international law and commit numerous acts of corruption, which caused an unprecedented defalcation in Venezuela and conducted it to a complex humanitarian emergency at least since 2015. Despite Venezuelan justice has not announced processes for all those cases, **Transparencia Venezuela** investigations reveal that tribunals in 22 countries have opened 116 causes linked to Venezuelan corruption, involving more than 64.000 million dollars.

As a consequence of the terrible handling in the oil industry during those years (and later fall in production, as well as the collapse of oil prices in 2013 and ranged corruption, the main source of income for Venezuela became practically fulminated. For 2018, oil income only represented 14% compared to 2012³.

The situation turned even more critical since 2017 with the imposition of economic sanctions by the government of the United States⁴.

In addition to this, fall of oil production made the collection of funds through exchange differential unsustainable. Through the different subsidized exchange schemes between 2005 and 2018, it is estimated that the non-oil public sector was not able to collect around USD 73.666 million, while the private sector received USD 149.314 million (Ecoanalítica, 2018).

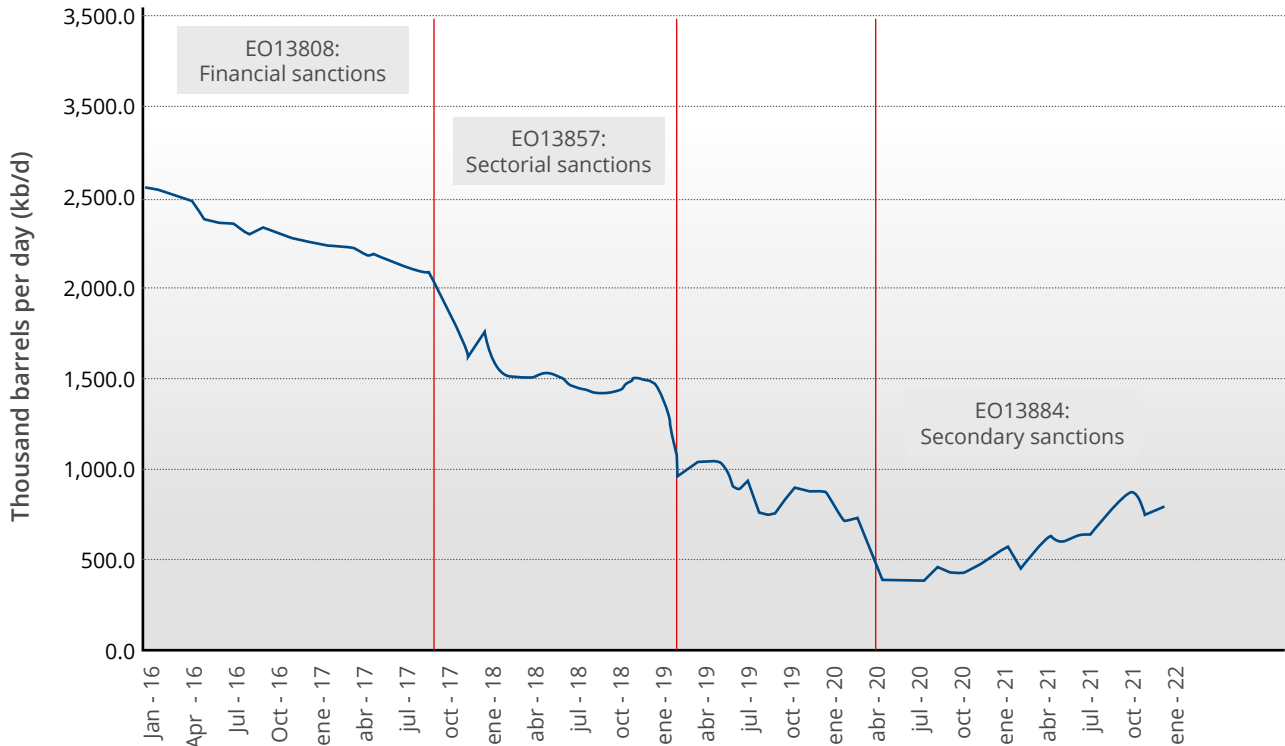
In this context of economic asphyxia, it became vital for fundraisers, corrupted groups encrusted on State Institutions, to find alternatives to substitute income associated to the oil sector and exchange differential. For this reason, illicit industries such as gas smuggling, drug traffic, illegal charges on ports and illegal sale of gold became the new focus of these networks.

3 In year 2018, Petróleos de Venezuela produced an average of 1,51 million barrels a day, while in 2012 were 2,03 million barrels a day, according to number reported by the Venezuelan Ministry of Oil to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Available in: https://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/MOMR%20February%202019.pdf

4 On August 24th, 2017 the then president of United States Donald Trump, signed the executive order 13.808 that prohibits the Venezuelan government to do transactions related to provision of financing to any of its organs or entities, including Pdvs. "Executive Order 13808. "Imposing Additional Sanctions with Respect to the Situation in Venezuela". Available in: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/13808.pdf>



Oil Production per month



Note: Chronology of main sanctions highlighted in red
Source: OPEC and Ecoanalítica

1.3. Gasoline smuggling

Gas has always been a subject of controversy in Venezuela. For years, and thanks to oil bonanza and huge subsidies to oil, Venezuelans had access to this resource at much lower prices compared to international average. **It got to the point that, in 2018, Venezuelans paid 99,9% less for oil than the price they paid in 1986.**

Despite different occasions in which the former President Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, referred to the need to increase prices of gas, in reality, the government chose to deepen this subsidy to unprecedented scales, with devastating consequences at distributive and fiscal level, also to be a great incentive for corruption.

By mere economic theory, subsidy to gas caused an incentive issue: as regular national price was considerably less than the rest of the world, especially in neighbor countries, smuggling was actively promoted, besides a bigger internal consumption (due to its accessibility), resulting in an opportunity cost that reached at least USD 115.029 million between 2003 and 2017, according to Ecoanalítica estimations.

The previous, together with the rise of population and income during Chavez government, as well as increasement of local consumption, increased subsidy, and therefore, opportunity cost. In the last years, after oil prices collapsed, destruction of hydrocarbons industry and sanctions imposed on the Venezuelan government, subsidies became even more difficult to maintain and demand was impossible to satisfy.



Raise on gas prices has always been a kind of taboo for Venezuelan governments, related to great political risks. After years of obtaining rents product of gas smuggling, the charging scheme was re-formulated but it kept giving opportunities for illicit activities to benefit interest groups involved.

The chavismo strategy during the first fifteen years was to totally nationalize the oil industry, with Pdvsa and related groups of interest as main beneficiaries. If difference between prices of Venezuelan gas and neighbor countries is taken into consideration, also considering the level of national production (previous to the complete collapse that took place in 2019), it can be estimated that gasoline smuggling to Brazil and Colombia for 2018 generated an income of approximately USD 1.860 million and USD 2.800 million (the leak was 80.000 barrels a day, even though it reached a peak of 120.000).

This implies that between 2008 and 2018, corrupted actors and related received from USD 21.000 million to USD 31.000 through this illegal activity (Ecoanalítica, 2018).

Considering smuggling dynamics previous to 2019, along the Colombian frontier in Táchira and Zulia, (where there were at least 192 trails, according to Colombia newspaper *Semana*⁵), Venezuelan military officers, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and even criminal groups such as Los Rastrojos, Los Urabeños and Los Pelusos acted in an activity that generated at least USD 3 million a day, a business sometimes even more lucrative than drug traffic. Once in Colombian territory, Venezuelan gas could increase its value 3.700 times, representing for the moment a fairly lucrative business for smugglers.

1.3.1. A story with a foreseeable end: gasoline crisis

However, as a result of years of disinvestment and corruption by the government, Venezuela completely lost its capacity to produce oil. For 2012, the main refineries of the country (Paraguaná, Bajo Grande, El Palito, Puerto La Cruz and San Roque) operated at 59% their capacity. This number reduced to 35% in 2017 and it is estimated that for 2020 it barely reached 5%.

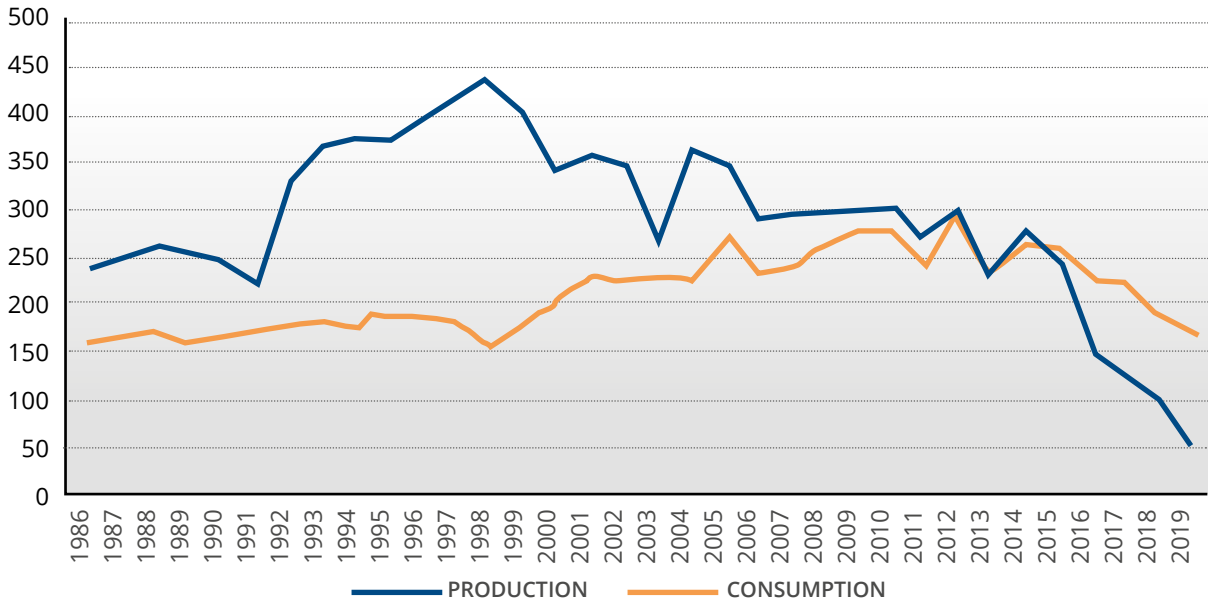


5 *Semana*. (2014). "Frontera con Venezuela, tierra de nadie". July 19th. Available in: <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/frontera-con-venezuela-tierra-de-nadie/396291-3/>



Gasoline production vs. gasoline consumption In Venezuela 1986-2019

(in thousand barrels per day)



Sources: US Energy Information Administration

Production devastation and sanctions imposed by the United States to the chavista government subjected Venezuelans to a general crisis of oil supply, which was aggravated by Covid-19 pandemic. At the beginning of 2020, production was at its lowest levels in recent history and Venezuelans crowded in long lines at gas stations all around the country looking for gas, a situation existing at frontier states and close to the borders for years.

Gas consumption previous to the pandemic was 170.000 barrels a day, but the gas industry was only able to supply 30.000 barrels a day. This unleashed the gas crisis that affected citizens during Covid-19.

In previous years, Pdvsa had managed to bypass production deficit with support of United States branch Citgo and from payments of oil

exports. However, sanctions prevented the continuation of this dynamic and closed many roads: partners such as Repsol (Spain), ENI (Italy) and Reliance (India) have prohibition to negotiate with Venezuela (despite the fact that they can operate, it can only be to pay pending debts, not to generate new benefits over debts). This situation got worse when Rosneft (Russia) also stopped operations in the country. In response to that, in May 2020 Maduro started receiving gas loaded vessels from Iran⁶, and the payment was allegedly made in gold, according to Yahya Safavi declarations, a general major of Revolutionary Islamic Guard of Iran⁷. Simultaneously, important efforts started having place to reactivate refineries (purchasing diluents to countries like Nigeria y Argelia), especially in El Palito and Cardón, which have capability to produce approximately 500.000 barrels a day.

6 Romero, T. y Buitrago D. (2020). Reuters. "Primer tanquero iraní atraca en puerto venezolano y aumenta refinación doméstica". May 25th. Available in: <https://www.reuters.com/article/venezuela-iran-combustible-idLTAKBN2311E0>

7 Infobae. (2020). "El régimen de Irán reconoció que la dictadura de Nicolás Maduro paga los envíos de gasolina a Venezuela con aviones repletos de oro". September 28th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/americas/venezuela/2020/09/28/el-regimen-de-iran-reconocio-que-la-dictadura-de-nicolas-maduro-paga-los-envios-de-gasolina-a-venezuela-con-aviones-repletos-de-oro/>



1.3.2. Covid-19 pandemic, a detonator

On May 30th, 2020, after months of persisting severe scarcity of gas, Nicolás Maduro announced the raise on gas prices under a difference scheme⁸, gas passed to be sold at an international price (USD 0.5 per liter) for general population and a subsidized price (USD 0.02 per liter) for people who were inscribed on the Patria System, a virtual platform created to collect social helps that has been criticized for its political connotations. The sale of gas through the system was also rationed to 120 liters per month per vehicle.

However, in view of persisting scarcity of gas, mostly in regions of the inner country and even more in border states, a parallel market was generated, in which gas can reach up to USD 3.5 per liter. This way, people cannot get gas in regular gas stations and must turn to black market. They pay in Venezuela the most expensive gas in the world.

The Bolivarian National Guard has control on gas supply. The corp that should be surveilling territorial integrity is the one in charge of checking gas stations around the country. Besides, some members allow and actively participate on gas black market and charge of bribery to let people load gas without making the line and in days non corresponding to the vehicle plaque, according to citizens denounces and the Venezuelan Public Ministry⁹. Of course, the differenced scheme of prices generates incentives for establishment of parallel markets, with the aim to get additional income and contribution to corruption.

1.3.3. Reversion of smuggling flow and new opportunities

Deepening of gas scarcity began to be registered in 2020, and it led to something particular: smuggling flows reverted and at least on frontier states such as Zulia and Táchira, the demand began to be covered with gas illegally imported from Colombia. Price of Colombian gas was about USD 0.57 per liter, while Venezuelan gas acquired through black market could reach USD 3.5 per liter. It is estimated that between 5.000 and 15.000 liters were smuggled from Colombia to Venezuela every day.

Flows of gasoline smuggling towards Venezuela



Source: Insight Crime. May 2020.

8 BBC Mundo. (2020) "Maduro anuncia una subida del precio de la gasolina en Venezuela y la participación de empresarios privados en el suministro". May 31st. Available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52865355>

9 Youtube. Venezuelan Public Ministry. (2022). "Declaraciones del FGR sobre la lucha contra las mafias de la gasolina y los funcionarios corruptos". Min 1:55. January 20th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC_E63BSs2E&t=7s



Still, at the beginning of 2022, in the rest of the country, where scarcity persisted and smuggled gas from Colombia was not available, the population depended on the national gas deviated from subsidized gas stations (controlled by GNB) and sold with overpriced in black markets. But at the same time, it left an open window for unscrupulous officials and officers to keep going with a lucrative and profitable illegal business.

Till beginnings of 2022, up to 42% of gas in Venezuela was destined to subsidized sale, according to sources of the Ministry of Economy, Finances and Foreign Trade.

Considering that to satisfy national demand 156.000 barrels a day are required; population may have access to 10.4 million gas liters at USD 0.02/lt. Having into consideration the difficulty of citizens to access gas and the progressive raise on production, it is estimated that 60% of production is destined to illegal activities, if this gas sales at least at the denominated international price of (USD 0.5/lt) on parallel market it could generate a benefit of 5.2 million a day or around USD 1.900 million a year.

Understanding reactivation of productive and refining capacity, it is estimated that internal gas deviation is at least among USD 1.800 and USD 2.700 million a year for actors who control illegal commerce of gas, and going back to levels previous to the pandemic and collapse of production.





1.4. Drug traffic: Venezuelan role on the most lucrative activity of the world

During the last decade, Venezuela has inserted progressively on the transnational market of illegal drugs, as a consequence of geographical characteristics of the country and political changes occurred on it. Currently, Venezuela stands as one of the main countries used for drug transit and a preferred route for drug traffic on the occidental hemisphere for a variety of illegal drugs, mostly cocaine¹⁰.



Source: Organized Crime Observatory. 2018.

¹⁰ United States Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. Drug and Chemical Control, Volume I, 231". November 27th, 2021. Available in: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/International-Narcotics-Control-Strategy-Report-Volume-I-FINAL-1.pdf>.

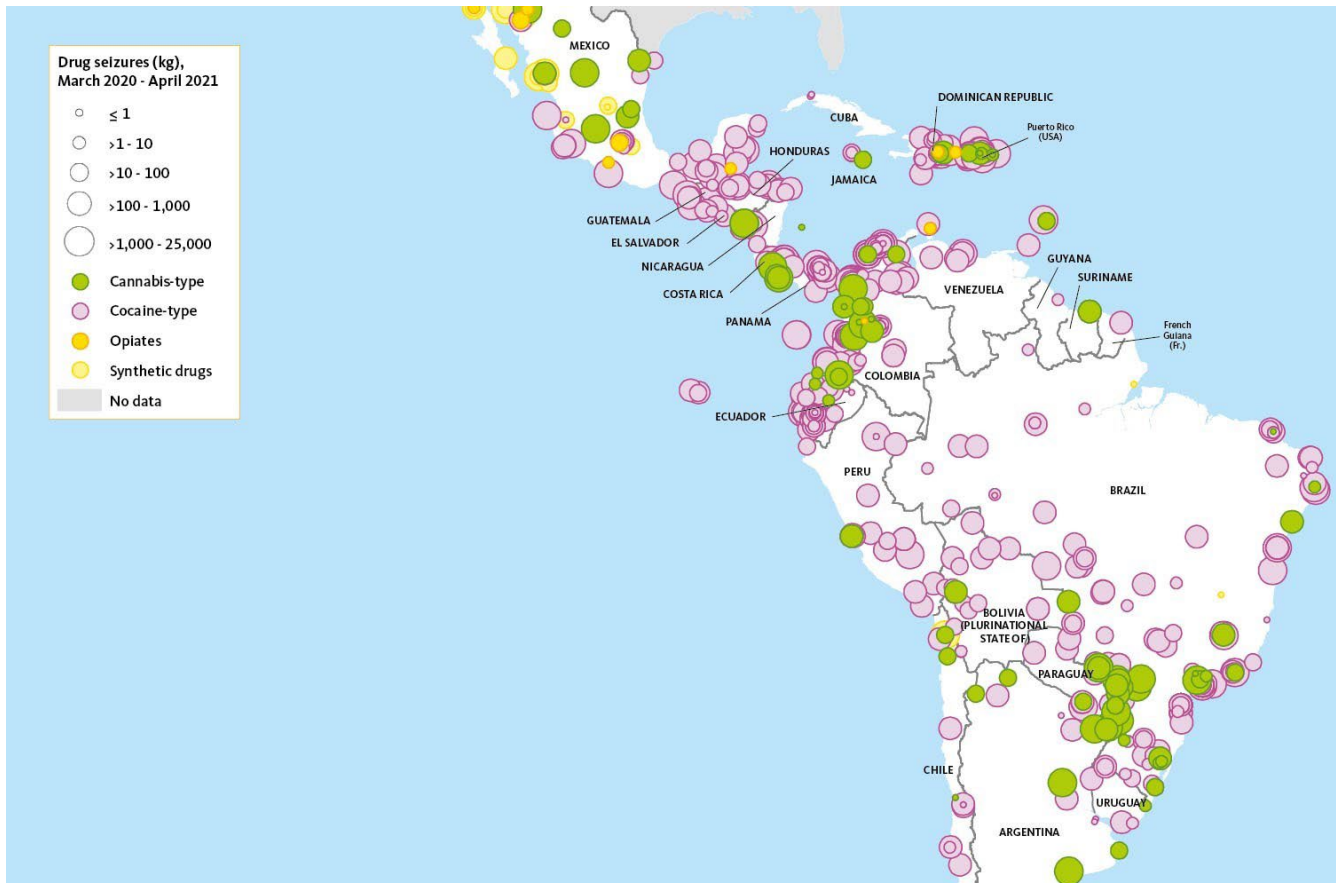


As shown in the figure, almost all drugs trafficked in national territory come from Colombia, particularly the Andean frontier. Lack of cooperation From Nicolás Maduro government to international organisms to fight traffic, minimum effort to collect and distribute information about the illicit activity at national and international level; centralization of military and judicial powers and a generalized corruption

environment create the perfect conditions to proliferation and expansion of this type of criminal organizations in the country.

Besides, central power members have been accused in international instances of contributing with organizations dedicated to drug traffic, to obtain benefits from the activity and avoid conflicts with them.

Drug seizures reported between March 2020 and April 2021



Source: UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform



1.4.1 New neighbors: groups of organized crime settle in the country

Efforts of the Colombian government to fight drug traffic have incentivized organized crime groups operating in that territory to move their illicit activities to other countries. On the frontier states between Colombia and Venezuela, since many decades, there have been reports of presence of Colombian guerrilla groups such as National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), nonetheless, after 2016 signature of the peace agreement among these last and the government of Juan Manuel Santos, presence of these groups increased in Venezuelan territory.

These groups transport and store great quantities of cocaine to rural zones of Venezuela and Use the country as points of transfer to be sent afterwards to Mexico, Central America, Occidental Africa, Europe and the Caribbean, according to DEA reports.

National Anti-drugs Superintendent of Venezuela, General Major Richard López Vargas informed at the "I Expo Seguridad Ciudadana", in December 2021, that during that year it was possible to seize 51 tons of illegal drugs in 5.334 procedures, a record number that exceeded seizures of 2011, when 42.000 kgs. of drugs were seized¹¹.

Regarding location of criminal groups on the territory, stands out control exercised in Apure state, in Venezuelan plains, neighbor of Arauca department in Colombia. In 2021 and first months of 2022, major confrontations took place between FARC dissidents present in Venezuela, FANB and ELN. These conflicts are deeply described in the fourth chapter of this report.

The traditional procedure of narcotic transport operations at great scale happens using air assets, in this case, there is "an air bridge"

for drugs established in Venezuela. According to information collected by the United States Southern Command Joint Interagency Task Force, on average there was at least one suspicious flight going through Venezuela every day in 2012. Since then, the conditions to tag Venezuela as a "secure route" for drug transportation just have strengthened.

A report from *Caracas Chronicles* media, published in 2020, enlightens the aerial route of drug smuggling. There, it details the testimony of a local farmer located in Zulia state, who received unexpected visits from ELN and FARC members to use his farm for creation of small clandestine landing strips and it is precisely on those complexes where the biggest quantity of drug inventory is moved¹².

Although most activities related to drug traffic in the country are limited to its transport, there are signs of beginning to cultivation of drugs in Venezuela. The 2019 report from International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), a United Nations (UN) body indicated that in 2018 were detected and dismantled 33 laboratories for cocaine processing in the limit territory with Colombia. According to INCB, in 2016 only 6 similar installations were detected¹³.

Fundaredes Organization, the Observatory of Organized Crime, and other organizations confirm evidence of coca plantations at industrial levels in Zulia state, facts that could change dynamics of the cocaine market worldwide.

In February 2022, the Prosecutor assigned by the **Constituent, Tarek William Saab, informed that Venezuelan authorities eradicated 341.000 coca plants, which occupied 31 hectares in Zulia state, frontier with Colombia**¹⁴.

11 Ferrer, M. Superintendencia Nacional Antidrogas. (2021). "Venezuela batió récord de incautación de drogas en el 2021". December 18th. Available in: <https://www.sunad.gob.ve/venezuela-batio-record-de-incautacion-de-drogas-en-el-2021/>

12 Padron, F y Pérez, A. Caracas Chronicles. (2020) "Dealing Drugs in Clandestine Airports of Perijá". January 11th. Available in: <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2020/01/11/dealing-drugs-in-clandestine-airports-of-perija/>

13 Diálogo Américas. (2020). "Venezuela involucrada en la producción de cocaína". April 08th. Available in: <https://diologo-americas.com/es/articulos/venezuela-involucrada-en-la-produccion-de-cocaina/>

14 EFE. (2022). "Venezuela erradica un cultivo de 341.000 matas de coca en una región fronteriza". February 17th. Available in: <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/sociedad/venezuela-erradica-un-cultivo-de-341-000-matas-coca-en-una-region-fronteriza/20000013-4742628>



1.4.2 Past experiences: the Walid Makled case

Walid Makled, alias “el Turco”, who is considered one of the biggest drug traffickers in Venezuela, made public more details about the modus operandi of this kind of organization after he got captured in Colombia in 2010. He established how he got control on drug routes through Venezuela thanks to his alleged alliances with sectors of the National Bolivarian Armed Force (FANB), operators of different emergent delinquency groups and FARC. According to his declarations, military served through a corruption scheme that eventually allowed his organization to create great storage and transportation complexes through the maritime Port terminal Puerto Cabello. He had plans to expand operations to port La Guaira when he was captured¹⁵.

1.4.3 Judicial proceedings and sanctions for alleged drug traffic

Relations between FANB and criminal organizations who traffic drugs have also been documented and denounced by prosecutors of different districts in the United States. According to our registers in Transparencia Venezuela, at least 12 criminal investigations have been opened in USA tribunals, all for drug traffic, involving Venezuelan public officials or former officials and in six of those nine military officers have been processed judicially¹⁶.

One of the most emblematic cases is the denominated Cartel de los Soles, which has been filed on the Court of the Southern District of New York under file 11 cr-205 since march 5th, 2020. According to the accusation, there is a criminal organization who took that name because it is composed by Venezuelan military officers that occupy high rank positions and use their power inside the State, not only military, but legislative,

judicial and inside intelligence institutions to enable traffic and distribution of cocaine, specially to the United States. El Cartel de los Soles makes reference to the insignias in the shape of sun, fixed to the uniforms of officials, allegedly members of this cartel.

Even though there is no detail of the organization’s hierarchic structure on the file, following officers from the National Bolivarian Armed Force are accused: Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, Clíver Antonio Alcalá Cordones y Diosdado Cabello Rondón.

Leader Nicolás Maduro was also pointed in the case of the so-called Cartel de los Soles, together with members of FARC Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez” and Seuxis Hernández Solarte, alias “Jesús Santrich”. This last was murdered in Venezuelan territory¹⁷.

Other judicial causes mention FANB active members such as: Vladimir Padrino López, Néstor Luis Reverol and Edilberto José Medina.

The list of active and/or military officers that have been involved in alleged cases of drug traffic is extense. In 2008, the OFAC sanctioned Henry de Jesús Rangel Silva, retired Army Chief General, former minister of People’s Power for Defense and former governor of Trujillo state, for his alleged support to FARC in drug traffic.

In 2008, and for the same reason, was sanctioned Ramón Emilio Rodríguez Chacín, navy Captain, formed minister of Interior and Justice and former governor of Guárico state. However, the sanction against Rodríguez Chacín was lifted in December 2021 when the names of dozens of former combatants of the guerrilla group were also removed.

On their part, FANB members pointed in different cases, active and retired, and the Venezuelan leader have repeatedly rejected

15 Primera, M. El País. (2011). “El narco que sabe demasiado”. April 14th. Available in: https://elpais.com/internacional/2011/04/15/actualidad/1302818407_850215.html

16 Drug trafficking cases opened in international courts, as well as the cases of corruption, can be consulted in the El Corruptómetro database, an interactive tool created by Transparencia Venezuela and Alianza Rebelde Investiga, formed by Runrunes, El Pitazo and Tal Cual media outlets. Available in: <https://corruptometro.org/>

17 BBC. (2021). “Muere Jesús Santrich: las disidencias de las FARC confirman el fallecimiento del comandante guerrillero colombiano en territorio venezolano”. May 18th. Available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-57165018>



the allegations and assure to be accomplishing with their duty of relentlessly fighting drug traffic. Occasionally, there are reports of armed confrontations with members of criminal groups that have resulted in the death of some of their leaders. However, there is no transparency if these events respond to a generalized national strategy or conflicts of local interest.

1.4.4 An approximation to the size of opportunity on drugs market

Lack of public statistics regarding drug seizures made in Venezuela, combined with the low reliability of the ones existing, difficult to determine precisely the size of drugs market in Venezuela for 2021.

According to the number of seizures that Runrunes (an independent media dedicated to data journalism) had access to, a total of 46.000 kgs, of cocaine were seized in 254 incidents during 2021; additionally, seizure of 7.000 kgs of marihuana were reported in 457 individual incidents. However, seizures reported in national territory do not take into consideration the quantity of drugs that managed to leave the country, but that was seized in transit to its destination. As a reference, the Coast Guard of the United States seized 9.600 kgs. of cocaine on boats coming from Venezuela during 2019. Assuming that levels of transported narcotics transported through maritime means have maintained constant, **since 2019 and summing up national and international proved seizures, at least 55.500 and 7.000 kgs. of cocaine and marihuana transited Venezuela in 2021.**

As a transit country of international drug market, it is adequate to think that income perceived by individuals responsible for drug traffic is only a margin of the value on final product. To determine this margin is literally impossible due to the business nature, but using international

sale prices helps dimensioning the value of drugs transiting through the country. Using the average of prices reported in United States, United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal on the yearly questionnaire of drugs from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2019, it can be observed that approximate sale price of a cocaine gram is USD 87,71 and a gram of marihuana is USD 6.



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Knowing quantities seized and final price of each product, total amount of drugs transited through Venezuela in one year is around USD 4.919 million. It is important to make clear that the mentioned value reflects the total minimum transiting in the country, not an estimated of entry. By possessing only data of substances seized, to calculate the real magnitude and benefits of such business is sincerely difficult. Nonetheless, to have an approximate of the proved value of the product going through the country gives an idea of what may the individuals involved be perceiving as earnings. As Venezuela has kept being a transit country for drug traffic, it makes sense to suppose that much product has reached its destination successfully.

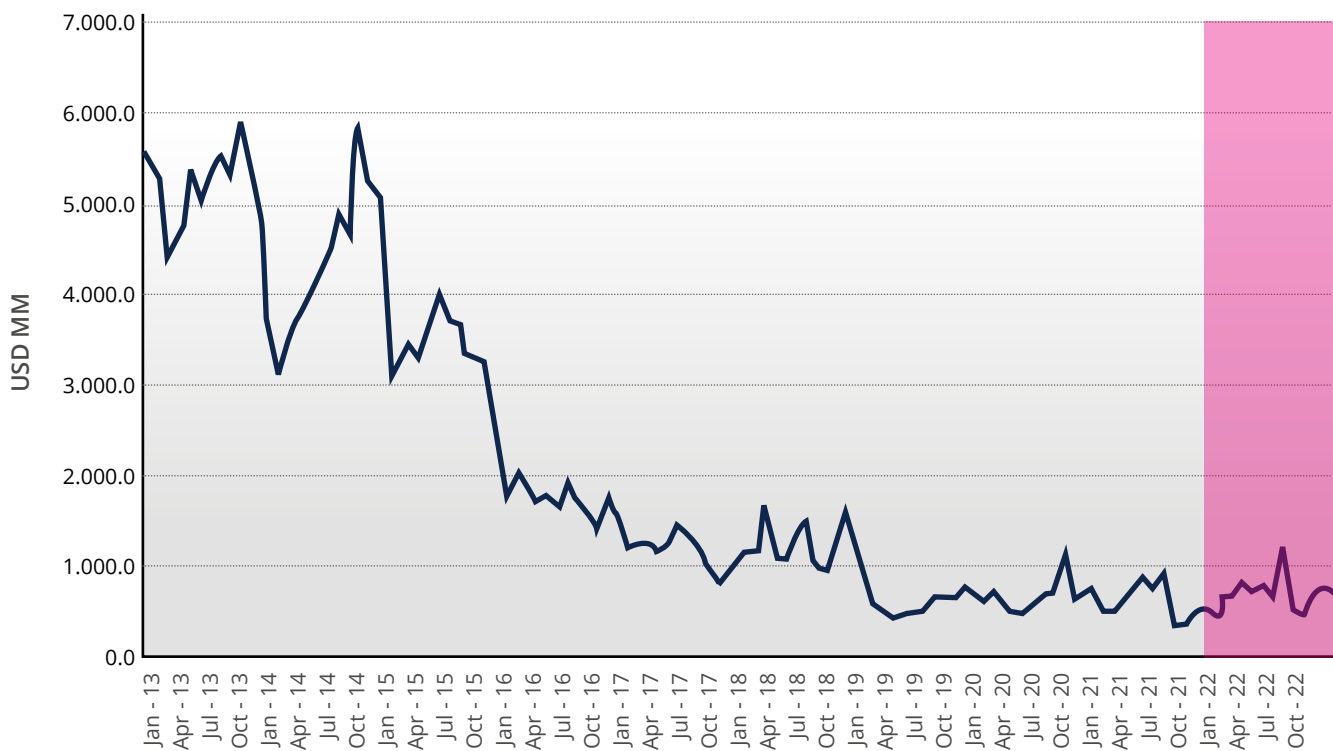




1.5 Control of ports: the fight over an important artery of Venezuelan economy

Port activity in Venezuela has a great historic importance. The country, used to satisfy great part of its internal consumption through goods and services importation, all financed with oil-dollars, came to the point of importing UDS 6.000 million monthly during period 2013-2014, according to numbers collected by Ecoanalítica.

Imports per month



Note: estimates and projections as of 2nd quarter 2021.

Sources: Un Comtrade, Trademap, IMF and Ecoanalítica



Economic power accumulated in this activity attracted the interest of influent groups to control ports and share benefits among their inner circle. The first reform of impact came on March 24th, 2009, when president Hugo Chávez signed the decree of creation of state company Bolivariana de Puertos (Bolipuertos)¹⁸, to which was given the responsibility to administrate physical port spaces previously handled by regional governments.

With the creation of Bolipuertos, it was managed to centralize port activity and use it as another instrument to attract rents. Port centralization gave more power to the National Bolivarian Armed Force that is nowadays in charge of performing most part of their activities in ports.

Since its creation, several directives of Bolipuertos have been related to alleged corruption cases and other illicit activities. In 2015, for example, former vice-president of the state company, Vice Admiral Antonio González Martínez and two other officials were arrested for alleged purchase of three ferries in Spain¹⁹.

Three years later, newspaper El País of Spain informed that former vice president of Bolipuertos, Elisaúl Yépez Leal, opened an account in the Banca Privada d'Andorra (BPA) in July 2011, in which he would have hidden USD 600.000²⁰. according to documents checked by the media, Yépez justified the need to open the account on the small European country BPA by telling this was to collect alleged “debts for services rendered in the customs area”.

The colonel Luis Augusto Piligra Jiménez case is more recent. He was president of Bolipuertos between 2017 and 2018 and later occupied the presidency of the also state company Lácteos Los Andes. Piligra was deprived of liberty in May 2021, after the General prosecutor assigned by the Constituent National Assembly, Tarek William Saab, accused him of creating a network of companies that turned out to be favored in public contracting with Lácteos Los Andes.

Piligra’s management in Bolipuertos left suspicious operations. In May 2018 the colonel authorized the establishment of a strategic alliance between Bolipuertos and Compañía Venezolana de Logística CVL-Caejerb, S.A (CVL-Caejerb), composed by five companies created by the Savings Bank of the Venezuelan Army. Five months after leaving his position on Bolipuertos, Piligra reappeared as vice-president and after that as general director of CVL-Caejerb, the same company with which an alliance was made²¹.



ELISAUL YEPEZ. EL PAÍS

18 Decree No. 6.645 of March 24th, 2009, published in Official Gazette No. 39.146 of March 25th, 2009.

19 Ruggiero, J. Efecto Cocuyo. (2015) “Vicepresidente de Bolipuertos y dos funcionarios más seguirán presos en el Sebin”. April 22nd. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/vicepresidente-de-bolipuertos-y-dos-funcionarios-mas-seguiran-presos-en-el-sebin/>

20 Irujo, J. y Gil, J. El País. (2018). “Un alto cargo de Nicolás Maduro ocultó fondos en Andorra”. April 04th. Available in: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/04/04/actualidad/1522836766_535011.html

21 Crespo, C. Armando.info. (2021). “Con un par de cabellos amarró el Ejército sus negocios en Bolipuertos”. September 12th. Available in: <https://armando.info/con-un-par-de-cabellos-amarro-el-ejercito-sus-negocios-en-bolipuertos/>



1.5.1. Authorities on ports

On port and customs activities have been present, for more than 15 years, the Cabello brothers: Diosdado Cabello Rondón and José David Cabello Rondón. The first of them was in charge of signing the constitutive Act of Bolipuertos when he was Minister of Public Works, to which the state company responded. Also, several authorities leading Bolipuertos have been linked to him, such as Elisaúl Yépez and Luis Augusto Piligra.

On the other hand, in 2008, his brother, José David Cabello was designated as superintendent of the Integrated National Customs and Tax Administration Service (Seniat), a position that has kept leading till 2022 after his passthrough other government positions. From his position, José David Cabello is responsible for customs collections corresponding to imports and exports activities. During his management there have been also denounces of alleged irregularities.

According to OFAC reports, the United States Department of the Treasury, Seniat applies diverse systematic extortion mechanisms towards several private companies, both national and foreign. According to USA²², Seniat authorities usually perform audits in which they find irregularities, some real, some not. The next step is to offer audited companies to pay great penalties or taxes directly to Seniat or to make gradual transferences in smaller amounts directly into corrupt official's accounts.

José David Cabello Rondón

Graduated from the Military Academy as licensed in Military Sciences, according to official media and occupied multiple positions in Chavez and Maduro governments. Besides being superintendent of Seniat, he was director of the National Center for Foreign Trade (Cencoex),

the entity controlling foreign exchange in Venezuela; Minister of Industries (2014-2015); and Minister of Commerce (2015-2016).

1.5.2 Paradigm shift on the coasts: port dynamics of delicatessen stores economy

Economic crisis deepened in Venezuela with destruction of oil industry and fall on oil barrel prices caused a reduction on imports and exports at all levels, which translated into a fall of activity on ports.

In view of the new international commercial barriers, reduction and national commercial regulations and the rise of figures such as the so-called delicatessen shops – stores in which mainly imported products are sold– a change of paradigm occurred in Venezuelan ports, particularly the boom of “door to door” providers who take the product directly into the mentioned stores.

Seniat²³ Resolution No. 3.283 establishes that door to door transport is a “...service rendered by International “Courier” companies through which they pick up, transport internationally, custom clear, distribute and deliver to the final user, also send correspondence, documents and parcels...”.

According to estimations of investigators, **door to door importation service represents between 20% and 30% of containers processed yearly in Venezuela in 2022**. The nature of these services makes difficult rendering of due process of clearing for allocation of taxes because, in theory, a detailed documentation must be presented regarding each good imported, but the great quantity of products arriving in containers and its diversity makes the process even more complex. This characteristic makes its lack of regulation and high volume of transit on ports the perfect opportunity to raise funds illegally.

22 U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2018). “Treasury Targets Influential Former Venezuelan Official and His Corruption Network”. May 18th. Available in: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0389>

23 Seniat Resolución No. 3283, which regulates International Courier Services, was published in Official Gazette No. 36.127 of January 16th, 1997.



1.5.3 New mechanisms of extortion in the modern Venezuelan economy

According to secondary sources, interviewed for this report, modus operandi of corrupted groups when receiving door to door product is following:

- The value of goods inside the container is not declared and it is rarely opened to check its content; on customs, a “tariff” is established to pay for each container of this nature. This tariff can vary depending on many factors and it is determined arbitrarily by the official in charge at that moment. However, according to the same secondary sources, approximate tariff by container rounds USD 10.000.
- These amounts are paid to corrupted officials directly on ports and in cash, without any records reported to a Seniat office.
- Even though these transactions represent the biggest part of the amounts collected, there are other corruption mechanisms used in ports of Venezuela, such as conspiracy given between proprietaries of loads and custom agents to diminish value of goods and

services imported, this way a low amount is declared before Seniat and a “commission” is paid to the involved agents.

- An additional mechanism used previously on ports to attract illegal funds when exchange control existed, consisted in simulating or over invoicing importations. Companies receiving preferential currency from the State to purchase abroad, in reality did not acquire the products or purchased only part of it, but with support from customs officials the documents were altered to simulate a full purchase.

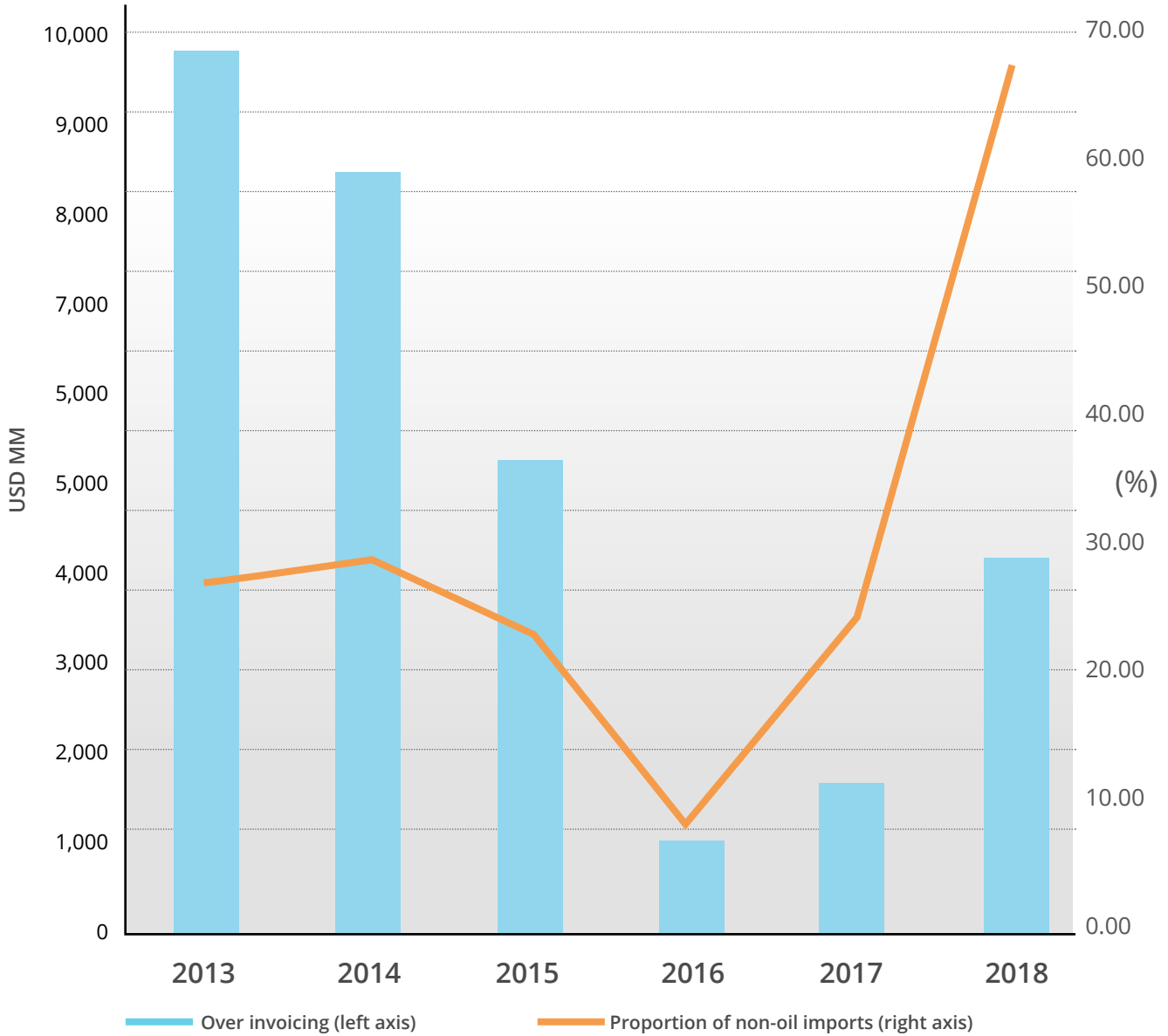
Contrasting data collected in TradeMap with figures reported by the BCV, it is estimated that in 2018 USD 3,711 million were over invoiced.

Year	Reported by BCV (MM USD)	Non-oil Importations (MM USD)	TradeMap (MM USD)	Over invoicing (MM USD)	Proportion of Imp NP (%)
2014	47.255	39.702	39.702	7.553	19,02
2015	33.308	28.655	28.655	4.653	16,24
2016	16.370	15.535	15.535	835	5,37
2017	12.023	10.563	10.563	1.460	13,82
2018	14.866	6.229	11.155	3.711	59,57

Source: TradeMap, Ecoanalítica



Import over invoicing



Sources: BCV, Trademark and Ecoanalítica

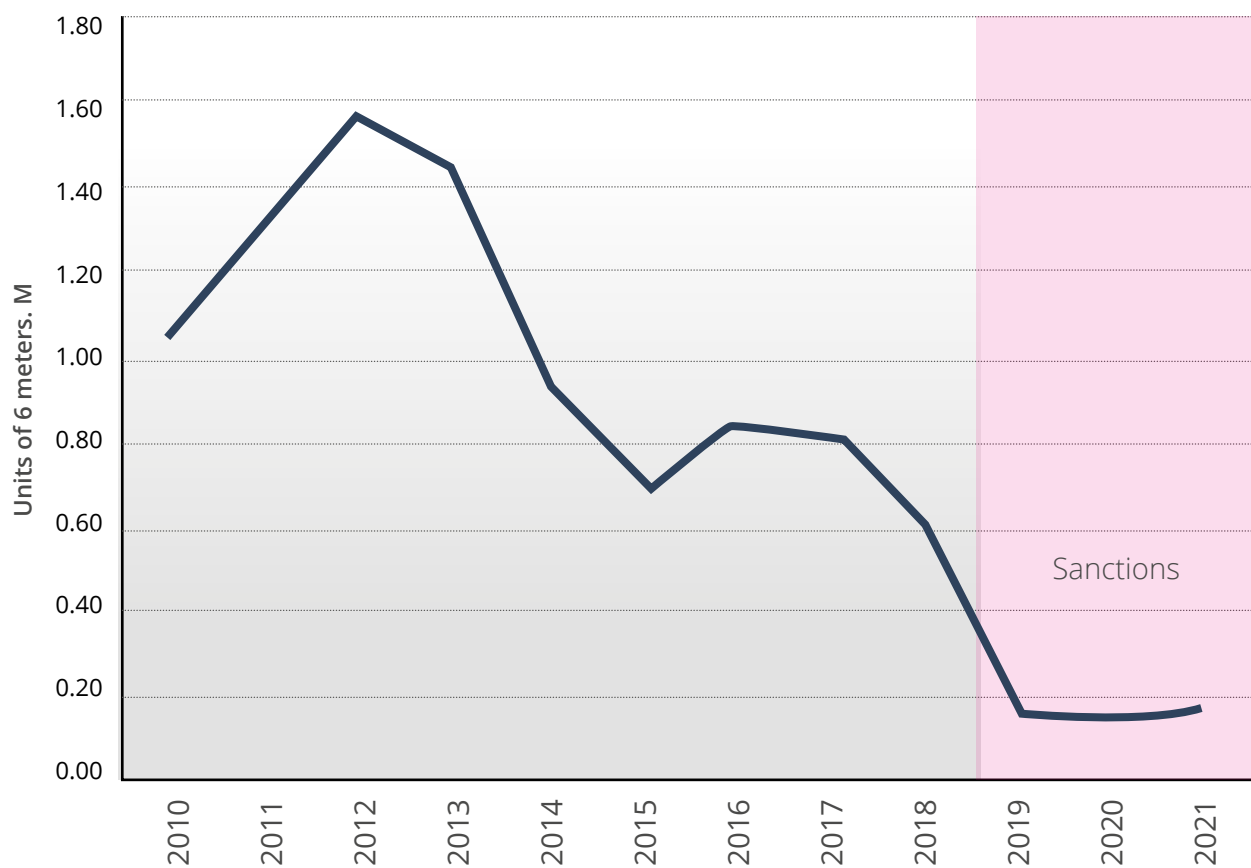


1.5.4 Reduction of market does not imply reduction of extortion appetite

Other data collected by the office of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad), indicate that the quantity of containers processed in Venezuelan ports yearly in years post-sanctions are about 200.000 units, using 20' containers as reference unit.

Considering this number, a projection suggests that for 2021 closure were processed around 180.000 containers, which represents a raise of 5% respect to 2020 levels. Given the need to overcome sanctions, it is probable that there is a black number of containers non registered by Unctad.

Containers processed per year



Source: UNCTAD



1.5.5 Dimension of robbery on ports

Despite numbers in recent years only represent 10% of the historic highest level on the country, there have been plenty of opportunities to use mechanisms of extortion on ports to get great earnings. Estimating the quantity of processed containers in 2021 in 220.000 units, which represents a raise of 5% respect to 2020, and assuming 37,5% of processed containers correspond to door-to-door services, in average, they pay a tariff of USD 10.000 to enter national territory.

It means, groups of interest on ports could be receiving USD 825 million yearly on delinquency schemes, money that does not enter to State bank accounts. This tariff is an extortion paid to individuals inside port institutions, that do not represent any type of official tax.

Control on ports in Venezuela is a crucial element for illegal funds collection from the corruption system in the country, but not only by its production through extortion systems mentioned previously. There also other illegal activities playing a fundamental role such as drug traffic, weapons traffic and illegal sale of gold.

Illicit economies in Venezuela and its dimension

Activity	Country Areas Involved	Main Actors	Destination of Smuggled Goods	Average Annual Estimate (million USD)	% GDP (2021)
Gold Smuggling	Orinoco Mining Arc (Bolívar and Amazonas)	Corrupt groups and their associates, FANB, ELN, FARC, National Guard, Minerven	Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, Dominican Republic, Panama, Turkey, Russia, Iran, China and United Arab Emirates	1.800	4.1%
Drug trafficking	Frontier with Colombia (Zulia, Táchira, Trujillo, Apure, Barinas)	FANB, ELN, FARC Dissident Factions	Central America, the Caribbean, North America, Occidental Africa and Europe	4.919	11.3%
Handling on Ports	Main Ports (La Guaira, Puerto Cabello, Guanta and Maracaibo)	Bolipuertos, Dirección Seniat	-	825	1.9%
Gasoline Smuggling	Frontier with Colombia and Brazil (Zulia, Táchira, Bolívar) / national territory	Pdvsa, National Guard, FARC, ELN	Brazil and Colombia, Domestic smuggling	1.900	4.4%
				9.444	21.74%

Sources: Ecoanalítica, UN Comtrade, TSI, OECD AND OAS



1.6 Extortion on Venezuelan street points of control

Along the Venezuelan territory, security and defense corps have installed hundreds of control points or “alcabalas”, a figure that normally has the purpose of contributing with population’s security. Nonetheless, in practice, many of these places have become an ideal space to act arbitrarily, in which officials retain citizens and many times, without justification, they force them to provide outlaw payments, which in Venezuela is popularly known as “matraqueo” (bribery).

Even though extortion in Venezuelan control points is not a recent phenomenon, the increasement on this illegal activity in the last years has caused a bigger impact on victims, specifically of people who transport any type

of legal merchandise, such as beans and vegetables, up to processed food or medicines. Increasement on Matraqueo has been such, that from small producers to great companies have had to include these amounts on their cost’s structures, which impacts prices paid by the consumers in the end.

For the purposes of this report, **extortion on control points is also considered an illegal economy because it contributes attraction of earnings from corrupted officials and creates economic distortions with a negative impact on population.**

Illegal charges on Venezuelan control points intensified since quarantine declared in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. Some security and defense officials installed on control points covered behind confusion surrounding mobility restriction measures existing, ignored exceptions previewed and decided arbitrarily who could freely transit and who had to pay what they disposed to be able to transit.

“I have given the order, Miss Vice-president (Delcy Rodríguez), you have to guarantee me that obstacles imposed on control points to Venezuelan people are eliminated”, affirmed Nicolás Maduro in a speech on July 12th, 2021²⁴, after he was claimed about illegal charges made on those places.

Despite the presidential order, the situation did not change. According to a joint analysis made by Transparencia Venezuela and Ecoanalítica, there is a high probability of extortion on control points located in the national territory, increased on occidental roads. **According to the applied study, it is estimated that going through 100 control points in a determined moment, in 25 of them there will be an act of extortion.**



24 Youtube. (2021). “Maduro ordena “eliminar trabas en las alcabalas” luego de que diputado adeco denunciara las matracas”. Youtube channel. July 12th. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qS8fhqxqTEs>.

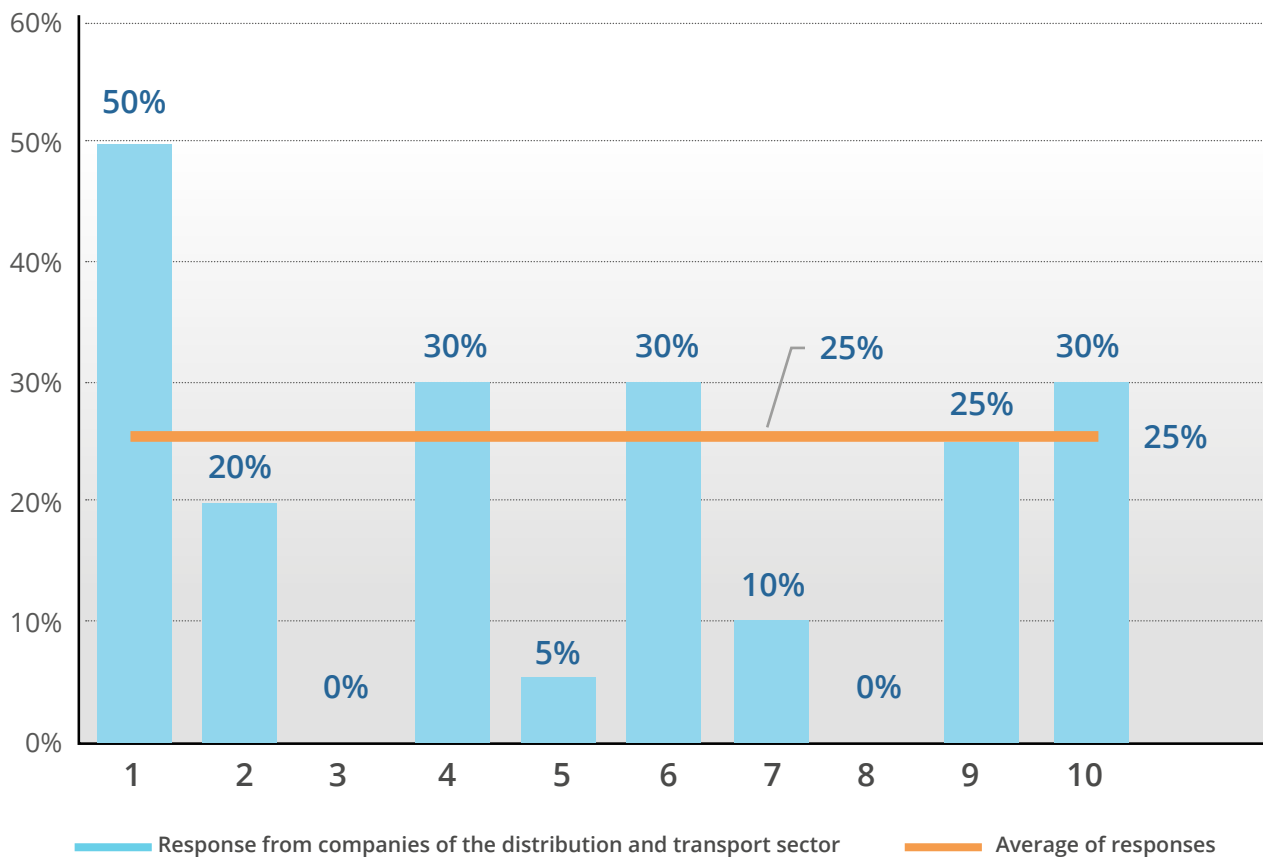


1.6.1. Study applied to companies:

On the first trimester of 2022, a study applied to 20 companies related to transport and distribution services of the country, with the aim to measure variables related to their experience with extortion on land control points

in Venezuela. From the study, it was managed to get effective data of those 10 companies and after getting an average of answer, it was specified that probability of extortion is around 25%.

Probability (%) of extortion in control points



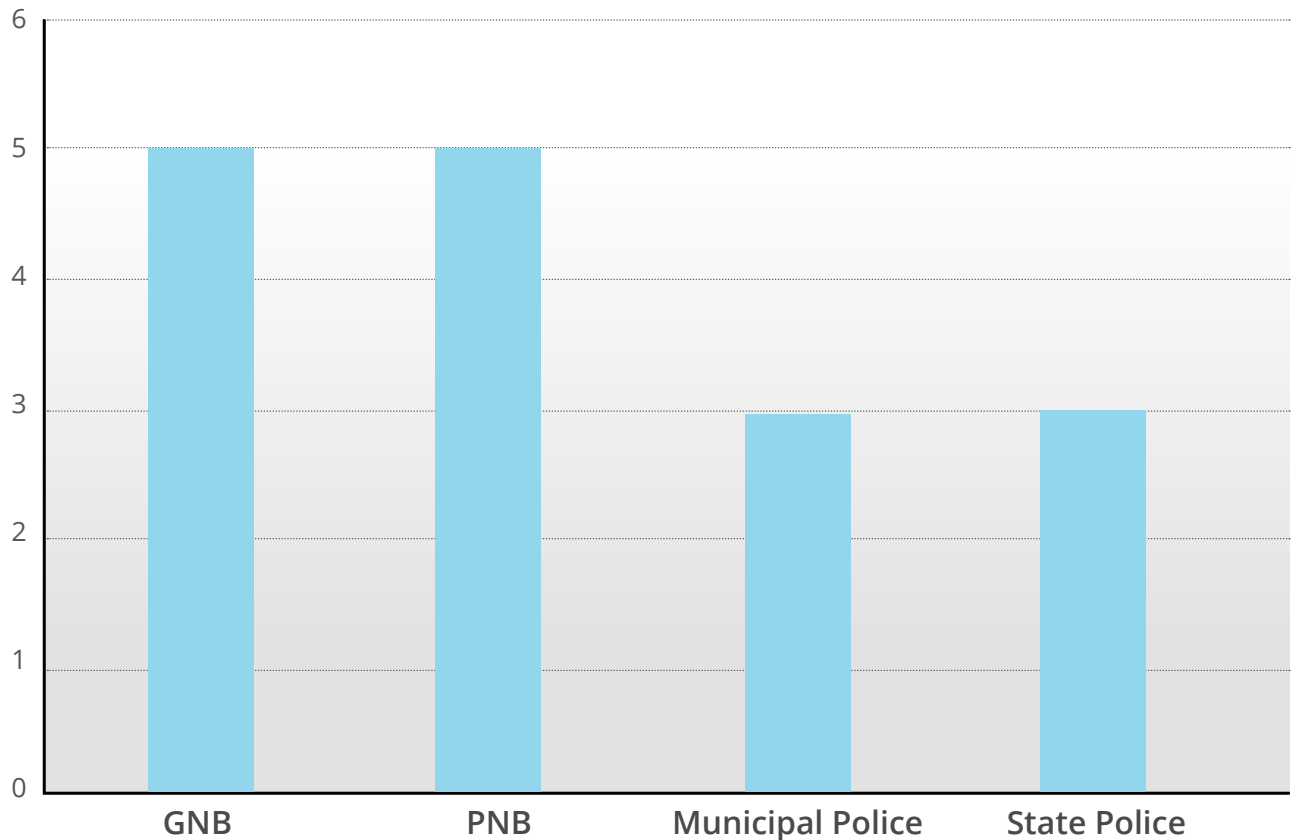
Sources: Ecoanalítica, results of owned study applied to Top-20 Companies in the country.



Although there are sample limitations for this information gathering, due to scarcity of data registered or lack of follow up on extortion cases, as well as resistance of companies to provide

more detail for fear of retaliation, the study also allowed to identify security and defense corps involved, according to answers.

Most frequently mentioned security corps related to extortion in road ways



Sources: Ecoanalítica, results of owned study applied to Top-20 Companies in the country



1.6.2. Control points incorporated

Information about control fixed and mobile control points of security and defense organisms, –GNB, Army, Cicpc, PNB and state and municipal police–, provided by the companies was corroborated and enlarged with owned field work and documental information. Likewise, all those points were geolocated in an actual map of Venezuela, which allowed to know their exact or approximated location.

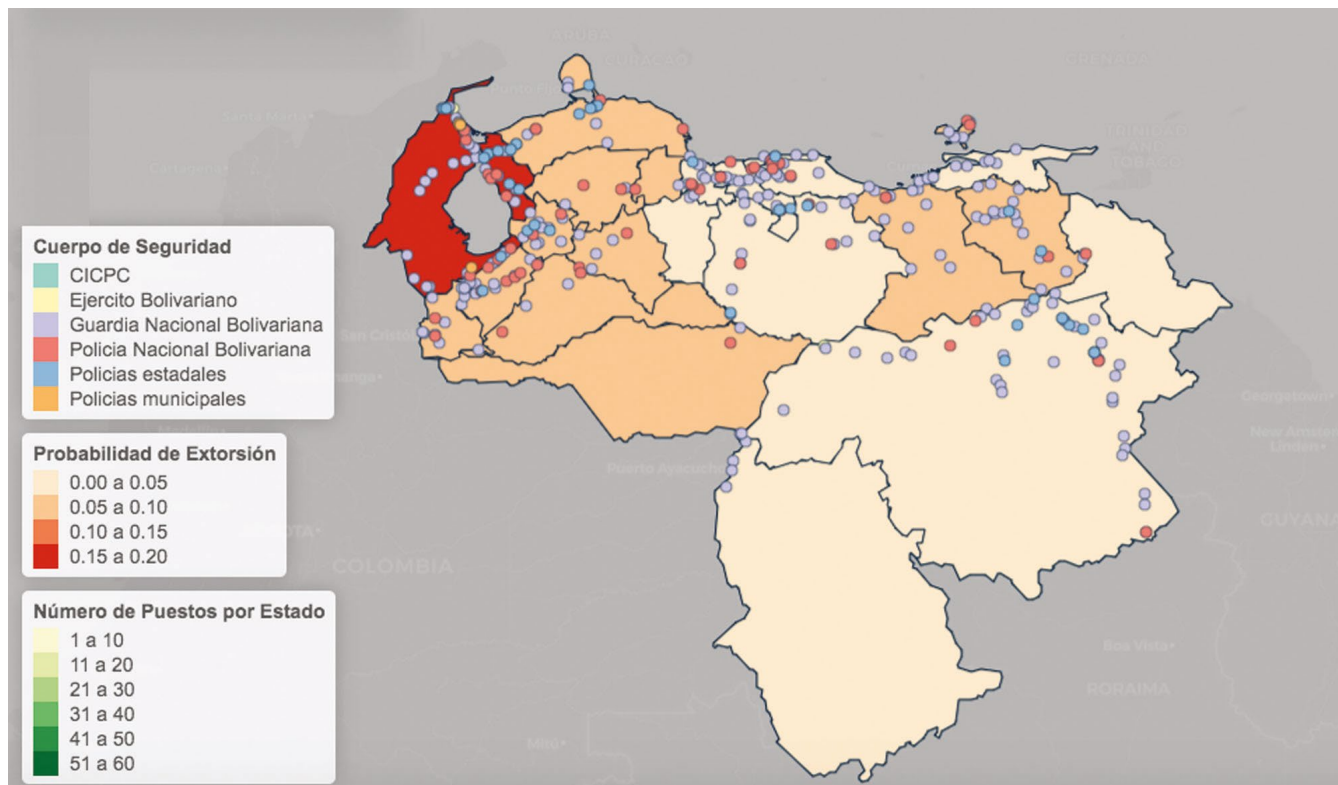
Data systematization allowed to identify 322 control points located over the trunk and regional roads, distributed like this: 223 of Bolivarian National Guard, 55 of Bolivarian National Police,

33 of state police, 3 of municipal police, 3 of judicial police and 3 of Bolivarian Army.

From the information compiled and conscious about limitations, a model was applied to estimate probability distributions linked to extortion facts. The summary of methodologic model employed can be consulted on annexes of this report.

The model allowed to estimate probabilities of extortion and occurrence of extortion events in each one of the 322 control points recovered, as can be observed in the Model of Extortion Probability in Land Roads.

Model of Extortion Probabilities in road ways



CHAPTER 2



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS



2.1 Ciudad Bolívar and Ciudad Guayana, the capitals of a mining state

Ciudad Bolívar and Ciudad Guayana are the arrival points for any person who wants to travel to the Orinoco Mining Arc, to Canaima National Park or to cross the border to Brazil. In these cities of Bolívar state, the impact of gold as a prelude of life in mining towns can be seen.

There is no need to get out of the cities to know precarity in which most population lives and the violence marking their lives, starting with public services.

The two largest and mighty rivers crossing Venezuela, the Orinoco and the Caroní, are a beautiful presence to see and hear, surrounding Ciudad Guayana (formed by Puerto Ordaz and San Félix) and Ciudad Bolívar, are not enough for water to reach home water taps. Not even in Puerto Ordaz, built 50 years ago to give urbanism to the city of basic companies from Guayana, a place completely paved and with major avenues, the water gets to the citizens homes through pipes.

Communities have solved the access to water with tanks, private wells, owned pumping equipment, installation of water tanks in each house and distribution of retailed water. Through San Félix and Ciudad Bolívar streets circulate carts with great buckets of water, pushed by young or old men, selling water to neighbors in pots or any kind of containers.

Despite “Simón Bolívar” Hydroelectric Power Station, is located in Guri and Caruachi dams, generates electricity for the whole country and is located in Bolívar State, energy service works intermittently, it is not regular. The intensified electric crisis suffered by the country since April 2022 also attacked this entity.

In regards to security, there is certain agreement between the interviewed in which they state violence has reduced in Ciudad Guayana and this “achievement” is attributed to two terrible reasons: on one side “delinquents migrated

to the mines”. On the other side, the peace collectives/pranes already control the most dangerous neighborhoods, the illicit markets and they “maintain peace”.

Analysts of the area consulted remember how in a beginning the strategy of president Chávez was to install a collective in each neighborhood; some of these collectives managed to control and impose their peace, but people from the community has to pay for it: “while they bring bills, there will be peace”, affirms father Carlos, parish priest of Vista al Sol, one of the most extended neighborhoods of Latin America with a population of 80.000 people and suffering from a high unrest since 2003, but where little by little delinquents started gathering in bands.

Father Carlos affirms that since approximately five years violence between gangs and the so-called construction unions diminished, negotiating territories and imposing their rules. “An example of this is Chirica market, it is controlled by collectives”.

Mines in the south area are a frequent destination and preferred by many young men of Guayana’s neighborhoods. There is a perception that the one who stays in the barrio is a “looser”. When entering to the pran’s band, youngsters receive a mattress, food and a motorcycle. “The young’s dreams are going to the mines, enroll the army, Cicpc or migrate”, says father Carlos.

A representative of a Human Rights organization affirms that in a visit to an El Dorado school, she saw how during school playtime children were playing to be “el Negro Fabio” the leader of a criminal organization controlling that area. Since years ago, women with children and men with their family go to the mines.

There are buses leaving every day from San Félix, full of persons going to the mines or migrating to Brazil.



Resilience versus negative adaptation: It's all right!

Investigators from the Catholic University Andrés Bello (UCAB) indicate that the community in Bolívar has “normalized” to such point the way they solve lack of water from the tap, that they come to express that the service is ok, that they do have water.

Before the consultation about electric service, other interviewed express as first response that it is Ok, that they do not have electricity issues. However, during field visits in January and February 2022, we determined that electricity power went out several times a day, generally for a short time.

Telephone and internet services are terrible, and the signal is only obtained with weak and irregular connection.

2.2 Mines, south and illicit activities

In Bolívar state, the south is that area starting from Upata city limits, crossed by Road 10, which ends up in Santa Elena de Uairén. One part forms area 4 of Orinoco Mining Arc, and another part corresponds to national Parks.

In that area, as in other regions of the world in which minerals are extracted, historically there have been illicit happenings and violations to human rights. Nonetheless, what has happened in the last decade, regarding massive and disordered extraction of gold, has turned the alarms on inside and outside the country and it has led national and foreign organizations to raise their voices demanding changes.

Among inhabitants of auriferous municipalities of Bolívar State (creole and indigenous), in south Venezuela, psychologists, geologic engineers, doctors, environmentalists, civil society

organizations, church representatives and members of academies, there is an agreement that the creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc marks a before and an after in political, economic and social dynamics of the area.

This project was shown by president Hugo Chávez in 2011, when he nationalized gold activity, but Nicolás Maduro was the one in 2016 to sign decree No. 2.248 that created the National Strategic Development Zone of Orinoco Mining Arc, a surface comprehended by 111.843 square kilometers of Bolívar state, where minerals such as gold, iron, bauxite, coltan, diamonds, manganese and granite¹ can be extracted, all classified as strategic minerals, under monopolistic control of the State. The Extension of the Orinoco Mining Arc represents 12,2% of national territory, and includes protected ecologic areas that house more than 170 indigenous communities.

In the midst of the economic recession accelerated with the fall of oil prices, the Venezuelan leader decided to turn to auriferous activity as a source to attract more rent. Since the beginning, he sold the Orinoco Mining Arc as a great opportunity to diversify the economy, reorder small mining, attract millionaire investments from national and foreign companies and increase contributions to social programs, but in practice none of that has happened.

Investigations developed by communication media of a recognized trajectory, as well as studies made by academies and civil society organizations, have allowed to determine that the gold business in South Venezuela, far from being a sustainable source of income, has splatted with blood and tainted with the most illicit practices, such as gold, gasoline, drugs, arms and munitions smuggling.

1 The decree of creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc was published in Official Gazette No. 40.855 on February 24th, 2016.



Track of information evidences the systematic use of silence as government politics. Since the Orinoco Mining Arc was created, entities of the State in charge of organizing mining and captivate income from the activity, have not offered clear, continuous or complete data.

There are no management reports stat from the state companies involved, or from private companies that have signed strategic alliances. It is not known what is the level of operations of these companies, how was their process of selection, which ones were the conditions for operating, among other details of national interest. Neither there is relevant information about environmental and socio-cultural impact studies. Not even the Central Bank of Venezuela, which does custody and authorizes gold commercialization, informs about level of acquisition and destination of the material.

In contrast, there is abundance of testimonies and evidences of violation to human rights and serious environmental impact exacerbated in the region, as well as dozens of massacres happened in mining towns, forced disappearances; murdering of indigenous leaders and forced movement of their communities; labor exploitation of adults and children; forced prostitution; pollution on water, soil and air with substances such as mercury and proliferation of diseases such as malaria.

All this in regards of the existence of a criminal structure that, with support from groups inside the government, has dedicated to exercise control on mines through the use of arms and imposition of cruel “punishments” for whom does not follow their rules.





2.3 Illicit activities and violations deepen during Covid-19 pandemic

Denounces of great violations to human rights on the Orinoco Mining Arc have even reached reports on international instances, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Acnudh), Michelle Bachelet² and the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, established by the United Nations³, have manifested their concern about the situation.

In its July 2020 report, Acnudh also urged the government to adopt immediate measures to end labor and sexual exploitation, child work and human trafficking; surveil for regularization of mining activities with the aim to respect the right to work in fair and favorable conditions; to initiate effective and transparent investigations, besides operations with order forces to dismantle delinquent and armed groups controlling mining activities; to face corruption, judge and sanction the responsables for crimes. They also urged the authorities to gather and publish information of public interest about Orinoco Mining Arc.

However, despite the urgency of the situation, national authorities have not taken effective actions to revert violation of human rights in the area and contribute to end up illicit activities. On the contrary, the investigation made for this report showed that, **in the last two years, during the Covid-19 pandemic that has decelerated the world, the destructive and illegal mining activity enlarged in the Orinoco Mining Arc.**

The national government increased its presence in mining towns of south Bolivar State through the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM) handled by General

Mayor Carlos Osorio, and numerous strategic alliances emerged for gold processing.

Nonetheless, deforestation and soil erosion continued to grow, as well as pollution on Yuruari and Cuyuní rivers; demographic explosion raised due to internal migration, with a corresponding collapse in basic services, poor neighborhoods grew up and there is a chaotic uprising of new towns.

The system

Despite the presence of more than five security and defense corps in the state, it was found that criminal bands in control of the mining areas have consolidated.

They went from being known as mining labor unions to defining themselves as *the system*, a classification that involves these organization's capacity to accomplish functions similar to the State-Nation.

They not only exercise power with the use of weapons, but also impose a combination of regulations to solve family, civil, mercantile or criminal conflicts. At the same time, they try to hide their illicit activities through *foundations* with which they offer support to the communities they control. Even though, there are still reports of confrontations with other armed bands and harassment episodes to indigenous communities both in Bolivar and in Amazonas states.

2 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2020). "Independencia del sistema judicial y acceso a la justicia en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, también respecto de las violaciones de los derechos económicos y sociales, y situación de los derechos humanos en la región del Arco Minero del Orinoco". Available in: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_44_54_UnofficialSpanishTranslation.pdf

3 Report of the Independent International Fact Finding Mission about the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. September 16th, 2021. Available in: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A.HRC.48.69_ES.pdf



The absence of effective actions allows the government to keep earning from illegal and disordered exploitation of gold, which became a new form of attracting incomes. From the State, this mining activity is endorsed when the Central Bank of Venezuela purchases, legalizes and commercializes gold coming from mines in conflict and extracted with forbidden substances, while activity in state companies is much reduced. To this commerce, it can be added the sale of gold ingots that take part of the monetary reserves of the country and that Maduro's management has taken without consulting.

At the same time, criminal bands and corruption networks benefit personally by illegal exploitation and smuggling of gold, which is taken through terrestrial, aerial and maritime ways and constitutes one of the main resource tools.

2.4 Production of gold and level of smuggling

2.4.1. Regulations that are kept unaccomplished

Since September 16th, 2011, the same Hugo Chávez signed decree No. 8.413 with Rank, Value and Force of Law Reserved to the State for Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold, which established that actions referred on the instrument could only be exercised by state organisms or mixed companies in which the State had the biggest number of actions (more than 55%)⁴.

On the text about nationalization of auriferous sector, it was also agreed that all gold obtained as consequence of a mining activity in the National Territory, had to be, by force, sold and delivered to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela or the entities designated by them, which would exercise the monopoly of commercialization.

This law decree and conventions derived from it were reformed in several occasions until in December 30th, 2015, merely two months after the creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc, Nicolás Maduro approved under enabling law decree No. 2.165 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law Reserved to the State for Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold and Other Strategic Minerals⁵, which is the one currently ruling.

According to the instrument, activities referred can only be exercised by:

- 1) The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela through the Ministry of People's Power with competence in mining matter; public institutions, corporations or companies of its exclusive property or its branches which social capital belongs totally to it and has been created for such end.
- 2) Mixed companies, in which the State has a participation of not less than 55% of social capital.
- 3) Strategic alliances conformed between the Republic and production units, social-productive organizations, societies and other forms of association allowed by the law, which will be oriented to the activity of small mining, properly inscribed on the Single Mining Register, previous authorization granted by the Ministry of People's Power with competence in mining matter", Art. 10.

The law also states that, of quantities of gold and other strategic minerals extracted from any reservoir, the State has right to a minimum participation of 3% and up to 13% as a royalty over the value of the final mineral product, which will be established by the National Executive and can be demanded by the National Executive to the persons developing primary activities, in currency or in species, Art. 27.

4 The Decree No. 8,413 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that reserves to the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of gold was published in the Official Gazette No. 39,759 of September 16th, 2011.

5 The Decree No. 2,165 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that Reserves for the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold and other strategic minerals was published in the Official Gazette No. 40,819 of December 30th, 2015.



On the instrument, it is reinforced that: gold and other strategic minerals obtained as consequence of any mining activity in the national territory, will be of mandatory sale and delivery to the Central Bank of Venezuela. BCV will be able to authorize the sale and/or deliver of each mineral to a different entity, Art. 31.

Furthermore, alongside the law, the Single Mining Registry was created, ascribed to the Ministry of People's Power with competence in mining matter, which has as function to administrate, manage information, follow up and control of natural and juridic persons of public or private character that develop such reserved activities; and the Mining Social Fund, that has as aim to guarantee resources for social development of surrounding communities to areas destined to the exercise of mining activities and whose incomes guarantee and protect social security of gold mining workers and other strategic minerals, and strengthen of knowledge in mining activities and care of the environment, Art. 41 and 42.

After the law entered into force, a series of regulations and conventions have been approved, among which are the same decree of creation of Orinoco Mining Arc, previously described, as well as constitutive acts of mixed companies, modifications of exploitation areas, among others⁶. **But about the Single Mining Register nothing is known.**

Likewise, on August 05th, 2016 it was approved the **Decree No. 2.412 that forbid "the use, tenure, storage and transport of mercury (Hg) as method to obtain or treat gold or any other metallic or non-metallic mineral" in the country**⁷. **But mercury flows among miners, mills, rivers and Bolívar lands even when the only institution enabled to obtain it is the State.**

More recently, on February 10th, 2021, BCV published resolution No. 21-01-04 with an update on the Regulations over the External

Gold Marketing Regime⁸, which insists in those subjects developing mining activities in the national territory must sale the obtained gold to the BCV, nonetheless, it adds that the emitting institute can decline the acquisition of gold offered for sale, totally or partially, for opportunity, merit or convenience reasons. In this case, subjects interested in exporting gold can do it only if BCV authorizes.

Despite all these legal restrictions, the information gathered independently shows that most part of gold extracted in Venezuela does not accomplish it.

Visit to mines in auriferous municipalities of Bolivar State at beginnings of 2022 leaves evidence of the many miners in charge of the first stages of the process are not inscribed in the Single Mining Register, do not enjoy any benefit from the State and have to work up to 72 continuous hours without the adequate protection measures. In small mills in the area the material is still processed with mercury and most part of gold is taken out of Venezuela by illegal ways.

2.4.2. Gold lost by smuggling

Opacity that has marked gold business in Venezuela makes, at seven years of Orinoco Mining Arc creation, to be extremely complex to precise how many tons of minerals are exploited yearly. Despite there are international statistics contributing to estimate how much material comes out of Venezuela legally, it is difficult to know exactly how much it is extracted from auriferous reservoirs, how much of that comes through regular channels (centralized) and how much goes out of the country via smuggling (disperse flows, as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD- identified it in its last report about illicit flows of gold in Venezuela)⁹.

6 Transparencia Venezuela. "El oro venezolano se funde entre la ilegalidad y la muerte". December 2019. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-oro-venezolano-se-funde-entre-la-ilegalidad-y-la-muerte/>

7 The decree No. 2.412 was published in the Official Gazette No. 40,960 of August 5th, 2016.

8 Resolution No. 21-01-04 of the Central Bank of Venezuela was published in Official Gazette No. 42.066 of February 10th, 2021.

9 OCDE. (2021). "Gold Flows from Venezuela. Supporting due diligence on the production and trade of gold in Venezuela". Available in: <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Gold-flows-from-Venezuela-supporting-due-diligence-on-the-production-and-trade-of-gold.pdf>



The last report from the Central Bank of Venezuela, in charge of custodying gold produced and authorizing it for sale, dates from year 2018, when it was registered in its statistics the internal purchase of 9,72 tons of gold coming from the Orinoco Mining Arc.

On their part, the Strategic Office for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies of the Office of the Vice Ministry of Exploration and Ecomineral Investment affirmed¹⁰ that in 2018 the Orinoco Mining Arc were produced 35 tons of gold. The organism announced that, to the closure of that year, 10,5 tons were delivered to BCV, which represents 30% of yearly production. The remaining 70% (24,5 tons), would be smuggled out of the country, according to the same entity. The figure of illicit market matches the estimations made previously by Transparencia Venezuela and the information compiled for this report.

Some official announcements allow to have an idea of what is the exploitation potential in the Orinoco Mining Arc and the level of smuggling. In 2018, the Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec) announced that that year 24 tons of gold would be delivered to BCV¹¹. The next year, in the occasion of launching the National Motor Mining Plan 2019-2025¹², Nicolás Maduro announced that the yearly goal would be 80 tons¹³. The president based on the program numbers projecting that the Mining Arc would be producing 45 tons per year in 2022 and 80 tons in 2025, that is, at the end of the outlined period.

The OECD 2021 report acknowledges the extreme difficulties to calculate gold production in Venezuela, it is estimated that processing capacity can reach 75 tons a year, a quantity that in July 2021 would reach a market value of USD 4.400 million. But researches made for this report, which includes interviews to sources



10 AVN. (2019). "2018: Año de grandes logros en el Arco Minero del Orinoco", January 05th. Available in: <http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/2018-a%C3%B1o-grandes-logros-arco-minero-orinoco>

11 González, Y. Ministry of Economy, Finances and Foreign Exchange. (2018). "Arco Minero del Orinoco otorgará al BCV 24 toneladas de oro este año". June 12th. Available in: <http://www.mppef.gob.ve/arco-minero-del-orinoco-otorgara-al-bcv-24-toneladas-de-oro-este-ano/>

12 Cadenas, A. Ministry of Economy, Finances and Foreign Exchange. (2019). "Presidente Nicolás Maduro aprobó recursos para el lanzamiento del Plan Nacional del Motor Minero 2019-2025". June 05th. Available in: <http://www.mppef.gob.ve/presidente-nicolas-maduro-aprobo-recursos-para-el-lanzamiento-del-plan-nacional-del-motor-minero-2019-2025/>

13 AVN. (2019). "Gobierno nacional invertirá 7.700 millones de euros en Plan de Minería 2019 – 2025". June 06th. Available in: <http://www.avn.info.ve/node/473026>



close to the Ministry of Economy, Finances and Foreign Exchange, suggest that **actual production in Venezuela is currently located between a third and half that amount, it means, between 25 and 37,5 tons of gold per year.**

Figures from the World Gold Council¹⁴ match the rank of OECD, and the information gathered. In that sense, Venezuela increased gold production in 45,22% in a matter of four years: went from recovering 23 tons in 2016 (year of creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc) to 33,4 tons in 2020.

It is important to highlight **the difference between exploitation potential and actual production, among other issues, because**

great scale mining in the Orinoco Mining Arc stil has not finished developing.

Sources linked to the Ministry add that only around 25% of gold extracted reaches BCV (it means, between 7,5 and 9 ton/year or between USD 500 and 580 million), the emitting institute afterwards commercializes this material with traders or intermediaries; approximately 30% can be left in hands of irregular criminal organizations with territorial control in the Orinoco Mining Arc Orinoco (between 9 and 11 ton/year or USD 600 and 705 million/year) and the rest is destined to transactions made by corrupted officials (between 13.5 and 17 ton/year or USD 870 and 1100 million/year).

Cuadro n.º 9.

Proyecciones del volumen de producción de minerales (Sistema minería centralizada 2019-2025)

Minerales		Año 2019	Año 2020	Año 2021	Año 2022
Oro	Tn	25,40	31,00	35,00	43,20
Bauxita	Tn	300.000,00	400.000,00	2.458.000,00	2.765.000,00
Hierro	Tn	11.690.000,00	12.040.000,00	12.470.000,00	12.670.000,00
Níquel	Tn	6.916,00	12.236,00	11.761,00	12.087,00
Diamante	Qte	68.500,00	68.500,00	136.750,00	205.000,00
Coltán (Columbita-Tantalita)	Tn	10.000,00	13.500,00	22.800,00	30.000,00
Feldespatos	Tn	40.000,00	55.000,00	65.000,00	85.000,00
Carbón	Tn	1.441.950,00	2.844.950,00	3.949.950,00	5.149.950,00
Fosfato	Tn	77.000,00	107.000,00	167.000,00	717.000,00
Cuarzo	Tn	158.000,00	158.000,00	158.000,00	158.000,00

Minerales		Año 2023	Año 2024	Año 2025	Total 2019-2025
Oro	Tn	56,20	67,30	79,40	337,50
Bauxita	Tn	3.600.000,00	4.500.000,00	5.000.000,00	19.023.000,00
Hierro	Tn	13.170.000,00	13.570.000,00	14.000.000,00	89.610.000,00
Níquel	Tn	12.009,00	11.786,00	11.786,00	78.581,00
Diamante	Qte	628.500,00	860.500,00	1.360.500,00	3.328.250,00
Coltán (Columbita-Tantalita)	Tn	35.000,00	35.000,00	35.000,00	181.300,00
Feldespatos	Tn	95.000,00	110.000,00	120.000,00	570.000,00
Carbón	Tn	6.279.950,00	7.299.950,00	8.149.950,00	35.116.650,00
Fosfato	Tn	1.347.000,00	2.267.000,00	2.817.000,00	7.499.000,00
Cuarzo	Tn	158.000,00	158.000,00	158.000,00	1.106.000,00

Source: Minister of Mining and ecologic Development (2018)

14 Global mine production. <https://www.gold.org/goldhub/data/gold-production-by-country>



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

In other words, currently gold smuggled by irregular groups and corrupted officials generates yearly incomes of

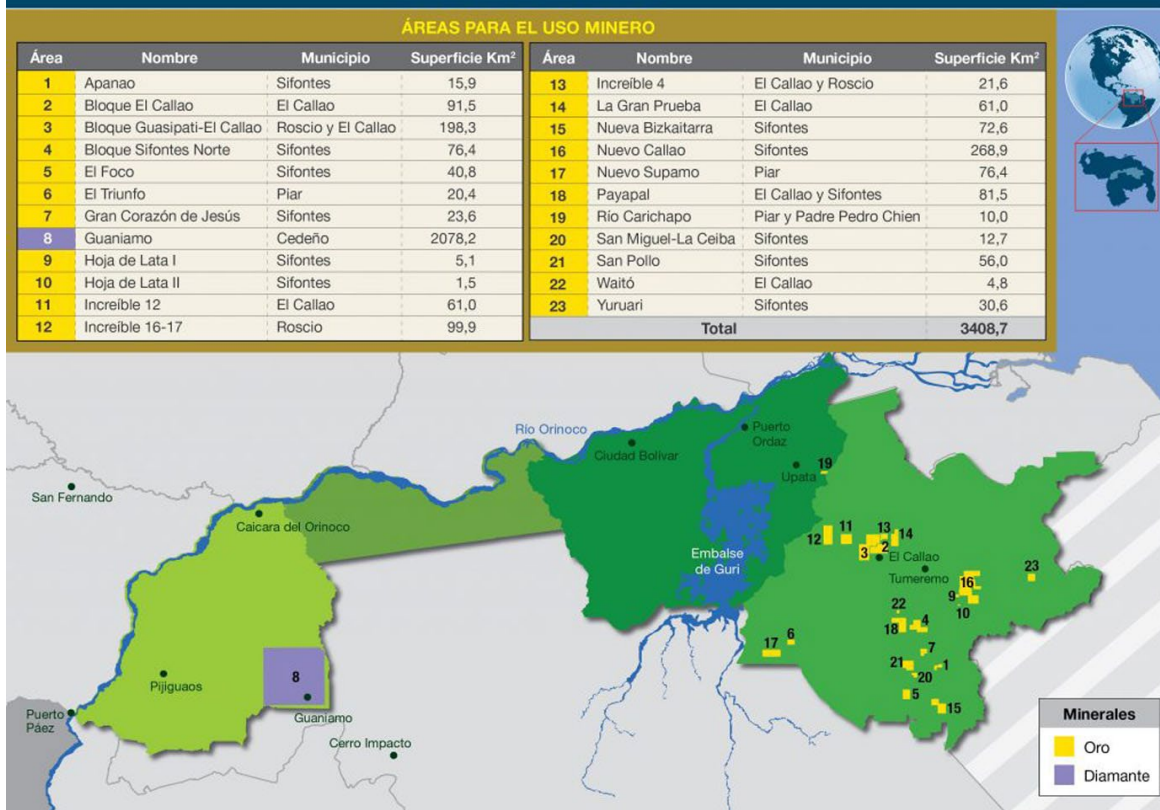
around USD 1.500 million and up to USD 1.700 million.

Distribution of gold exploitation by actor

Actor	Proportion	Tons per year	Millions USD/ per year
BCV	25%	7.5 - 9	500 - 580
Irregular groups	30%	9 - 11	600 - 705
Corruption network	45%	13.5 - 17	870 - 1.100
		30 - 37	1.970 - 2.385

Source: Ecoanalítica and spokesmen from the Ministry of Economy, Finances and Foreign Exchange in extra-official declarations

Áreas de producción minera / Arco Minero del Orinoco (AMO)



Source: Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development



2.4.3. Production stages, its actors and bleeding ways

The Venezuelan Municipality with more association to gold production is El Callao, located at no more than 290 km of distance from Ciudad Bolívar, capital of Bolívar state. In the mid-nineteenth century a group of indigenous found gold in the area and a tradition of exploration and exploitation of that mineral was born and kept alive till the present time, but that has been degrading in the last decade, according to testimonials of its own inhabitants.

On El Callao mines, around 3.000 kilos of gold are produced monthly, according to calculations made by that jurisdiction. Even though there is no certainty about the percentage of that gold going through irregular ways and the quantity smuggled by different actors participating in the activity. The path through mines of El Callao allows to know how the small and medium mining is developed, its main actors, as well as phases in which gold is leaking.

The wrongly-named “illegal miners”

There are two great sculptures of women with dark skin, dressed with large gowns, necklaces and hats, welcoming to whom visit El Callao. At the “Madamas” figures feet, which represent an homage to the midwives of African origin symbol of El Callao Carnivals, groups of men and women gather there to start their way to the town’s mines.

Few meters towards the town, in Bolívar square of El Callao, and in surrounding streets, it is also possible to find persons carrying with wooden pans, picks, shovels, flashlights and plastic bags. **Most miners are not inscribed on the Single Mining Register nor integrate payrolls of any company. They do not accomplish personal security nor environmental safety and arrive to start searching for gold in non-authorized areas for such end. Nonetheless,**

they represent an essential group in the first stages of mining production, both in that area and in other southern towns.

“We are not illegal miners”, says one of the Chile inhabitants, an area located southwestern from El Callao, where there are hundreds of holes in which gold is extracted at all times. There is no need to go far, near their own backyards they can find different kinds of mines with hundreds of small miners of different ages. But it is not easy to reach the place, first you have to notify bands controlling El Peru to count on their authorization.

After descending by improvised trails, surrounded by the vegetation typical of the area, it is possible to see mines. The firsts visible are vertical, some kind of narrow ravines that can reach up to 50 mts of deep, without light, nor ventilation systems, in which miners sink to break off the rock that may have gold in it. To go up and down with the material they use a manual or electric winch which they call “machina” (from the English word *machine*). Stones extracted are emptied afterwards in bags to be transported to mills and get the gold out of them.

This ravine has around 23mt., when you reach the bottom there is a gallery on the right that is about 10mt. and one to the left of 15 meters more. They built it themselves, using wood to ‘shore’ as excavation was performed, so they prevent it from falling down”, says a woman sitting on the mouth of the mine while she waits for any signal of miners to help them out. “When they started doing it they had to introduce a hose connected to a fan so the oxygen entered, but it is not necessary anymore, we don’t know where from, but down there they get oxygen and they can spend the whole day inside, working”, she adds. In local media it is reported the frequent collapse on mines that leave miners trapped, in mines similar to the one described¹⁵.

15 Runrunes (2020). “Siete mineros de El Callao murieron en tercer derrumbe de este año”. July 23rd. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/415981/siete-mineros-de-el-callao-murieron-en-tercer-derrumbe-de-este-ano/>



Near the ravines there are also zones in which mining is practiced in “flower”, it means great extensions of land in which wide holes are excavated at open sky. There, miners get in to shovel the material that is thrown then into bags to be processed.

“The first thing one does is to put a little portion of soil on a sampler (it can be a small pan and even a shovel) and you wash it with water. Depending on what remains on the bottom, you know if the soil will pay or not. But one knows more or less where is good to search or not”, says another miner, of around 50 years old, who went to work on the mine for one year and a half, pushed by financial need. She does not carry a helmet or gloves, only a shirt, distressed jeans and broken plastic sandals.

At merely four meters of distance, there are miners practicing alluvial mining in a small lagune. For this procedure, miners sit on the shore, pour water over some material in wooden

pan, which put into the water and between their legs and with circular movements they make the rhythmic process that allows to separate soil from gold particles, which go to the bottom. Afterwards they stop to check if the work paid off.

According to official testimonies compiled, in order to be able to do their job, miners are forced to give a percentage of the gold extracted to different actors controlling mines. To criminal groups they must give 10% of production, while to mill owners in which material is¹⁶.

“Here we don’t talk much about that subject, they don’t like people who ask too many questions. There are people from *the system* (criminal band) everywhere, listening what we say. It may be a 13 years old kid, or a 30 years old man”, points one of the sources interviewed.

For a miner (man or woman), few grams of gold compensate the effort and risk they are submitted to everyday. With that and a

“rebusque” (an informal work), selling or fixing something they live, while they keep hope that a day will come in which they find the gold vein that will change their lives.



Pass through mills

Bags with auriferous material extracted by small miners, as well as the one that is collected with the use of explosives and machinery, must be carried to mills where the first phase of gold recovered from the raw material is made.

¹⁶ Commission numbers may vary depending on the area in which the gold is extracted and the rules imposed by criminal groups. These amounts have been reviewed even on the Acnuhd report.



Soon after the creation of the Orinoco Mining Arc, it started the spreading of mills in El Callao, as well as in other auriferous populations in south Bolívar State.

At the interior of it, the noise produced by machines is deafening, but around its owners and levels of production there is plenty of silence.

In all these type of places there are several processes to be followed to extract gold:

To start, all kinds of auriferous rocks that were extracted from the mines, are emptied in a ripper machine, in which its size is reduced.

After the material is ripped, it is taken to a proper mil, where it is even more processed and mixed with water, powder detergent and mercury (despite it is forbidden).

As part of this stage, water with grounded stone is drained through some metal plaques. With the hands the material must be pressed so gold amalgamates with mercury.

The rest of material falls into tanks, like metals pools disposed to that end.

Afterwards, the gold amalgamated in the mill (a silver shiny paste) is burnt to separate the mercury. This stage is usually performed without any kind of protection and mercury ends up being expelled to the environment, increasing the already large environmental impact.

In this process, small miners recover barely 30% of gold contained on the rocks extracted, because the rest remains with the material fallen on the pools, known as auriferous sands or tail sands.

Regularly, the auriferous sand passes from pools to drying spaces, till making great white mountains. It is accumulated during months until trucks from cyanidation plants pass and purchase them.



From the quantity of gold recovered, miners must leave a percentage to mill owners, (approximately 10% - 20%). “There is not actually an exact number about how much miners have to give in mills. The percentage is established after grounding the material and having the gold in hand. If the result was little, percentage is lower. But if the grounding left much gold, the percentage has to be higher”, says a 20 years old woman who worked in a mill administration in El Callao.

Mill administrators also have to pay a “vacuna”, a kind of tax to *The system* (criminal groups) to allow them operate. **One of the sources consulted for this report in February 2022, detailed that in the mill he works for they have to pay 300 grams of gold every three months to irregular groups. For that date a gram of gold was worth USD 49, it means, that only by that regulation, criminal organizations earn around USD 15.000 every trimester.** And there are thousands of mills.

“Besides what is given to the irregular groups to let miners work, there is also a percentage destined to administrative work, which includes payment to personnel and purchase of work supplies, such as mercury, an expensive material”, says the worker of a mill in El Callao.

Processing plants. From mixed companies to strategic alliances

The state company Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela, C.A. (Minerven), created in the 70's was in charge of extracting all gold in their own mines or capturing the material of small miners to process it industrially and channel it through regular ways and with authorized materials for such end. Nonetheless, internal reports of the company show its collapse.

In 2019, Minerven was already operating at 10% its installed capacity and its plants were abandoned, covered by water, dismantled and invaded by criminal groups, according to workers testimonials, who declared with the condition of keeping their names reserved, for fear to retaliations¹⁷. The situation did not improve despite its functions passed to be exercised by the mixed company Mibiturven, the only surviving mixed company, formed by Minerven and Marilyns Proje Yatirim, S.A, a Turkish company linked to Colombian businessman Álex Saab, incarcerated in United States under the accusation of corruption¹⁸.

Besides Mibiturven, **with the creation of Orinoco Mining Arc it was announced the emergence of other mixed companies for production of gold that were not installed completely. This figure of association was left aside and for 2022 gained importance the “strategic alliances” among private and State entities for gold processing.**

Alliances are concentrated mainly in plants to recover gold from auriferous sands with the use of cyanide, active carbon and lime. Even though cyanide is forbidden in several countries due to water pollution risks implied, in Venezuela its use is authorized. The most recent report of SOS Orinoco gives details of how it is the process of these lixiviation plants¹⁹.

The responsible persons for these lixiviation plants go to the mills and present proposals to purchase their auriferous sands. After establishing agreements, they send their trucks to pick up the material.

“In the mill, the first thing to do is obtain the materials tenor (quantity of gold per ton) and it is defined on how much it will be sold to the company”, says one worker from El Perú mill, in El Callao.

17 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). “El oro venezolano se funde entre la ilegalidad y la muerte”. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-oro-venezolano-se-funde-entre-la-ilegalidad-y-la-muerte/>

18 The constitution act of company Sociedad Anónima Minería Binacional Turquía-Venezuela (Mibiturven, S.A) was published in Official Gazette No. 41.513 of October 30th, 2018.

19 SOS Orinoco (2022). “El rol de las plantas de cianuración en el negocio del oro del Arco Minero del Orinoco”. Available in: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cDulSoSgknmaa4TsGOPmBKlru6IT_Bz4/view



“Here people identify companies by the color of trucks used to take the sand, yellow trucks, red trucks, and such. The most we know is the name of the plant, but not much more than that”, adds another miner consulted.

About companies there is a great opacity. Even with a rigorous track to data bases and a wide field work it is pretty difficult to get information about who are their owners and actual beneficiaries, how they got to establish their alliances, who signed and approved these alliances, what does the State demand to those allied companies, if they count or not with mining experience, or how much capital it is required. There is no certainty about quantities of gold recovered or gold quantities reported to the Central Bank of Venezuela. With these alliances the State manages to recover gold, but leaks are kept registering.

According to testimonials gathered, most mining work developed by strategic alliances does not count on enough technology, ecologic processes nor protection systems for workers. There is barely a mechanization of some processes. Workers who prefer not to be identified, describe how companies use C4 or other explosives to “shoot” twice a day in each mine. In double shifts from 11 am to 5 pm and from 5 pm to 11 pm, workers finish breaking and selecting the material, and with retro excavators they fill up trucks carrying the material to the mill or to the cyanide leaching plant.





ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

EXTRACTION



The auriferous material is extracted mainly by persons who practice small mechanized mining.

Many are not inscribed on the Single Mining Register, do not count on safety measures and operate in areas that are not authorized. They must give out from 10% to 30% of bags to criminal bands.

In government or allied companies mines extraction is made with shots of dynamite or C4 in the hillsides. The soil and stone falling is picked up in trucks and carried directly to mills or lixiviation plants.



PROCESSING

MILLS: it receives the auriferous material from the miners, crush it and grind it with mercury to extract gold. They charge miners up to 30% of gold resulting and keep the auriferous sands that can process. Mills must also pay criminal groups to operate.

LIXIVIATION PLANTS: they purchase gold sands to small miners and process it with cyanide, active charcoal and lime. There is no certainty of what percentage of gold resulting is declared and sold to BCV

PURCHASES



In the different municipalities of Bolivar state there is presence of retailers who purchase gold to small miners and lately melt it in small pieces.

They gain around 15% gold value.



DEVIATION

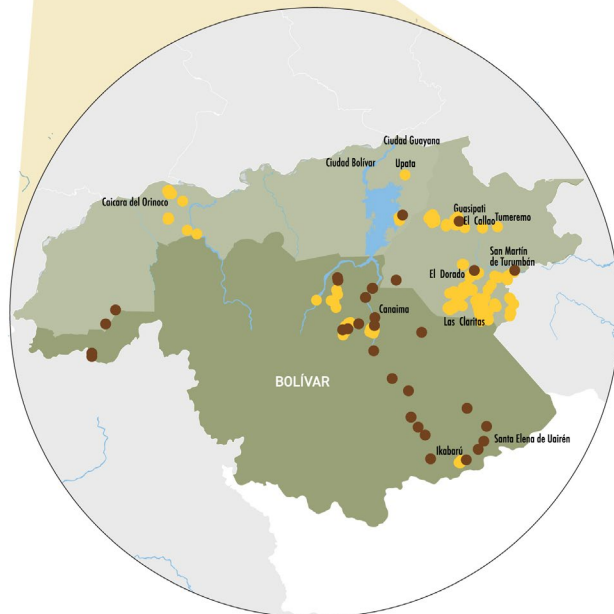
Melted gold pieces should be sold to BCV by law, in order to increase national reserves. But that is not the destination of most metals. More than 70% is taken out of the country by land, aerial and maritime ways, a minimum part remains in hands of miners.

ROUTES

gold arrives to neighbor countries like Colombia, Brazil and Guyana, where the origin is erased and exported to further destinations

Location of mines and irregular tracks

- TRACKS
- MINES
- MINING ARC





2.5 New strategic alliances and lixiviation plants, but same irregularities

2.5.1. New mechanized and opaque artisanal alliances

The ecosystem of industries and gold recovery plants previously described, was one of the highlighted changes during Covid-19 pandemic in south Bolívar state. The variation is evident and it can be observed in the deteriorated road 10 that communicates Ciudad Guayana with Brazil, mainly in the section crossing to Roscio, El Callao and Sifontes municipalities. On both sides of the road there is movement of soil, in order to build plants and transit of cargo trucks has increased.

Till May 2019, there had been installed 60 gold recovery plants in south Bolívar, according to declarations given by the then Minister of Mining and ecologic Development, Victor Cano, during the opening of "Refimina", a gold extraction plant in Km. 0 of El Dorado²⁰. One year later, in September 2020, the vice-president of the Republic, Delcy Rodríguez, met representatives of 21 plants to "check productivity" and with directives of seven plants that would be activated at the end of that year²¹.

That was the last official reference around the number of gold processing plants. Nonetheless, as the focused on extraction plants as well as the recovery plants through cyanide leaching process were built in internal areas of mining municipalities, none easy to reach easily for a passerby.

Now, mining development is in full Road 10, in plain sight of inhabitants, as well as tourists transitting to the Canaima National Park or migrants who aspire to cross the border with Brazil.

Only between Guasipati and the entrance to El Callao, there are at least 10 new mining works, which first structures indicate that is it about mill buildings and gold recovery plants.

Six of those developments are identified in their front: Goldtex, JC Eminca, Santa Bárbara, Planta Rita, La Increíble and Agrominera Corminca, this last with logos from the Ministry for the Penitentiary Service. At few kilometers of El Callao entrance, there are other three plants identified as Aurumin, Intac and Guayana Oro.

More into the south, between El Dorado and Tumeremo (Sifontes municipality towns), the team counted a dozen of auriferous material mills.

Furthermore, in each municipality were installed stores for sale of mining supplies during pandemic. The commercial establishments identified with Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM) logos, are operated by private companies: Corporación Nara (in Sifontes), Corporación Estrellas del Oro (El Callao) and LT Import (Upata, Piar).

20 VTV. (2019). "Gobierno Nacional activa planta de extracción de oro «Refimina» para producir 500 kilos al año". May 15th. Available in: <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/activan-planta-extraccion-oro-refimina/>

21 Ministry of People's Power for Ecologic Mining Development. (2020). "Ministra Magaly Henríquez participó en encuentro con representantes de plantas de lixiviación del estado Bolívar". September 24th. Available in: <http://www.desarrollominero.gob.ve/ministra-magaly-henriquez-participo-en-encuentro-con-representantes-de-plantas-de-lixiviacion-del-estado-bolivar/>



2.5.2. Companies behind strategic alliances

Absence of management reports from entities in charge of the activity in the Orinoco Mining Arc, as well as lack of responses to requests of public information by communications media and civil society organizations, prevent to know exactly data of national interest about the companies that recently began operating in the area, as well as those that have been operating for longer time.

El Callao Major, Coromoto Lugo, informed that till January 2022, only in that town operated 39 gold producer plants under the figures of mixed companies and strategic alliances, 1.200 small mills and 600 gold purchase stores, according to the local census made by his administration. The major explained that CVM receives 35% of taxes from strategic alliances every month. But entities responsible for activities all around the Orinoco Mining Arc have not published complete and updated data.

It is not known what is the criteria from the government to choose its partners in strategic alliances, because there are no reports of calls for an open and competitive granting process. Neither there is official data regarding the level of production on these alliances and income obtained by the State from it. Another dark element is who are the final beneficiaries of private companies involved, where the funds come from, what is their experience in the area or if they are free of interest conflicts. All that opacity constitutes one of the main risks of corruption on the sector.

Nonetheless, **by tracking companies already identified till now in open and close data bases, it is evidenced that there are links of some directives with cases of alleged defalcation to the Venezuelan public patrimony, as well as nexus with high rank officials.** Here are some of the most outstanding cases:

Company name	Creation Date	Share holders	Findings
Goldtex de Venezuela, C.A.	05/17/1995 or 05/24/1995	Nellys Josefina Ramírez. (100%) Previously: Eduing Flores Zuloaga (30) Gran Alexander Ritchie Silva (70%)	This company, located in El Callao, was disqualified from the National Registry of Contractors (RNC, where all actors willing to contract with the State must be inscribed), due to inconsistencies with the information. With the same name and Register of Fiscal Information (RIF) there are two directive boards, different dated of register and different addresses. In one of the directive boards of the company are Eduing Flores Zuloaga and Gran Alexander Ritchie Silva, who have also been partners in Degran & Compañía, C.A. both men are accused in 2011, by crimes of conspiracy of public official with contractor, for presumably having contracted with the state company Orinoco Iron, obviating all tender processes and internal mechanisms, in the case known as the Mafia of Cabillas (toggles). Afterwards, the case was dismissed ²² . In this case, it was strongly involved the former governor of Bolívar State during three periods, (2004-2017) Francisco Rangel Gómez.

22 Rangel, C. (s/f). Transparencia Venezuela. "Sidor y el tráfico de cabillas". Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/sidor-y-el-trafico-de-cabillas/>



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

Company name	Creation Date	Share holders	Findings
Inversiones Intac C.A.	02/05/2015	Jackson Javier Soto Guardia (100%) Previously: Yacsury Alexandra Silva Cardona (50%) Misael Smith Silva Cardona (50%)	This company was constituted in 2015 in Lara state, west Venezuela and has two branches, one in Cojedes state in central-western of the country and the other in El Callao, Bolívar state. Among the directives held by this company stand out the names of Yacsury Alexandra Silva Cardona and Misael Smith Silva Cardona, who also figure in directive boards of several Grupo JHS firms, a business conglomerate led by her brother Jorge Alfredo Silva Cardona who has been linked with Diosdado Cabello in investigations published by Armando Info ²³ . Jorge Silva worked till mid 2013 as administrative technician of Seniat and currently owns Deportivo Táchira (one of the most famous soccer teams of Venezuela) and several other companies dedicated to customs and agro-productive services. According to investigations made by Armando Info, Grupo JHS was lifted after the signature of a billionaire alliance with the Venezuelan government, represented by Diosdado Cabello and the Brazilian food giant JBS, accused later of corruption acts in Brazil ²⁴ , the Lava Jato operation.
Corporación Guayanaoro C.A.	09/14/2016	Jean Carlo Ranauro Guzmán (50%) Leonardo Santilli García (50%)	This company subscribed a strategic Alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM) in 2017 for installation of Hydrometallurgy plant by lixiviation with cyanide Guayana Oro. Corporación Guayanaoro C.A. is located in sector La Gran Prueba, of El Callao and its directives are shareholders of multiple companies inside and outside Venezuela. The most significant name is Leonardo Santilli, who was investigated and accused in USA of money laundering and other crimes related, after having contracted irregularly with PdvsA between 2014 and 2017 ²⁵ . In September 2020, short after the accusation went public, he was murdered in Anzoátegui state, Venezuela ²⁶ .
Inversiones y Representaciones Glenduard, C.A.	02/28/2016	Eduardo José Rivas (90%) Eukarys del Valle Lazzar Bernay (10%)	This is one of the six private companies forming the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, located in El Callao municipality by the Venezuelan state. Its director, Eduardo Rivas, is considered one of the men with most power in gold business, besides, he is the president of the complex Domingo Sifontes and Complex Manuel Carlos Piar, established in Caroní municipality, Bolívar. On the interviews made in Bolívar state, it is common to hear his name. Sources coincide about the significance he has in mining activity, even though they talk with much care. Rivas was candidate to Legislative Council of Bolívar State in 2018, with support from United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and other parties associated to chavismo, even though he did not win. General Manuel Ricardo Cristopher Figuera, former director of the National Bolivarian Service of Intelligence (Sebin), a section of chavismo, declared that Rivas is a trusted person for Nicolás Maduro Guerra, son of Nicolás Maduro ²⁷ .

23 Deniz, R. Armando.info. (2020). "El viaje más productivo de Diosdado Cabello sigue generando dividendos". November 8th. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-viaje-mas-productivo-de-diosdado-cabello-sigue-generando-dividendos/>

24 Deniz, R. Armando.info. (2017) "El eslabón entre el Deportivo Táchira y el gigante brasilero JBS". January 29th. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-eslabon-entre-el-deportivo-tachira-y-el-gigante-brasilero-jbs/>

25 The United States Justice Department. (2020) "United States v. Leonardo Santilli: Docket no. 20-mj-02459-lff". March 20th. Available in: <https://www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/fcpa/cases/leonardo-santilli>

26 VTV. (2020) "Ministerio Público investiga homicidio de Leonardo Santilli García registrado en Anzoátegui". September 03rd. Available in: <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/ministerio-publico-investiga-leonardo-santilli-garcia/>

27 Armando.info. (2020) "El capataz que mantiene a Venezuela". July 26th. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-capataz-que-mantiene-a-venezuela/>



Company name	Creation Date	Share holders	Findings
Corporación Petroglobal, C.A.	2017	Mario Enrique Bonilla Vallera Raúl Eduardo Saavedra Leterni	This is one of the six private companies forming Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes in El Callao. According to documents of the Public Registry published in Armando.info, Mario Bonilla Vallera and Raúl Saavedra Leterni, partners in more than one dozen of companies in Venezuela and abroad Bonilla has been identified as close friend of Cilia Flores sons, Yoswal and Yosser Gavidia Flores, and their step-brother Nicolás Maduro Guerra, son of Nicolás Maduro ²⁸ . Bonilla Vallera was accused in the federal court of the Southern District of the United States for the alleged embezzlement of USD 1,200 million from Pdvsa, in a case known as Operation Money Flight.

The companies Inversiones y Representaciones Glenduard, C.A. and Corporación Petroglobal, C.A., owners of two of six plants integrating the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, in El Callao, have not been the only ones in this conglomerate raising suspicions.

Another company on the complex, called Invertrade, also has interesting operations. Data gathered by Armando.info reveal that the company has dedicated to imports of sodium cyanide since 2019. Furthermore, in April 2019 imported 5.140 kilograms of mercury from México to Cuba, in three shipments that cost USD \$257.000.

“The destination of these loads of mercury is not clear, but it is still striking that a Venezuelan company dedicated to mining imports an element prohibited since august 2016 on its use, tenure, storage and transport with aims to obtain or treat gold”, refers the media²⁹.



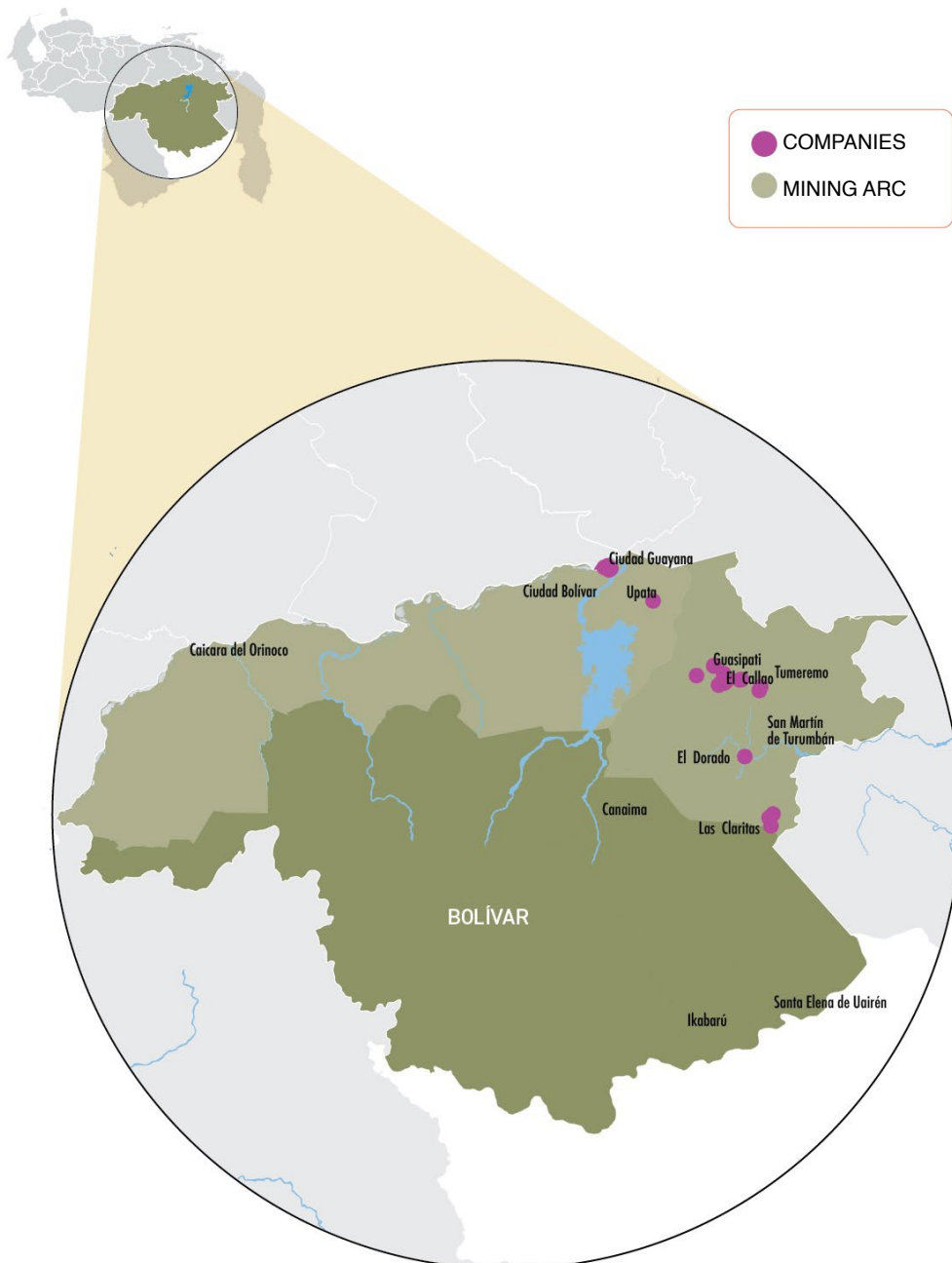
²⁸ Ídem.

²⁹ Ídem.



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

In following map are geo-located 38 companies related to gold exploitation, identified till March 2022.



In addition, on the annexes of this report, it can be deeply reviewed data from register of these companies available till now.



2.5.3. More processing plants than gold sands



While more new gold processing plants are installed in Bolívar state, other already installed are operating at half capacity, such as the Industrial Complex Manuel Carlos Piar, installed by the government in 2019 in Caroní municipality, north state.

By the moment of its opening, it was announced that that lixiviation gold plant with national technology would have the capacity to process 20 kilos of gold monthly, while in full function it would be 200 kilos of gold every month³⁰. But three years later the plant is not working, internal sources confirm. There are no trucks loaded of auriferous material coming in or out.

Sources with knowledge on the case assure that the cause is paralyzation is scarcity of gold sands. There would not be enough material for the plant to process regularly and that due to two reasons: first, because there are more plants installed than the ones needed for gold sands processing; and second, because in purchase of sand to mills, the Complex Carlos Piar would not offer competitive prices.

In the case of this particular plant, raw materials supply complicates even more because even though it is in sector 3 of Mining Arc, it requires transport of gold material located in different spots. About 154 kms separate Ciudad Guayana from Guasipati, for example, which would take more than two hours.

A geologist interviewed for this report assures that what has been happening in the complex and other complexes is consequence of chaos and improvisation. "The Nicolás Maduro government set up the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes in El Callao without guaranteeing production of gold sands needed for this type of cyanidation plant to work. Behind that there is much ignorance: it is fundamental to guarantee the supply chain, starting in first place with a mine with enough production of material to feed the plant during a long period of time. It means, count on a mine that opportunely supplies raw materials to the plant".

The expert was able to recently visit the Gold Processing Plant Sarrapia, initiated in 2018 in Guacamayo sector of Piar municipality, and he assures there is not enough material to process.

The hypothetical scarcity of raw material enters into contradiction with projects of alleged ongoing installation of lixiviation plants. Why opening new concentrators if there are not enough gold sands to process? This would force the acceleration of the first stage of production chain in charge of small and medium mining operating in flood mines (at open sky and in water bodies) and of vein (verticals), which implies to remove soil, chop trees, erode the soil, destroy ecosystems without counting on previous geologic studies or environmental impact evaluations as the law orders.

30 Ministry of People's Power for Ecologic Mining Development. (2019). "Venezuela puso en funcionamiento planta aurífera en el estado Bolívar". November 20th. Available in: <http://www.desarrollominero.gob.ve/venezuela-puso-en-funcionamiento-planta-aurifera-en-el-estado-bolivar/>



2.6 The state involved in a world of illicit activities

2.6.1. The Orinoco Mining Arc State Structure

Since ends of 2015, when Nicolás Maduro approved Decree No. 2.165 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that Reserves for the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold and Other Strategic Minerals, and with more reason since 2016, after the signature of Decree No. 2.248 that created the National Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arc, **a new government structure was established, in charge of all activities associated with utilization of mineral in Venezuelan soil.**

For national convenience reasons and given its strategic character, the Orinoco Mining Arc counts on a national government structure in which there is also participation of regional and local executive. Moreover, there is active presence of all security forces of the State in the

zone, starting with Bolivarian National Armed Forces, national, regional and local police, the Corps of Scientific, Criminal and Criminal Investigations, the General Directorate of National Counterintelligence and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service.

Entities of the national public administration

In the Orinoco Mining Arc there are currently at least eight state entities in charge of ruling on all matter related to exploitation and commercialization of Venezuelan gold. These administrative organs have the opacity politics in common, the same characterizing other instances of the Venezuelan government. They do not render accounts to the country, which triggers risks of corruption in the sector.

List of entities with responsibility in mining activity and its responsible in 2022

Entity	Authority	Designation	Entity	Authority	Designation
Sectorial Vicepresidency of Economy	Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah	06/14/2018. O.G. No. 41.419	Ministry of People's Power for Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	William Miguel Serantes Pinto	08/19/2021. O.G. E No. 6.638
National Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeomin)	César Alejandro Basanta	10/22/2020. O.G. No. 41.991	Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM)	Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano	06/21/2019. O.G. No. 41.660
Misión Piar Foundation	Reiber Alexander Mendoza Pérez	10/22/2020 O.G. No. 41.991	Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela, C.A (Minerven)	William Miguel Serantes Pinto	10/07/2021. O.G. No. 42.229
Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV)	Calixto José Ortega Sánchez	06/19/2018 O.G. No. 41.422	National Service of Mining Fiscalization and Inspection (Senafim)	Richard Alexis Sánchez Arias	06/10/2021. O.G. No. 42.146



From the state entities list involved with mining activity, stand out two that have been sanctioned since 2019 by the US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control, accused of alleged corruption cases and other irregularities. Likewise, former and current directives of these entities have also been pointed by national and international instances.

- **The Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela, C.A (Minerven)** and his former president Adrián Antonio Perdomo Mata were sanctioned by OFAC on March 19th, 2019, for allegedly backing up illegal operations of gold extraction that have allowed “to sustain Nicolás Maduro regime”³¹. As a result of the measure, all goods and assets participations of Minerven and Perdomo, located in the USA, in power or under control of north American persons, were blocked. Besides, by OFAC regulation, all North American or who reside in the country are forbidden to do transactions with the sanctioned.
- The **Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV)** was sanctioned by OFAC on April 17th, 2019, with the aim to restrict access to American dollars and prevent the entity to do transactions abroad³². According to the then security advisor, John Bolton, BCV helps Maduro to keep in power, even controlling transfers from gold to currency. In that occasion was also sanctioned Iliana Josefa Ruzza Terán, who is director of the BCV directive board since July 2018 and has occupied several positions in state entities, all questioned by corruption, such as Bandes (where she worked in 2009), Fonden (2011), Pdvsa (2018), Corpovex (2018), Cencoex (2018).

- **Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah**, is leading the Sectorial Vice-presidency of Economy, with responsibility on coordination of Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development. He is sanctioned by USA, Canada, the European Union, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and other European countries accused of corruption, human rights violations, among others.
- **William Miguel Serantes Pinto**, a retired admiral graduated from the Navy School of Venezuela in 1988 and since then has led the Ministry of of Ecologic Mining Development and CVG Minerven.

Between 2015 and 2020 he was designated by Vladimir Padrino López to lead at least three high rank positions, ascribed to the Ministry of Defense. In January 2015 he was designated main director of the Banco de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana Banco Universal C.A. (BanFanb); in 2018, responsible for the strategic region of Integral Defense (Redi) Guayana.

In 2019, the dismissed Fiscal general by the National Constituent Assembly, Luisa Ortega Díaz, pointed Serrantes as one of the main responsables for Ikabarú massacre, in Bolívar state³³.

31 U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2019). “Treasury Sanctions Venezuela’s State Gold Mining Company and its President for Propping Up Illegitimate Maduro Regime”, March 19th. Available in: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm631>

32 U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2019). “Treasury Sanctions Central Bank of Venezuela and Director of the Central Bank of Venezuela”. April 17th. Available in: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm661>

33 González, A. Runrunes. (2019). “Ortega Díaz tomará acciones contra Justo Noguera y un almirante por la masacre de Ikabarú”. November 27th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/393852/ortega-diaz-tomara-acciones-contra-justo-noguera-y-un-almirante-por-la-masacre-de-ikabarú/>



Entities of the regional public administration

Among the State entities linked to the development of activities in the Orinoco Mining Arc there also in Bolívar state governorship. This entity has been led since 2000 by officials related to Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro ideology.

In 2022, the governorship is directed by Ángel Bautista Marcano Castillo, who won the regional elections in November 2021 with support from the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. From the electoral campaign, Marcano has had the support of ex-governor Francisco Rangel Gómez. Besides, according to reports from regional media, great part of his cabinet is formed by the same persons that occupied positions when Rangel Gómez was governor³⁴.

- Ángel Marcano was deputy of National Assembly in period 2005-2010, sponsored by PSUV. He was also alternate deputy for Bolívar state and candidate to re-election in parliamentary elections of December 06th, 2015, in which he lost³⁵. In 2017 he was elected constituent by the workers sector, industries sub-sector.

Since 2006, he has occupied directive positions in companies property of the State. His first period leading the aluminium industry, CVG Alcasa, initiated in February 2012 till August 2015. The next year, he was designated again president of CVG Alcasa. He was also designated in May 2013 as president of Corporación Nacional de Aluminio S. A., ascribed to the Ministry of Industries.

Entities of local public administration

As in the case of Bolívar governorship, in the last decade, majorities of municipalities with more chaotic and massive gold exploitation has been mostly led by PSUV directives.

After the regional and local elections in November 2021, the situation did not change. In Roscio municipality (capital city Guasipati) and Sifontes (capital city Tumeremo), rule Wuihelm David Torrellas Martínez and Juan Vicente Rojas Medina, respectively. Both were supported by Psuv and other parties denominated Gran Polo Patriótico (Great Patriotic Pole).

Only Callao Municipality (El Callao) is ruled by a leader that is not from PSUV. In 2021 turned elected Coromoto Lugo, backed up by the opposition party Board of Democratic Unity and Parties Convergencia and Bolívar Joven.



COROMOTO LUGO

34 Siverio, J. Correo del Caroní (2021). "Figuras claves de la gestión de Rangel Gómez integran gabinete de la Gobernación de Bolívar". December 03rd. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/pais-politico/figuras-claves-de-la-gestion-de-rangel-gomez-integran-gabinete-de-la-gobernacion-de-bolivar/>

35 <https://poderopediave.org/persona/angel-marcano/>



List of majors from Bolívar state in 2022		
Municipality	Mayor	Period
PARTY PSUV		
Gran Sabana	José Manuel De Jesús Vallez	2021-2025
Heres	Sergio de Jesús Hernández	2021-2025
Caroní	Tito Oviedo	2021-2025
Padre Pedro Chien	Benny Ramos	2021-2025
Roscio	Wuihelm David Torrellas Martínez	2021-2025
Sifontes	Juan Vicente Rojas Medina	2021-2025
Piar	Yulisbeth Josefina García González	2021-2025
Cedeño	Milthon José Tovar Guape	2021-2025
Sucre	Luis Alberto Hernández Carpio	2021-2025
PARTY MUD		
El Callao	Jesús Coromoto Lugo Larrial	2021-2025
PARTY AD		
Angostura	Yorgi Deivis Arciniega	2021-2025

Security forces present in AMO

Article 13 of the decree that created the Orinoco Mining Arc establishes that the Bolivarian National Armed Force together with the organized popular power, is the institution in charge of safeguarding, protecting and maintaining harmony of operations developed in this territorial space in which are exploited different minerals of the nation.

The norm adds that the FANB must develop an Integral Plan of Defense and Security for the AMO zone and install corresponding units ascribed to the related regional command.

The decree does not detail which components of FANB will be in charge of safety of activities developed in AMO, however, the current form of organization on the military institution, this would correspond to the chiefs of Integral Defense Strategic Region (REDI) of Guayana and the Operative Zone of integral Defense (ZODI) of the same region. The Ministry of Defense also has responsibility on the region.

List of FANB in charge of defense and security of AMO 2022



Organism: Ministry of Defense
Official: Vladimir Padrino López
Position: Minister
Period: 10/24/2014 - currently



Organism: Integral Defense Strategic Region (REDI) Guayana
Official: Alfredo Parra Yarza
Position: Commander
Period: 07/12/2021 - currently



Organism: Operative Zone of integral Defense (ZODI) Bolívar
Official: Julmer Rafael Ochoa Romero
Position: Commander
Period: 15/07/2021 - currently



Among militaries with responsibility on the Orinoco Mining Arc stand out the name of the Minister of Defense.

- **Vladimir Padrino López**, Army General in Chief has been designated by Nicolás Maduro in at least 11 high rank positions, since 2013. Among those stand out: Integrant of the Presidential Commission for Defense, re-structuration and re-organization of National Oil Industry in 2021; Sectorial Vice-president of Political Sovereignty, Security and Peace in 2018; Chief of Great Mission of Sovereign and Safe Supply in 2016; and integrant of the commission for fight against smuggling in 2014.

According to our registers in Transparencia Venezuela, Padrino has been linked to several investigations of alleged great corruption or organized crime. In Columbia district, USA, there is an ongoing accusation against Padrino López, in which it is alleged that

since March 2014 till May 2019, the military officer “conspired with others to distribute cocaine on board an aircraft registered in the USA” . In the Southern District of Florida, there is another active judicial process against a businessman contracted by the Venezuelan government to allegedly evade north American sanctions and also by money laundering. In this cause, Padrino López is mentioned, as well three other high rank military officers linked to the contracting³⁶.

In mining towns of Bolivar state not only are present Bolivarian National Armed Force officials, but there also are present officials from the Corps of Criminal and Criminalistic Scientific Investigations, of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence, besides national and regional police officers, as it was possible to prove in visits made between January and February 2022.



36 Transparencia Venezuela. Suprema Injusticia. (2021). “Mencionan a Padrino López y otros 4 militares en un juicio por evasión de sanciones y lavado”. November 05th. Available in: <https://supremainjusticia.org/mencionan-a-padrino-lopez-y-otros-4-militares-en-un-juicio-por-evasion-de-sanciones-y-lavado/>



Highest authorities of other security and defense corps present in AMO 2022



Cicpc

Douglas Arnaldo
Rico González
Director



Sebin

Gustavo
González López
Director



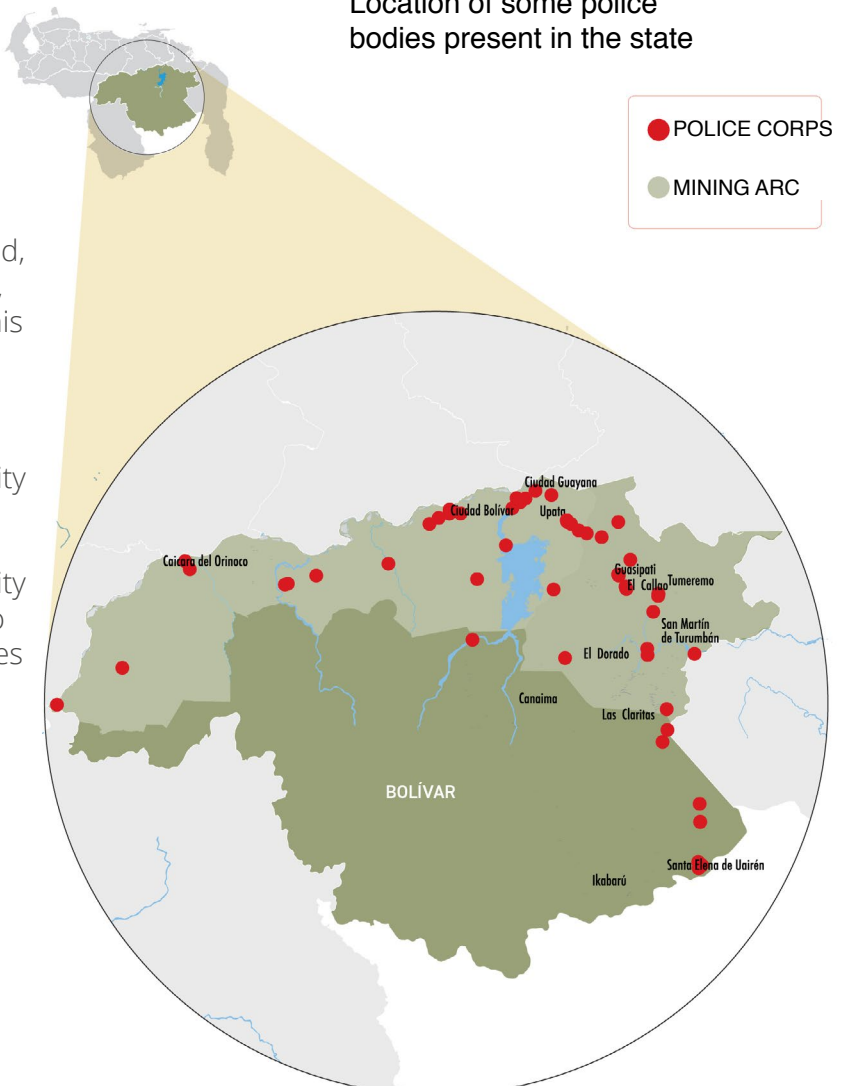
Dgcm

Iván
Hernández Dala
Director

Presence of all these groups is so notorious that some sources interviewed coincide in affirming that “the south is militarized”. The appreciation is not unreasonable, only on Road 10, which goes through mining towns of Bolívar state until the frontier with Brazil, 25 control points or alcabalas were identified, with presence of military and police officers, according to the tracking made as part of this investigation.

In following map is pointed the real location of those control points in Bolivar state. The amount of alcabalas existing and its proximity to mining zones should guarantee the non-existence of gold, mercury, arms or drugs smuggling in the zone. However, on the entity not only those crimes are reported, but also the power of criminal organizations increases every day.

Location of some police bodies present in the state





2.6.2. Omnipresence of the Venezuelan Mining Corporation

An entity deserving special attention among all others with presence in the Orinoco Mining Arc is the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM), controlled by General Mayor Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano. In almost any conversation held in Bolívar state related to AMO, this company's name comes out, since it has gained relevance in the last two years.

CVM was born by resolution of Pdvsa directive board in 2012 in Zulia state and was transferred to the Ministry of People's Power of Ecologic Mining Development of June 09th, 2016, on the same decree in which it was announced the creation of this office³⁷. At that moment, its president was José Salamat Khan Fernández, known as El Chino Khan, who was also acting as director of the Central Bank of Venezuela, minister of Basic and Mining Industries, among other positions.

In September 2016, CVM started to feature as representative of the State in the first mixed companies created in the Orinoco Mining Arc frame. Only between that month and November 2016, the corporation was registered as owner of 55% share of mixed companies Minera Ecosocialista Siembra Minera S.A, Minera Ecosocialista Oro Azul and Minera Ecosocialista Parguaza. Since then, CVM has also subscribed most strategic alliances that have been established for gold and other minerals exploitation.

Since its creation, CVM contributes with the integral social productive development, humanistic and sustainable, through exploration, exploitation, processing, industrialization, commercialization and rational promotion of its minerals and high-quality products, in harmony

with the environment", says a bulletin from the Ministry of Mining Development promoting "Ecomining"³⁸.

Even though it is not a new actor on the mining sector, since ends of 2019 till current days, CVM has increased its prominence in auriferous municipalities of Bolívar state.

"CVM is the most powerful state actor in this moment in the south", affirms an investigator from the entity with years of experience of field work and following the pulse to dynamics of power registered on the area.

Other testimonials gathered match when affirming that CVM is exercising great control over all supplies entering mining towns, from materials for mining activity to food and other kinds of goods. They check all products arriving to the zone and charge taxes in gold to whom wish to transport any material. Furthermore, they supply explosives, bags and other tools to small miners.

Even fuel, which is not found regularly in mining towns gas stations, has come to be distributed by CVM. "Since more than a year we did not have any subsidized gas to El Callao, but if you wanted, you could go to CVM and pay it with gold", tells one of the local authorities, who prefers not to be identified by fear to retaliation. This person assures that from the corporation they sheltered saying that gas available was only to provide companies with strategic alliances, but private entities receiving gas also re-sold it.

CVM logo appears now much clear in Cyanide plant fronts and in supply distribution centers, which can be seen from Road 10. Stores in which gold is analyzed and purchased, expose in their walls the agreements reached with the state corporation.

37 Decree No. 2.350 of creation of the Ministry of People's Power for Ecologic Mining Development was published in Official Gazette No. 40.922 of June 09th, 2016.

38 Ministry of People's Power for Ecologic Mining Development. (2021). Ecominería al día. "Corporación Venezolana de Minería en vanguardia junto al pueblo". Available in: <http://www.desarrollominero.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/boletin-ecomineria-al-dia-diciembre-2021.pdf>



“CVM has a more severe control to attract gold processed in mills and cyanidation plants. They are everywhere, they have their own trucks to take the material and get people inside strategic alliances. But they still do not inform anything about what they process and what is reported to BCV, this, with no doubt raises suspicion”, aggregates another source with knowledge on the area.

Despite the increasement of control on supplies from the state entity and its bigger presence, substances prohibited by law, such as mercury, continue to be freely commercialized and used in the state. Besides, most part of gold production is extracted by irregular ways.

Concern about opacity surrounding handling on the corporation is not groundless. Its president has been accused of corruption after his pass-through important organisms of the State under governments of Chávez and Maduro.

- **Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano** is a Mayor General graduated from the Military Academy of Venezuela in July 1985. During the management of the so-called revolutionary government, he has led three of the most important ministries: Food (2010-2013 and 2015), Presidential Office (2014-2015 and 2017) and Transport (2017-2018). Furthermore, he has been designated president of at least eight State owned companies. In most positions, he was nominated by the president of Venezuela and the Minister of Defense.

National Assembly deputies Ismael García and Carlos Berrizbeitia, denounced³⁹ that when passed by the Ministry of Food and the companies ascribed to that ministry, Osorio got involved in a corruption case together with Naman Wakil, a businessman with an ongoing criminal process in the USA⁴⁰.

In 2016, the National Assembly declared Osorio as politically responsible for the food crisis affecting the country. And he continued to be object of pointings for alleged over prices in food imports. He is sanctioned by Canada, USA and Panama, for alleged corruption facts and violation to human rights; and by being considered person of high risk due to money laundering, terrorism financing and proliferation of massive destruction weapons; respectively.



Without certainty about the level of extraction and processing of gold, there is no possibility to have a transparent management and reduction of corruption risks. All data obtained are approximations and estimated percentages of production distribution among the different actors. In that context, the only one that seems to understand how to handle it is *The System*, which does not demand for a percentage over production, and could not calculate due to lack of information registers but that demands a quarterly fixed amount.

39 Transparencia Venezuela. (2016). “Conoce las razones por las que la AN le pide a la Fiscalía que investigue a Osorio”. July 12th. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/conoce-las-razones-por-las-que-la-an-le-pide-a-la-fiscalia-que-investigue-a-osorio/>

40 Transparencia Venezuela. (2021). “A Naman Wakil lo acusan también de negocios turbios con Petropiar y Petromiranda”. August 05th. Available in: <https://supremainjusticia.org/a-naman-wakil-lo-acusan-tambien-de-negocios-turbios-con-petropiar-y-petromiranda/>



2.7 Instauration of criminal co-governments

2.7.1. From “labor unions” to “the system”

The afternoon of Wednesday, September 29th, 2021, the name of El Callao came back to national communications media events pages, after the finding of two human heads inside a backpack left in El Jobo square of the town. The fact, even though it was bloody and alarming, was not a novelty for the town citizens, because in several occasions they have been witnesses of similar happenings.

The first police versions about this incident indicated that the heads were abandoned by a man with a miner appearance, who left the bag and went away in a motorbike. Although there were no more official details about the case, extra officially it was reported that the perpetrators of such crime were members of criminal organizations operating in the area and that were applying one of their “exemplary punishments”⁴¹.

In the last decade and with more emphasis since 2016, when the Orinoco Mining Arc was created, in mining towns of Bolivar state a criminal structure was established, dedicated to control the business of illegal gold exploitation.

While not all bands are equal, and many have their own mines to exploit mineral, it is known that members of these groups charge “vacunas”(extortion) to whom decide to work on the activity, miners, merchants or millers; they authorize who can enter or exit from each mine; they order how much and how the work is done; they define what can be said and what cannot...all of that imposed by the power of fire.

These criminal groups in power of mine areas are led by “pranes”, a term born in Venezuelan jails to refer to criminal leaders. With the years, they have managed to copy structures such as the Bolivarian National Armed Forces to control every

step given inside a mine. They count on people who is in charge of early surveillance, to whom they call “gariteros” (surveillance watchmen) and they even have logistic teams, who help with supplies, and strike groups to defend their territories and enforce their rules⁴². Punishments for who disobey go from beatings to mutilations and dismemberments made in public so the message gets to more people.

Despite the constant denounces made by organizations of civil society and international organisms, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the national authorities have not taken effective actions to stop criminal activity.

On the contrary, **in the last two years most of these criminal organizations have managed to consolidate and guarantee a domination, territorialized in sectors, thanks to a kind of cohabitation agreement established with other bands and some State Security corps**, according to the investigation made.

For many years, most of these criminal bands were recognized under the name of mining labor unions but currently several of them are self-defined as the system. this new denomination not only involves consolidation of what these bands have achieved, but also the extension of their dominions to areas outside the mines, its workers, its inhabitants, as well as culture and regulations that group them.

According to testimonials compiled, **systems are not only in charge of exercising control over mining activity with the use of weapons, they have also imposed a group of rules to maintain peace, solve family conflicts, problems between merchants or decide over property sales.** For all that they have established a kind of own tribunals.

41 Siverio, J. Correo del Caroní. (2021). “Hallazgo de dos cabezas humanas en plaza de El Callao reafirma la anarquía impuesta por el pranato minero”. September 30th. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/region/sucesos/hallazgo-de-dos-cabezas-humanas-en-plaza-de-el-callao-reafirma-la-anarquia-impuesta-por-el-pranato-minero/>

42 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). “El infierno puertas adentro o cómo es vivir y trabajar en una mina”. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-infierno-puertas-adentro-o-como-es-vivir-y-trabajar-en-una-mina/>



“One thing is to say that in any society there are zones with delinquency in which eventually appear irregular groups, but a different thing is when the legal order and social relations in an extensive enough territory are imposed by a group that does not obey National State criteria at all, and that is what happens in that area”, a political scientist and investigator of mining activities says, who prefers not to be identified.

He adds that changes on denominations of these criminal groups obey to the intention of its leaders to show themselves with a more human face. **Now they try to be known as groups that procure order in communities and that search to help the most needed through foundations that give food bags, supply medical ambulatories and repair schools.** But not because of those murders, tortures and other practices are left aside. During field visits were collected diverse positive references towards pranes, since dependance and authority recognition relations are imposed, there is admiral for the power exercised and the wealthiness shown, it is a reason for pride to show links and kinship with them.

Advance of these groups and absence of the State has led some citizens to normalize the situation. “In these towns there is no insecurity”; “I go out with my cellphone to the square and no one is going to rob me”; “the one who get his head chopped its because he ate the traffic light (did not follow the rules)”, are phrases repeated in the zone.

2.7.2. The State and irregular groups

Uprising and consolidation of criminal groups in Bolivar mining municipalities has been given even when there is an important presence of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) and other state security agencies, such as the national and regional police, the Judicial and Criminal Scientific Investigations Corps (Cicpc),

the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin) and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dgcm), as described before.

Actually, any person going through Road 10, the way crossing Bolívar state and communicates mining municipalities on the entity, can find control points with FANB presence, and with other security groups of the State. Inside towns it is also possible to find officials, but beyond downtown power is left in hands of criminal organizations.

Sources interviewed for this report assure that **bands were born and strengthen precisely thanks to the support from military officers, who have had important positions inside the government and the approval of maximum authorities of security forces settled in the zone.** They agree that in alliances between State representatives and criminal bands is given because **all of them participate in sharing the spoils obtained through illicit economies.**

“Each pran has their own godfather among state officials with most power”, refers the politics scientist and investigator consulted. He adds that many political decisions announced to the country have as aim to replace one godfather for another.

The alleged links among representatives from state entities and criminal groups have been denounced even by effectives of the same security corps of the State, such as the former Sebin commissioner José Gregorio Lezama Gómez and the first National Army lieutenant, Jesús Leonardo Curvelo.

On January 26th, 2016 Lezama Gómez sent a letter to Gustavo González López, Sebin director, in which described the alleged responsibility of Bolívar governor (2004-2017), retired division general Francisco Rangel Gómez, in the uprising of criminal bands in mining municipalities. The former commissioner of intelligence assured that the promoter of delinquent groups was brigade



general Julio César Fuentes Manzulli, Citizen Security secretary and right hand of Rangel Gómez.

Fuentes Manzulli was also accused by the first lieutenant Curvelo, who during 14 years worked as his personal assistant. Curvelo was detained in 2015 and accused of belonging to a criminal network, but once he received house arrest, he ran away from the country. From outside he sent a “denounce report” in which he narrated part of the alleged acts of corruption committed by his former boss, in order to build up and position those criminal bands in Bolívar. He said that weapons were provided and also helped them to get released when they were arrested.

“Another instruction received from brigade general Julio César Fuentes Manzulli was to take back weapons from the Disarm Plan located in the National Park of Arms of the Arms and Explosives Direction (DAEX) to be moved to south Bolívar towns, an instruction familiar to division general Francisco Rangel Gómez”, says the document sent by Curvelo to the deputy of National Constituent Assembly of Venezuela, Américo De Grazia⁴³.

Oposition politician Andrés Velásquez coincides about criminal groups denominated trains, labor unions or systems being consolidated in Bolivar mines during Rangel Gómez management, according to this report. “We could say that all those groups replace the State. They have codes to distribute territories and confront each other when they make short circuit to take control form their rivals”.

Rangel Gómez exit from governorship and initiation of mayor general Justo José Noguera Pietri (2017-2021), coincided with an uprise of denounces about the presence of alleged guerrilla groups in the mines. According to opposition deputies, these groups would have



FUENTES MANZULLI AND JUANCHO

been supported by Noguera with the aim to replace the non-state bands already settled in the area.

More recently, there has been evidence of links between Alexander “Mimou” Vargas, current National Assembly deputy and presidential high commissioner for peace and life, in acts organized by foundations linked to at least two armed bands of Bolívar state.

There are reports that link criminal bands with the Venezuelan Mining Corporation officials, but there are not enough elements that allow to confirm the relationship. Details of these relations are presented in data sheets of each band present on chapter three of this report.

43 La Causa R. (2016). “Informe del comisario Jesús Curvelo revela nexos de la Gobernación con pranes mineros al sur del estado Bolívar”. Available in: <https://es.slideshare.net/LaCausaRve/informe-de-comisario-curvelo-del-sebin-revela-nexos-de-la-gobernacin-con-pranes-mineros-al-sur-del-estado-bolvar>



Francisco José Rangel Gómez



Retired Army division general, former president of CVG and ex-governor of Bolívar state (2004-2017). During his political career

him and his family have been accused of corruption in several occasions. Communications media and denunciations made by deputies of the National Assembly in 2015 point Rangel Gómez has a close relationship with businessman Yamal Mustafá Henríquez, to whom he granted important contracts. This businessman affronted a trial in 2013 for allegedly committing crimes of own willful embezzlement, arrangement of public official with contractor, and association to commit a crime when participating in a network to traffic iron from Ferrominera del Orinoco. According to the denouncement made by Euzenando Prazeres de Azevedo and Mónica Moura during Odebrecht case carried out in Brazil, Rangel Gomez's political campaign for period 2008-2012 was financed by the Brazilian company. Upon leaving the governorship he retired from the public eye and moved to Mexico. At the end of 2021 he came back to Bolívar and directly supported the candidacy of Ángel Marcano, current governor of the state.

advantage of his position as right hand of Rangel Gomez to allegedly arming criminal bands in control of gold mines in south the state in exchange of receiving money. Fuentes Manzulli was also accused of similar crimes by the Sebin ex-commissioner, José Gregorio Lezama Gómez. He is legal representative of companies Agropecuaria Los Wuaicas, C.A., Fundación La Ceiba e Inversiones Julpatri, C.A. besides he figures as president of Cachamay Foundation, ascribed to Bolívar governorship.

Justo José Noguera Pietri



major general of the Bolivarian National Army, former president of Sidor and ex-governor of Bolívar state (2017-2021).

In 2014 he was commander of the Bolivarian National Guard and from his position he led the military deployment that faced anti-government demonstrations that year. He was also in charge of the team present in the surrender of Leopoldo López at Plaza Brión in Chacaito. Panama government aggregated him to the list of high-risk officials for money laundering and terrorism financing in 2018.



Julio César Fuentes Manzulli

Army brigade general, former director of Bolívar state police and ex-secretary

of Citizen Security on the entity during Rangel Gomez's management. His personal ex-assistant, Jesús Leonardo Curvelo, accused him of taking



Alexander "Mimou" Vargas Gutiérrez

former basketball player in Cocodrilos de Caracas (1988-2004). In 1988 he founded the basketball school with his name,

same as Fundación Alexander "Mimou" Vargas. He is shareholder and legal representative of companies Procesadora de Alimentos V & G C.A., and Eventos VIP Diez, C.A. constituted in Miranda



and Portuguesa states respectively. In 2013 he was designated vice-minister of Sports Promotion for Peace and Life and during his management he was in charge of the program “repair your court”. He is currently deputy to the National Assembly for period 2021-2026, elected with support of Somos Venezuela party, presented by Delcy Rodríguez. He is also presidential high commissioner for Peace and Life. Communications media point that his foundation was greatly benefitted with public resources from Foundation Pueblo Soberano. Furthermore, according with an investigation from Connectas, Vargas was one of the authorities in charge of buildup (and failure) of vertical gyms. al Relations office interviewed for this report.

Cockfights have been used to negotiate economic and power loyalties among members of criminal bands and corrupted officials, according to testimonials gathered. Those are cultural acts, almost religious, that serve to formalize pacts, and just as in other cases, are sealed with the rooster’s blood. Loyalty has an economic content and the aim is the access of these groups to gold.





2.7.3. Criminal organizations which share the mines

The conformation between armed bands controlling mines in Bolívar state has changed in reiterated occasions, mainly as consequence of murder or incarceration of its leaders. However, interviews made to citizens and authorities of mining towns, together with compilation of reports from communications media and reviews of security corps, allowed to identify the main delinquent groups operating in the area in 2022, as well as its current leaders.

In mining towns can be easily related the names of leaders for those *systems*:

- “Ronny Matón”, chief of the Tren de Guayana, operating in Caroni, Roscio and El Callao municipalities
- “El Totó” and “Zacarías”, also controlling El Callao mines
- “El Run”, who directs the Organización R dominating in Tumeremo and with presence in El Callao
- El “Negro Fabio”, criminal leader of El Dorado;
- “Juancho” and his team, with power over Las Claritas, and Km. 88

Data sheets with details of each one of these groups can be seen in chapter three of this report.

Guerrilla in Bolívar: ELN, FARC, FBL?

In the field work made in Bolívar state, strong indicators were found regarding presence of criminal organizations with camouflage dressings and hostile behavior that witnesses identify as guerrilla members. It was also compiled an important number of reports of attacks from irregular groups in the last two years. However, several experts consulted for this study have doubts about those groups being part of the

National Liberation Army (ELN) from Colombia, as it has been reported before.

Even though there is certainty about this criminal organization being present in south Bolívar, there is more evidence of their acting in Area 1 of AMO, corresponding to the zone of El Caura, Caicara and more towards Amazonas state, and on the way to Apure, where indigenous leaders have declared to have been victims of guerrilla groups self-denominated ELN.

These reports are referred to attacks and irregular incursions from these groups in Bolívar state, but not about guerrilla settlements.

Sources interviewed in área 4 of AMO, along road 10 describe these irregular groups in a similar way: they are persons wearing military clothing or camouflage, they have a ribbon in the arm, they use “large” weapons, they declare themselves guerrilla groups and some talk with Colombian accent. Nonetheless, reports from leaders of mining labor unions such as Eduardo José Natera Balboa alias “Run” or “el Pelón” refer that he wore military clothings and rubber boots too. Besides, several leaders of the system have Colombian origin.

Academics of the area express their reasonable doubts about these criminal organizations called guerrilleros actually belong to ELN or FARC dissidences. They agree that there are indications of guerrilla, but they do not count on enough evidences to confirm ELN or FARC dissidences presence in the south. They affirm that a deeper investigation is necessary.

Doubts are related to behavior of those groups in Venezuela, which is different to the one they have had in Colombia:

1. Groups in Venezuela have too much autonomy, in comparison with groups in Colombia.
2. They do not self-denominate as ELN members, nor FARC dissidences.



3. They do not refer their belonging to a commander, a boss or leader.
4. They do not claim authorship of facts in the name of those groups.

Declarations of opposition political leaders, reports from civil society organizations, communication media and even some persons consulted during the tour made through mining communities affirm that these groups are present in mines of El Callao, el Dorado and Tumeremo, but all is reported by third parties.

Several people consulted assured that even when there is no certainty whether it is about the same Colombian guerrilla, in the mining areas there have been incursions of criminal organizations differenced from labor unions or systems by the ways they operate. “Those groups arrive here and identify themselves as guerrilla, such as ELN or revolutionary fronts. They reunite inhabitants of the area, many from indigenous communities and assure them they are not going to harm them if they obey their rules. They do not threaten as much as the labor union ones do and that implies, they are received a little better”, says a person who works with indigenous communities in south Bolívar.

On the way to Bochinche and San Martín de Turumbán signs point to incursions of criminal organizations denominated revolutionaries and bolivarian. They get in contact with indigenous communities, demand and negotiate payments before retreating.

From the official sector, one part of the Bolivarian National Guard in Bolívar, of november 15th, 2020, talks about the death of four members of an “irregular group” that allegedly confronted the military officers in sector La Cochineria of Angostura municipality⁴⁴, in Bolívar. Even though the deceased were not identified, GNB reported that they were “apparently Colombian and dressed military clothings”.

Moreover, a Dgcim report from January 29th, 2022 corresponding to the “Investigation report about deviation and smuggling of gas extraction in Independencia municipality of Anzoátegui state”, orders the arrest of Carlos Rafael Vidal Bolívar, major of the jurisdiction, as well as 11 other persons, for irregular administration and commercialization to “Organizations dedicated to practice illegal mining, violence generation groups (**dissident elements of Colombian guerrilla groups dedicated to drug traffic**)”.

2.7.4. Massacres and disappearances. Red numbers behind the fight for mines

In their attempts to control gold mines in Bolivar state and dominate illicit economies in the zone, criminal groups have propitiated bloody episodes that have taken hundreds of people’s lives, mostly miners or members of the same delinquent bands.

Effectives of two different security corps from the State have also turned out dead or hurt in alleged confrontations with criminal bands, even though civil society organizations that investigate violence patterns and mining communities’ inhabitants have denounced the happening of extra-judicial executions.

These facts have led **Bolivar state to rank third on the most violent entities of the country, with a rate of 56,8 homicides for each 100.000 inhabitants**, according to the 2021 report from the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV)⁴⁵.

The organization highlights that when it is observed at municipal scale, it is found that among **the five most violent municipalities of Venezuela, three are located in the mining zone of Bolivar State** and have exceptionally high violent death rates:

44 Suniaga, C. El Pitazo. (2020). “Bolívar | Enfrentamiento entre militares y grupo irregular deja cuatro muertos”. November 16th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/bolivar-enfrentamiento-entre-militares-y-grupo-irregular-deja-cuatro-muertos/>

45 Venezuelan Observatory of Violence. (2021). “Informe Anual de Violencia 2021”. Available in: <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/informe-anual-de-violencia-2021/>



**El Callao municipality with a rate of 511
Sifontes with 189
Rosco with 125 homicides
per each 100.000 inhabitants**

Among the violent facts reported in South Bolívar State stands out the one occurred in Tumeremo in March 2016, when the band of Jamilton Andrés Ulloa Suárez, alias “el Topo” band murdered 17 persons, found in a common grave according to registers from the Venezuelan Public Ministry. Even though the official version alleged that the incident was given due to alleged links of victims with the pran’s rival (Alexandro Lisandro González Montilla, alias “el Gordo Lisando”), some sources agree⁴⁶ that the intention of the massacre was to clear and prepare the ground for the new companies that received grantings as part of the newly created Orinoco Mining Arc.

The size of the denominated Massacre of Tumeremo or Massacre of Atena transcended Bolívar frontiers, scandalized the country and made “el Topo” the most wanted man in Venezuela. Three months later, the pran was murdered by special forces of Sebin, but violent incidents continued to register.

A data base gathered for this report, starting from publications made by trustable communication media and reports elaborated by civil society organizations handling the subject, allowed to identify **79 violent events occurred in the mining context between March 2016 and March 2022, which left a balance of at least 104 persons dead.** From systematization of the information, it follows that in nine violent events died at least 11 officers from security corps of the State, two police officers, six military officers and three members of Dgcim.

Besides persons turned out dead due to violence registered in mining zones, the Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship (Codehciu), in alliance with el Correo del Caroní, have compiled reports of 175 people disappearances in south Bolivar state between 2012 and 2021⁴⁷.

Codehciu stands out that even though these disappearances can be considered a systemic pattern that cannot be separated from gold extraction in south Venezuela, the Venezuelan State has not implemented yet public policies to guarantee life search of these persons. This is a fact despite Venezuela signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearances and signed and ratified the Convention -and the Optional Protocol- against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of the United Nations.

Only in 2021, Codehciu and el Correo del Caroní denounce the disappearance of 26 people in south Bolivar state, most of them lost in mines of municipality Sifontes (10). The rest, in El Callao (4), Sucre (3), Cedeño (2), Angostura del Orinoco (1) and Gran Sabana (2).

According to data compiled, barely 27% of persons disappeared in 2021 have re-appeared, but in none of these cases there was support from Cicpc. “The percentage of people who appeared, reported to their relatives that they were uncommunicated for some time because inside the mines their phones were taken away, because the current labor union prohibited them to communicate of due to lack of phone signal”, they add.

46 Boon, L. y Meléndez, L. Runrunes y Connectas. (2019). “Oro de sangre y compradores cómplices”. Available in: <https://www.connectas.org/especiales/fuga-del-oro-venezolano/pista-de-aterizaje-5.html>

47 Codehciu. (2022). “26 personas desaparecieron en territorios mineros de Bolívar durante 2021”. February 09th. Available in: <https://codehciu.org/26-personas-desaparecieron-en-territorios-mineros-de-bolivar-durante-2021/>



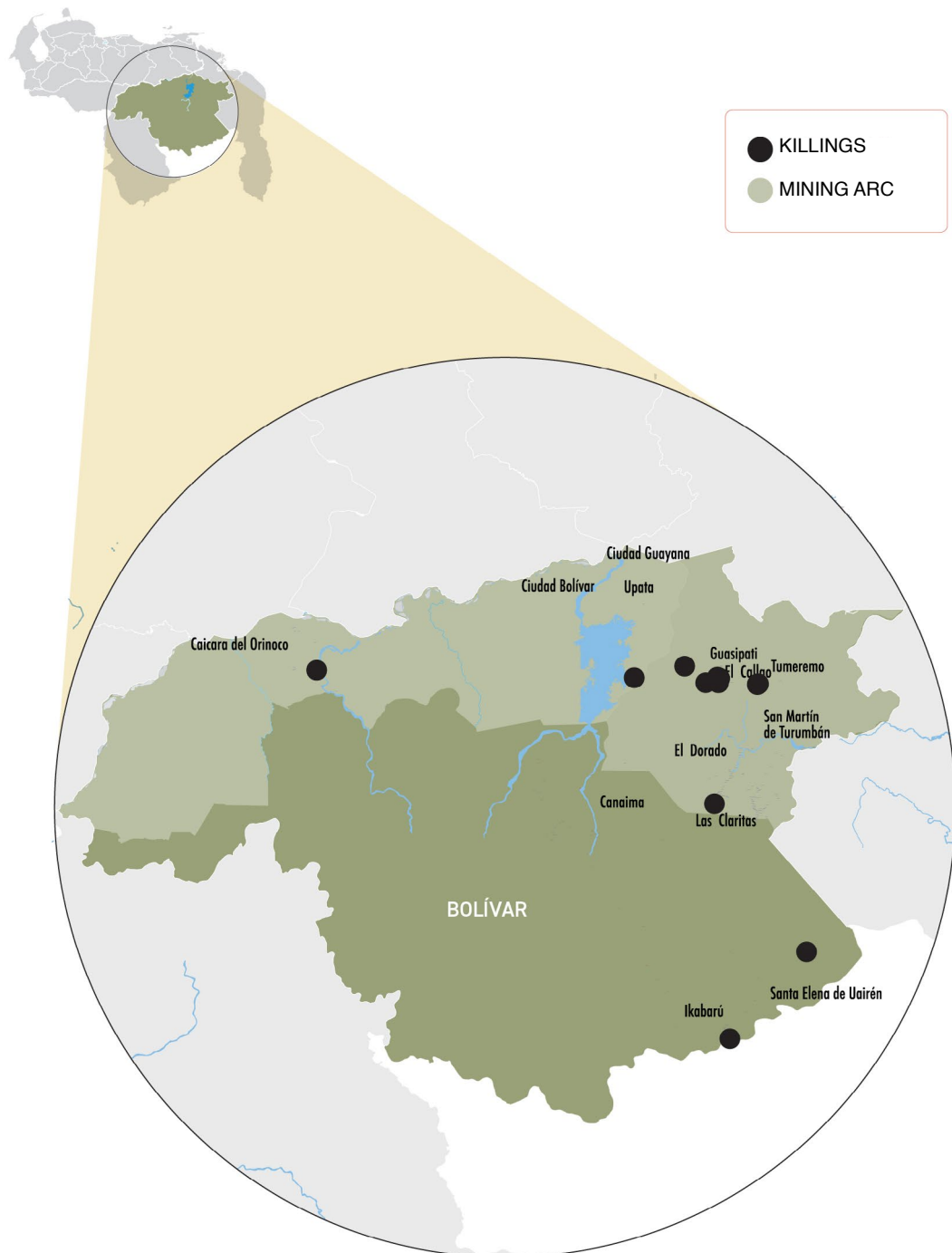
ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

In this map it is possible to see the approximate location of violent events that left more than five deceased since March 2016 until March 2022.

Besides, on annexes of this report the complete list of violent facts registered in mining context between march 2016 and march 2022 can be checked.

Approximate location where violent actions took place and left more than five deceased

From March 2016 to March 2022





Justice in the south. Hands of metal operation

On June 08th, 2018, the national government launched an operation denominated “hands of metal”, with the aim to “attack metal extraction smuggling mafias”, among them copper, silver and mostly gold.

The then vice-president, Tareck El Aissami, was in charge of communicating those seven persons were detained allegedly linked to illegal traffic and that there were arrest warrants for another 28 people.

Almost four years after this operation initiated, the results have not been the expected. Despite dozens of improvised stores of gold buyers were destroyed in Altavista sector of Puerto Ordaz, and the life of Phanor Vladimir San Clemente alias Capitán (leader of one of the most sanguinarios bands in Guayana) was ended, illegal traffic of gold persists and both in Ciudad Guayana districts and mining areas justice is imposed by the system.

2.7.5. Impact on indigenous communities

In the last years, the system operating in south Bolívar state have expanded even more to indigenous territories that coincide with the areas marked for exploitation in Orinoco Mining Arc, which keeps affecting the traditional ways of life for these communities and exposes them to the criminal governance, diseases and labor and social relations in the shape of modern slavery.

Extension of control areas by criminal organizations with complicity of the State has been denounced since more than five years by indigenous leaders in formal institutions, but the answer has been null. Leaders consulted for this report agree that in communities want to take justice by their own hands, even though they insist in the need to exhaust regular ways. While tension is latent, they wait for the eviction of their lands and have installed boards in an attempt for marking their territory.

A fact happened on January 12th 2022 allows to portrait the indigenous people situation and the violence spiral in the area. The conflict occurred in indigenous communities of San Isidro Parrish, in Sifontes Municipality, Bolívar State⁴⁸.

Sororopan, Inaway, San Miguel, Araima Tepui and Joboshirima indigenous communities -located in Road 10- decided to occupy a storehouse in km 82, in lands of the indigenous community Santa Lucía de Inaway, with the aim to install a community sale their products and harvests, according to their story.

The place was abandoned for over 30 years but is located just right at the entrance of the access way to a mining field controlled by the criminal group operating in Las Claritas and Km 88, led by alias “Juancho”.

“Before, the indigenous passed by because those were their trails to go to Cuyuní river, to fish, but now they cannot do that because they have no permission to pass. There are lagoons back there and they are working on it. There are also companies back there” declared a leader on the sector.

To prevent indigenous communities to occupy the storehouse, the armed group made the communal council to occupy it first.

48 Ramírez, M. Correo del Caroní. (2022). “Grupo armado arremete contra comunidades indígenas tras intento de ocupación de galpón en Km 86”. January 14th. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/region/grupo-armado-arremete-contra-comunidades-indigenas-tras-intento-de-ocupacion-de-galpon-en-km-86/>



The indigenous tried to avoid the invasion, but around 30 men-estimated- carrying large weapons intimidated and attacked them. Joboshirima's Captain, Junior Francis, was hurt when he tried to make photos and videos. Another two indigenous received punches with the delinquent's guns when trying to take photos. In protest for the attack, indigenous communities closed the Road 10 -which communicates Venezuela with Brazil- in three points (Kilometers 72,82 and 84) during six days.

Attack with long weapons in January 2022

Joboshirima is a community mainly formed by arawaco etnia, but with presence of pemón and caribe indigenous too. It is located in Road 10, a little more than 10 kilometers from the mining town Las Claritas.

The Captain of this community, Junior Francis, arrived at 11:42 in the morning of January 12th, 2022 to the land in which the storehouse is located. Indigenous from the near community Inaway asked him for support because the structure was being taken. Francis did not know what happened exactly, but he moved there with six young men from his community to the point of conflict, to which already had arrived members of indigenous community security group.

In the place there were two delinquents, members of "Juancho" "labor union", alias "El Causa" and "Yorman". The subjects took three trucks that came from the way near to the storehouse in which the armed group has a "mecate" a kind of control point in which bribery is charged to allow transport of gold or supplies.

The delinquents shot to the air. "They are killing my brothers", thought Francis. In that moment he reacted, took the phone and started taking photos. While he was doing it, one of the

delinquents called "Yorman" ran to take off his phone. "I put my phone inside my boxer and as soon I stood up, he guy just hit me and broke my nose", remembers. To the place also arrived the heads of the criminal band, besides "Juancho", there were "el Viejo Darwin" and "Humbertico".

"The government does not support us. They (armed groups) say they have the State back up and say it to everyone. The government is raising them, because where they the weapons from? What does the Guard do? What does the police do? What does the Sebin do when they are in there? All of them must be 'eating' (benefitting) there", said an indigenous leader interviewed in Sifontes municipality.

"For a group of people to keep in power it must be feeding the ones on top, because how do you keep up there? The government is the one with will to get that people out. They say it's difficult to take them out, but how did they get the Cota 905 group out? And that was in Caracas, the Capital. And here it is difficult for them to get these groups out", added, referring to the criminal band led by alias "el Koki".

The armed group forced stores to close in Las Claritas, agreed consulted sources. Miners were in gold reservoirs at open sky were taken in trucks to the storehouse "because they said that the guard was going to face them (armed groups) and used the town as a shield", kept saying the indigenous leader. Closure of Road 10 ceased in the afternoon of January 17th, 2022⁴⁹, after a meeting in which Bolívar governor, Ángel Marciano, participated. In the encounter it was decided that the storehouse in dispute was going to be under the Governorship authority and surveillance of the Bolivarian National Armed Force. It was also announced the installation of work tables.

49 Ramírez, M. Correo del Caroní. (2022). "Grupo armado arremete contra comunidades indígenas tras intento de ocupación de galpón en Km 86". January 14th. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/region/grupo-armado-arremete-contra-comunidades-indigenas-tras-intento-de-ocupacion-de-galpon-en-km-86/>



On January 26th, 2022, fourteen days after the attack of criminal organizations in Santa Lucía de Inaway, it was established the first work table. It was made in the school of the indigenous community of San José and participated 19 captains of 22 indigenous communities of Sifontes municipality, representative of pemón, arawaco, kariña and akawayo ethnicities, which form 3 edges: frontier (Esequibo), road (troncal 10) and fluvial (rivers Yuruán, Cuyuní and Chicanán). The first point to discuss was violence and invasion of lands for the design of an eviction plan for criminal bands in indigenous territories.

In the meeting also participated the secretary of Citizen Security, Edgar Colina Reyes; and representatives of the Public Ministry and the Integral Defense Operational Zone (ZODI). The authorities manifested they would meet in 15 days and once a month they would check advances. But there has not been any more information about it.

“They want to take control and have already done it, but they want to keep spreading control, dispossess the communities from their habitats and their lands to take total control”, said general captain of Cuyuní IV sector, Luis Miranda.

“Indigenous leaders agree that criminal organizations heads that have invaded lands are “Juancho”, “el viejo Darwin”, “Humbertico” and “Negro Fabio”. “They are deployed in all the territorial area, they are inside and that is what we are facing, but we don’t want to do it with a radical confrontation because we know how regrettable that can be. We are denouncing to the State as it should be, to the security organisms, so they neutralize this situation that indigenous people are going through”.

It is not the first time this situation is exposed.

At least seven state and security organs have received denounces from indigenous communities: Chancellery, Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian

National Armed Forces (Ceofanb), People’s Advocacy, General Attorney, Bolívar Governorship, Strategic Zone of Integral Defense (REDI) and ZODI. None has acted till now, they notice.

In the meeting, informe dan indigenous leader present, captains asked in front of authorities: “What do you want, that we arm ourselves too? What is your function? What are they doing? What answer are you giving us?”.

Currently, Santa Lucía de Inaway, Joboshirima, San Antonio de Roscio, San Martín de Turumbán and San Luis de Morichal are the indigenous communities in Cuyuní IV more affected by the presence of criminal organizations.

In February 2021, pemón community of San Luis de Morichal declared themselves in emergency⁵⁰ due to the invasion of community lands by illegal miners in an area known as El Chivao, in Chicanán river, less than one kilometer from the community.

In all of them, said Miranda, there is invasion of indigenous lands. “In San Antonio de Roscio there is invasion of criminal organizations to take control of mines, just as in San Martín de Turumbán and San Luis de Morichal. There is part of mines taken, but there are mines closer to the communities of which they want to take control and to that the community is facing through communal and sectorial community, and also requesting the State to do something before it gets out of hands, that is the exigence point, of claim, a constitutional right is claimed”.

Presence of criminal organizations in indigenous territories initiated in 2007, indicated, but in the last years it has intensified, “it is shameless, more in sight of everyone, in sight of public eye, where the same government officials turn a blind eye, they are involved in it and we are openly presenting that”.

50 Provea. (2021). “Pemones de San Luis de Morichal se declaran en emergencia ante penetración de sus territorios por grupos irregulares”. February 23rd. Available in: <https://provea.org/actualidad/pemones-de-san-luis-de-morichal-se-declaran-en-emergencia-ante-penetracion-de-sus-territorios-por-grupos-irregulares/>



The worst issue is that they have had to suffer the murderer of indigenous between 2016 and 2019: six in San Antonio de Roscio and two in San Luis de Morichal, by hands of armed groups.

Indigenous leaders agree that communities want to take justice in their own hands in view of the State indifference, “and we as leaders are neutralizing and trying to take it in peace so this does not happen, because we know the consequences it can bring. Before this situation, we still are giving a confidence vote to the State so they do their job, but desire to confront is not needed for our people when they see the State just not doing a thing for us”.

Not only security is a concern for general captain, who assures that health and education areas are in decadence. He mentioned pollution of rivers due to mining activity and increasement of malaria. These subjects would be included in the second work table with Bolívar governorship. “We have hope, but in an extreme case if it does not happen we hope it does not get worse, we trust the State to solve (...) as a community we will keep resisting and we are not going to knee, bend or give up before them”.

Surrounded in San Antonio de Roscio

Criminal organizations have surrounded indigenous population of pemón San Antonio de Roscio, lands located between Km. 24 and 41 of Road 10, in Sifontes municipality. Their incursion began through peripheric mining areas and currently are few located at kilometers from the community, in which live nearly 2.000 persons, according to local census.

Dispossession is also observed on the invasion of community lands in both margins of Kms. 24 to 34 of Road 10, by non-indigenous persons

who installed their small shops and kiosks. They took the area during 2020 and 2021, in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, when transport was restricted in the country. In that section, full of businesses of all kinds, criminal organizations charge bribery. from the coffee seller to the merchant who sales gasoline by liters are under the dominion of armed groups, assure. Control is held by a character known as William, who responds to the group of “Juancho”.

The Captain of San Antonio de Roscio, Cecilio Bigott, points that mineral extraction from strangers has been considered by the community as an invasion. “It is not about invasion of a space and exploit it anymore, in terms of mining, but it is already an organization that keeps trying to take total control, our lands have been invaded by them”.

Indigenous leaders do mea culpa and reflect if they have been permissive towards foreign people entering their territory. They explain they are surrounded by at least three “labor unions”.

The “Negro Fabio” “labor unión”, which área of influence is El Dorado, dominates at west the fluvial part of river Cuyuní and a portion of San Antonio jurisdiction, where Sanpollo mine is located. The captaincy recognizes that they allowed operations in the reservoir because it was far from the community, “but now **they are coming closer because in the while they go exploiting the land they get out of land and get more and more closer and they are surrounding us**”.

In South they are closed by the “Juancho” union and on East there is a delinquent called Alvaro, which they presume he responds to this armed group.

The death of three indigenous (Domingo Pérez, Óscar Meya y Anthony Martínez) from the community in the last four years and threat from criminals are frequent. “They want to take mines from the community, the ones that are



guarded, administrated and worked by us, those that are for our self-management. We have always argued that with the government, 'hey, the indigenous practice illegal mining', ok, but we have to do government because the economy of the country is on the ground. I send a request to the government and it is a lie to believe they are going to answer me. Communities try to do self-government, give them a little incentive to teachers, doctors, that is why we say that those are our mines. We know the State has right to extract that mineral, but for government to enter here they have to follow our laws, which is previous consultation".

Bigott said that criminal organizations have wanted to negotiate. In San Antonio they have not met, "but when there have been situations of violence, there has always been confrontations, 'keep your limits, respect us'. It has not been about sitting and negotiate, but about keeping tranquility. We have never spoken of agreements or businesses because they are irregular groups. We can talk with ministers, majorities and governorships, because those are established institutions, but what can I get talking to irregular groups, indigenous communities are not there to do that kind of alliances".

The captain affirmed that violence has generated a great social impact. He said consumption of drugs has increased due to its introduction by ambulant dealers, price of food has increased greatly, due to bribery demanded by labor unions. Furthermore, he affirmed that they feel a lot of pressure because children of the community constantly observe armed characters.

"When we started seeing armed organizations (in river areas), we had to say to those organizations that at least they should not move through the territory carrying guns, because it intimidates them. Some understood and disarmed. Others came with that attitude of 'I don't care what you say' and in front of that there are always reactions from the community, indigenous people are warriors".

Alejandro Lezama, a member of the captaincy team, stood out that the community requests combat actions, but the captain insists in exhausting all resources through the regular channels. **"The population is tired, hurt, till when government? How do you receive a person that comes with a weapon with the intention to threat? How do I give them a tumá (traditional pemón soup) when they come armed in a threatening tone?"**.

San Antonio leaders agree that in criminal organizations they frequently say that they are supported by the government, "it is too strong and sometimes the government does not know how to respond, how do they explain to us that they carry weapons and if they see a little indian with a shotgun or an arrow, does it mean he is a thief or a terrorist?".

Indigenous leaders do not know how heads of criminal organizations came to South Bolivar. Not either how they managed to take control and erect as a force. What they do know and recognize and "hurts to say it", is that the government has nexus with them "and that is why is so difficult to eradicate them... those are raw realities that sometimes we say and we know the government offends.



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

Mining Arc (MA)	Indigenous communities	%
Block 1	84	16
Block 2	18	3
Block 3	7	1
Block 4	57	11
Ikabarú Block	10	2
MA	176	34
Not MA	348	66
Total	524	100

Chart 4. Distribution of indigenous communities by Mining Arc sectors

Source: INE, 2001; SOSOrinoco.

Mining Arc (MA)	Populated areas	%
Block 1	160	27
Block 2	55	9
Block 3	116	20
Block 4	93	16
Ikabarú Block	5	1
MA	429	73
Not MA	160	27
Total	589	100

The MA coincides with 14 of them: Akawayo, Arawak, Eñepa, Kariña, Kurripako, Mapoyo, Pemón, Piapoko, Piaroa, Sáliva, Sanema, Warao and Ye´ Kwana. To these towns, only have been demarcated and titled as indigenous "lands" and all of them are located inside MA (board 3).

Chart 2. Distribution of populated centers by Mining Arc sectors.

Source: IGVS; SOSOrinoco

The Observatory of Indigenous Communities Human Rights Kapé-Kapé, has also alerted in several opportunities⁵¹ about the severe violence situation taking place in indigenous communities close to mining areas where illegal mining is done. Specifically in the territory formed by the Orinoco Mining Arc.

The organization affirms violence unleashed in that area has traduced in threats, harassment, physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse, labor exploitation, and in the worst cases, disappearances, deaths and massacres of indigenous⁵². It denounces that these facts are not only executed by delinquent groups, but also by members of security corps from the State, specifically by effectives of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces.

Kapé-Kapé highlights that incursion of criminal groups and displacement of indigenous

communities is equally manifested in Amazonas and Delta Amacuro states, even though cases are less known.

In June 2020, the organization informed the activation of the territorial guard by the uwottüja (piaroa) indigenous community, in Autana municipality, Amazonas state, before the constant aggressions and threats received from irregular armed groups who participate in illegal mining dynamics in the area⁵³.

Since mid 2020, the figure of territorial guards has been constituted in five communities of Autana municipality with 80 volunteers that install control points in strategic areas, according to investigatons of communications media Armando Info⁵⁴. However, these groups have not had stopped invaders to get into their territories.

51 Kapé-Kapé, civil asociation. (2021). "Violencia minera en comunidades indígenas del sur de Venezuela". Available in: <https://kape-kape.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Informe.de.Resultados.Violencia.minera.en.comunidades.indigenas.pdf>

52 Ídem.

53 Political Ecology Observatory of Venezuela. (2020). "Kapé Kapé: Indígenas Uwottuja de Amazonas activan guardia territorial". June 22nd. Available in: <https://www.ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2020/06/22/kape-kape-indigenas-uwottuja-de-amazonas-activan-guardia-territorial/>

54 Poliszuk, J y otros. Armando. Info (2022). "La resistencia indígena se organiza en guardias territoriales". February 13th. Available in: <https://armando.info/la-resistencia-indigena-se-organiza-en-guardias-territoriales/>



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

“Amazonas state is not formally inside the Orinoco Mining Arc, but here we have our own Mining Arc, it means we have a great cross to bear which is National Park Yapacana, a park that in last 20 years has been devastated, devoured by illegal mining. Currently there are more than 3.000 hectares affected and probably there are more than 5.000 miners settled there, devastating all that area. All that happens with the permissive and accommodating watch of the Venezuelan State, specially of military, from the national armed force (...) that area is controlled by foreign irregular armed groups”,

Simeón Rojas
Human Rights Defendor, descendant
of sáliva community
Amazonas

“In the last two years the illegal mining exploitation has been extreme in my sector, specifically in Alto Guayapo, where the impact is huge, to see all that being damaged in our sector, to us as women, it has affected our souls (...) the ones who finance the mining groups are guerrilla men(...) us as indigenous leaders have come to agreements with them, we have the opportunity to talk with one called Domingo, who said ‘I have come to help you’, ‘I came to see if there is the opportunity to talk to you’. I said: we do not need someone else governing in our territory, you are still foreign, how are you going to rule a territory that is not yours (...) they always say that the government made a convention with them and that is why they can move inside the territory”,

Denaida Álvarez
Leader of uwottüja (piaroa) indigenous community
Amazonas

“Many indigenous communities have shown resistance to what means this mining activity to our territories and have submitted to threats, intimidation, disappearances, torture, forced recruitment (...) many screams from our indigenous sisters have been silenced by fear of being murdered or actions being taken against a relative or a child (...) denunces are usually made, but it does not go further paper work. In this area of Amazonas state gold shuts many things up, it purchases institutions, military, judges, attorneys and many security entities that should be there to defend us, end up being complicit of these activities and criminal facts”,

Yaritza Rodríguez
Leader of Baré indigenous community
Amazonas

“We have denounced, even in international instances, the presence of criminal organizations in our indigenous communities. Those are groups who threaten you, they frighten you and one way or another those are intimidating factors. Those are factors that promote mobilization and massive migration, which in these moments is a great problem that affects Delta Amacuro state, specifically the population of warao indigenous community in Delta Amacuro state”

Melquiades Ávila
Indigenous defendor of Warao community
Delta Amacuro



“Mining in Caura river banks has affected greatly indigenous communities. It has brought a lot of instability, health, education, safety and healthy cohabitation have been affected. This has also caused community members to migrate to other municipalities, states or countries (...) indigenous organizations do not want their brothers to leave, but to stay in their territories, but mining has affected them too much and of course, presence of irregular groups has been a great threat for indigenous families”

Higinio Montiel

Yekuana community indigenous investigator

Bolívar

charging some grams of gold (5 grams a month for their services). But this is not enough to survive and schools are closing.

Migration of community members to mines and incursions of criminal organizations have led to the closure of at least four Fe y Alegría schools since 2020. Only in the way to Bochinche, an area of Sifontes municipality of Bolívar state, near the frontier with Guyana, three of those schools are lost: La Esperanza, Matupo 1, La Guaica, due to pressure from those criminal organizations.

“The school called Matupo 1, was located after passing Km. 50. It reached to the point in which people was going to mines and lost the sense of presence on school, even the teacher went to mines. They actually took the school ceiling with them, to be used as material in the new settlements. There was no more option than to take it off”, said a person with knowledge on the case.

- On the annexes of this report can be found a list of violent events in the mining context that has affected directly indigenous communities.

Closure of schools due to migration to mines

In traditional town of Bolívar state, it means, Upata, Guasipati, El Callao, El Dorado and Las Claritas, as well as immediate settlements around them count on schools of basic and high school education. Fe y Alegría, as its slogan says, starts where the asphalt ends, it has schools in the most remote areas, attending groups of disperse population in that great territory called Bolívar.

The traditional structure of Fe y Alegría, which on March 05th, 2022, celebrated 66 years of foundation, operates with a mixed financing, the physical and administrative structure, as well as maintenance counts on the private support administrated by the institution’s coordination, while teachers and professors are paid by the Ministry of Education Payroll. Even though the crisis, which started in 2014, this has changed.

In the Mining Arc teachers do not scape the poverty situation. Almost all educators from schools are form the area and, according to people close to the institution, they survive

2.8 Gold does not shine on Orinoco Mining Arc towns, economic, social and environmental impact

The thousands of millions of dollars generated yearly by the gold fever in the Orinoco Mining Arc have only translated into prosperity for a few. In mining towns where the gold material is extracted, misery is obvious, their habitants not only live exposed to violence of criminal groups, but they also must survive with reduced and uncertain income, in a context of high prices on food and restricted means of payment; increasement of illicit businesses; proliferation of diseases that were almost eradicated; scarcity of medicines and unassisted medical centers; deficient public services; disordered migration and a huge environmental devastation.



One of the most paradigmatic cases is the one of El Callao, where the Venezuelan Mining Corporation has given 38.000 of 40.000 hectares owned by the municipality to strategic alliances to process gold. The entity major, Coromoto Lugo, who has occupied the position for four non-consecutive periods, assures the CVM receives 35% on taxes from these companies every month, and in theory, the municipality should receive benefits through a social fund to which 5% of that rate is assigned. About the fund, the details are unknown, there are not discussions about assignment of resources and “not even a bolivar has been invested”.

The creation of the Mining Social Fund was established on Decree No. 2,165 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that Reserves for the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold and Other Strategic Minerals, approved by Nicolás Maduro on December 30th, 2015⁵⁵. According to article 42, the fund has as aim to guarantee the resources for the development of surrounding communities, destined to exercise of mining activities and whose income would guarantee and protect social safety of workers and gold and other strategic mineral mines, and strengthening of knowledge in mining activities and environmental care.

Two years after the approval of the Law Decree in March 2017, the then minister of People’s Power for Ecologic Mining Development, Jorge Arreaza, announced the activation of the Mining Social Fund for the development of “Comprehensive Attention Plan for Small Mining”⁵⁶, but nothing further was said about the subject.

Despite counting on larger mining operation, for which estimate a monthly extraction of 3.000 kilos of gold only in El Callao, major Lugo decreed the emergency on the municipality on December 05th, 2021, at barely 14 days to be elected. The measure was due to the crisis faced by the mining town, caused by the collapse of public services, overpopulation and pollution caused by mining activity and use of cyanide and mercury.

“There is great mining opening that does not leave nothing to the municipality (...) where are the social works? What? Is it about taking all gold from El Callao and leave nothing here? (...) the municipality must be sustainable and give answers in health and in water, as long as the companies understand that they must give also to the municipality”, questioned.

The major assures that resources received by governorships and majorities by constitutional treaty, calculated in the base of estimated ordinary income by the national tax office, are not enough to handle the critical situation lived there. “Here we pay 360 dollars daily only for two trucks of garbage”.

The biggest fear of callaoenses is that El Callao becomes another El Pao, another mining town in Piar municipality, located west Bolívar state, that knew prosperity with iron exploitation till the 70’s and today is a ghost town.

Fear is shared by inhabitants of other mining municipalities of Bolívar state that see how authorities of the Orinoco Mining Arc have disrupted their lives without compensation in any way.

55 Decree No. 8,413 with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that reserves to the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of gold was published in the Official Gazette No. 39,759 of September 16th, 2011.

56 Ministry of People’s Power for Ecologic Mining Development. (2017). “Gobierno Bolivariano activará Fondo Social Minero para atención integral a la pequeña minería”. March 26th. Available in: <http://www.desarrollominero.gob.ve/gobierno-bolivariano-activara-fondo-social-minero-para-atencion-integral-a-la-pequena-mineria/>



2.8.1. Attracted by El Dorado

La emergencia humanitaria compleja que The complex humanitarian emergency suffered by Venezuela at least since 2015; the promotion of the Orinoco Mining Arc as source or richness since 2016; the failure in procurement of basic products; the high prices of food and other essential goods; loss of purchase power of salaries and fall on state companies; all this joined to the high rates of informality and unemployment, led the country to an unprecedented internal migration, to which there was no preparation⁵⁷. Thousands of people from all around the country migrated to mining towns in south Bolívar state, in search of resources for their subsistence.

In the last years, during Covid-19 pandemic, the situation, far from getting calmed, got worse. Despite the national government decreed a ferreous quarantine that prevented mobilization through the country for many months, in mining towns of south Bolívar an even bigger demographic explosion started.

The field work made in January 2022 in mining populations allowed to prove the growth of poor neighborhoods; chaotic raise of new towns, such as the one registered in Km. 27 of Road 10 and the boom of invasions to localities, such as the one lived in the airport of El Dorado.

From the same road going through mining towns can be observed how new communities have appeared in areas in which there were no populated centers before. In the middle of nowhere, men, women and children have lifted improvised refugees, called by them Bungis, using planks or wood sticks, plastic bags, sailcloth and even rocks.

“The situation is too strong, there are many people, men, women and children adventuring to come to these areas and start working in mines without having any previous knowledge, no experience, that is why we see so many accidents happening, just as the cases of people who die covered by soil floods. That happens many times and no one even knows because no one knows the person who died, they are foreign and no one claims for him/her”, says a religious authority in one of southern towns, who prefers not to be identified by fear to retaliation.

This person assures that the same economic crisis impulses migrants to the mines, makes them victims of an enslaving system in which who works more is the one who receives less. “The need makes them do extremely risky things, and, in the end, the few they get have to share it between the system’s bandit, the processing mill and the national guard who stops them and tell them that they do not have permission to operate. They say they are illegal, but they are the ones who end up getting the material out and give them to the strategic alliances with the government”.



57 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). “El estado bolívar de vuelta al primitivismo”. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-estado-bolivar-de-vuelta-al-primitivismo/>



ORINOCO MINING ARC: CONCENTRATION OF ILLICITS

Some numbers about the demographic impact that the Mining Arc has had in the region have been given by major Coromoto Lugo. According to census 2011, the last made in Venezuela, in El Callao there were 25.000 habitants, but according to calculations by the majority, population in this town reaches 80.000 habitants.

In El Callao there is no miner census because they are considered floating population, even though the municipality registers almost new 21 land invasions in the last four years. "Here comes a lot of people from the center of the country with their corresponding demand of a place to live, electricity, water, health, which the majority cannot attend. The social impact is suffered by all. What there is here is a great social injustice", says Lugo.





The Nacupay sector is the most invaded of El Callao, with five invasions in the last years. To have an idea of the demographic growth size, the Nacupay voting center has 310 electors and nowadays it raises up to 7.000 electors approximately.

For Lugo, the government did not calculate the social impact of national plan as important as the Orinoco Mining Arc, and what it would bring to the municipalities. El Callao major agrees with the mining opening, but with the due planning and coordination. For example, to deliver a determined number of hectares, but at the same time to give population better quality, living improvements, health, strengthening the land ways, urban trash collection and transport. None of that has been brought to the Mining Arc, but all the contrary.

2.8.2. Gasoline in the south, a new illicit

During pandemic, illicit businesses such as gas smuggling also flourished and diversified in mining towns.

While in Puerto Ordaz, one of the most important cities in Bolívar state, the habitants have to wake up really early and spend several hours in lines on the gas stations to be able to purchase a limited quantity of gas only once a week, in mining towns of south Bolivar gas is offered without restrictions in informal kiosks, in plain sight and many times with a high overvalue.

“Contrary to the rest of the country, in which the gasoline has slightly normalized, in Puerto Ordáz the situation is critical. To the gas stations here they do not send many loaded trucks, but you can see how it is sent straight to the south”, says a transporter from the entity. His testimony was reiterated by other sources consulted who assure that security corp effectives from the State participate actively in gas smuggling up to the mining areas and Brazil through trails.

Unlike 2019, when to travel south there was need to purchase gas “bachaqueada” (black market) and travel with enough gas in drums to go and get back, in February 2022 it was evidenced the sale of gas along the way, but “illegal”.

As well as in 2019, in Transparencia Venezuela we proved the sale of five liter drums and barrels of gas from the way out from Maracaibo at a price that raised by kilometer till the maximum price in Paraguachón (the Guajira frontier with Colombia), the same occurs in Road 10 of Bolívar. While some neighbors sale guayanés cheese, others sale gasoline.

From the way-out Ciudad Guayana it is possible to see people coming out of their houses to offer gasoline. They put five-liter drums full of gas and shake an improvised funnel attached to a long stick. At few kilometers from San Félix the price is already USD \$1 per liter, it means double the official price in gas stations. As it advances to south, the value rises to USD \$1.2, USD \$1.3 and keeps rising.

Besides Venezuelan gas deviated from gas stations, in south Bolívar mining towns it is also possible to find gas from Guyana, entered illegally to the country. This gas has an intense red color similar to a tutti-frutti flavored soda, packed manually in soda bottles of diverse sizes. The product can be found in Sifontes mainly and it is not casual, because it is located in the borderline with the Essequibo territory. The municipality citizens suppose it is entered through the frontier community of San Martín de Turumbán.

The liter is commercialized in 0,6 thousandths of gold, the equivalent of USD 2.7, an amount that varies depending on the gold price. Sources consulted agree that Guyanese fuel has better performance than gas commercialized in the rest of the country, and that is why it has better demand.



Illegal commerce of gas is a regular situation, both in the extensive Road 10 and in the localities of south Bolívar, in which formal gas stations practically do not operate. During the journey made in the area, these establishments were closed.

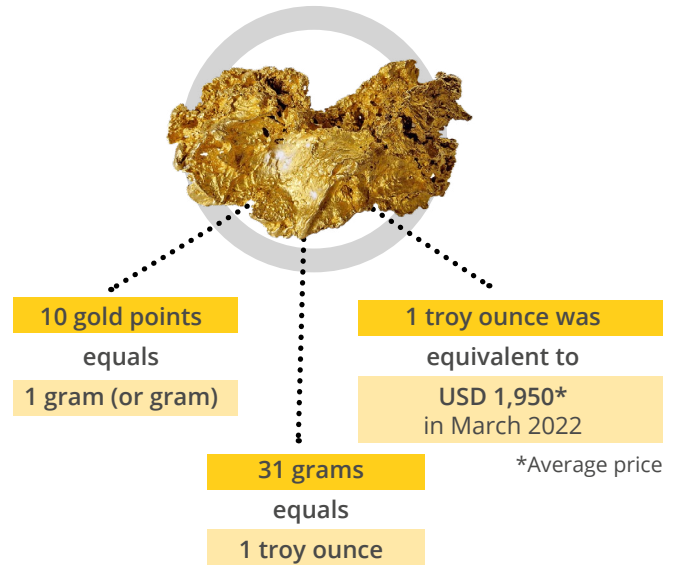
Irregular distribution of gas has also been advantaged by criminal organizations operating in mining zones. This control could be observed in Km. 88, where the Juancho labor union controls the area. They distribute gas directly in an operation point of the criminal group known as La Gallera. The delivery is known by the locals who, even suggest this place to go purchase gas.

The numbers related with this illicit economy can be seen in chapter 1 of this report.

2.8.3. Gold or cash in bolivars. Dollar is worth less in the south

The price schemes in thousandths, points and grams of gold, a kind of new currency system based on the precious metal invented by the local miners, strengthened and expanded in the last two years. From Sifontes municipality, products in shops, restaurants and all kinds of formal commerce establishments charge almost exclusively in this modality. This way, an hour of WIFI connection costs 0.02 grams of gold; a lunch, 0.06 grams; a mattress, 2 grams, and four beers, a point of gold which is equivalent to 0.1 grams of the metal.

In the supermarkets there is a cash box enabled to receive only payments in gold. They count on a scale to weigh the metal, tools to make the cut and even a blowtorch to heat gold and verify it is real.



Beyond this “Golden” economy, it is usual to do transactions in cash bolivars, an operation that -even- in Bolívar cities is unusual due to the scarcity of paper money. The packs of bills are visible, those are offered in the corners, shown by street vendors and it is worth more than in the rest of the country. “To the south bills arrive first than in the bank”, says a miner.

Distortions created by the mining dynamic complicate the lives of employees such as teacher or public officials, who receive their deteriorated salaries through deposits in bank accounts.

All is paid in cash. In Roscio, El Callao and Sifontes, the three municipalities in south Bolívar making part of the Orinoco Mining Arc, it is not usual to use terminal sale points or electronic transferences because the bank infrastructure is weak or inexistent and the telecommunications signal does not work or has many failures, such as in Km. 88, Las Claritas and El Dorado.



“Contrary to what happens in the rest of the country, here there are zones in which dollars are not even accepted and if they take it, they pay it much lower than the daily rate and that is not convenient. Few months ago, near Km. 88 I needed to pay for WIFI connection and they only accepted gold points”, said one of the sources consulted.

2.8.4. Signs of environmental impact

Only by advancing Road 10 to reach the different mining towns in south Bolívar state, the environmental devastation can be proved in the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc and that has been documented in detail by organizations such as SOS Orinoco⁵⁸.

As described, at few meters from the roadside it is possible to observe the growing installation of treatment plants of gold sands and the appearance of mills to process gold manually. Deforestation can also be seen, due to clearing of trees and soil movements giving place to mud puddles and clay terrains that threat to extend with their load of mercury and cyanide.

In several sections of the route, which lengthens from El Callao because of the bad state of the way, it is possible to suffocate by the dust lifted when trucks pass, loaded with auriferous material from mines at open sky and mills to cyanidation plants.

Immediately calls the attention the state of rivers Yuruari and Cuyuní, which border two of the main mining populations and show a thick brown color product of sedimentation by flood mining and lixiviation plants residuals.

Few meters from the bridge over Yuruari, connecting Road 10 with El Callao, a group of youngsters with bare chest use rustic tripods armed with sticks as an elevation on the river. There they submerge themselves with the aim to find gold and even diamonds scratching the river bottom sands. From the legendary Eiffel bridge and up to El Dorado, can be seen the presence of mining rafts operating in Cuyuní river, extracting all gold from the bottom of its opaque waters.

El Callao major, Coromoto Lugo, stands out as one of the greatest consequences of the Mining Arc, precisely the high pollution of Yuruarí river, and alerts that the local water treatment plant does not have the technology to palliate water scarcity.

“We don’t have drinkable water since four years ago. The last information we handle is that due to the high pollution of Yuruarí water cannot be pumped from the river to the dam. We are forced to pump water from a dam built by Crystallex years ago, an expropriated mine. That water is healthier than the one from the river. We already lost the river”, sentences.

Pollution by mercury has not been measured recently in all mining areas of Bolívar, but studies made before and during the current gold fever report high levels of the heavy metal in the water, air, soil and bodies of all inhabitants, just as shows the report presented by organizations Clima 21 y Todos por el Futuro⁵⁹, in occasion of the third universal periodic review of Venezuela.

The text cites studies that have shown the average level of mercury in the air near gold extraction operations in Venezuela, which was nearly 183 times higher than the limit recommended by the World Health Organization for human exposure; also the level of intoxication by mercury on El Callao mining population was one of the worse in the world; and it was

58 SOS Orinoco (2021). “Deforestación y cambios en la cobertura vegetal y de usos de la tierra dentro del denominado Arco Minero del Orinoco entre 2000-2020”. Available in: <https://sosorinoco.org/es/informes/deforestacion-y-cambios-en-la-cobertura-vegetal-y-de-usos-de-la-tierra-dentro-del-denominado-arco-minero-del-orinoco-entre-2000-2020/>

59 Clima 21 and Todos por el Futuro. (2021). “Situación de violación a los derechos humanos como consecuencia de la contaminación por mercurio utilizado en la explotación de oro en la región sur de Venezuela”. Available in: <https://clima21.net/informes/situacion-de-violacion-a-los-derechos-humanos-como-consecuencia-de-la-contaminacion-por-mercurio-utilizado-en-la-explotacion-de-oro-en-la-region-sur-de-venezuela/>



detected signs of chronic intoxication and neurologic damages in a great majority of mine workers related with the process of gold amalgamation.

Other works reported point high concentrations of mercury in indigenous and peasant communities' populations, in fish used for human consumption and in diverse environmental elements. Besides, it stands out that pollution by mercury seem to be affecting greatly vulnerable groups such as boys, girls and adolescents, indigenous and women.

Chaos and improvisation

The inexistent surveillance of the norm in mining is one of the causes for environmental devastation. A geologist consulted in Puerto Ordaz for the present investigation, who has participated in exploration studies in the Orinoco Mining Arc, calculates that 95% of mining projects, including excavations in flood or vein mines, processing in mills and cyanidation plants, have not accomplished with previous corresponding studies.

"In mining, if you don't have a good plan, you go directly to fail. You end up doing survival mining and destroying the environment and the future of your sons and grandsons", affirms.

According to the expert, all mining project must follow following steps:

Bibliographic gathering:

Revision of sources, maps and satellite images. Only when the chief geologist identifies a potential area, then the prospection proceeds.

Prospection:

A process through which geochemical samples are taken to analyze in the lab. "The miner makes holes, while the geologist does explorations", to procure the minimum environmental alteration possible. Holes of around 80 centimeters are made, the sample is taken, kept in identified and coded bags to then be analyzed under protocol Quality Size Control (QQC). The sample is stirred, divided in 4 pieces with a crazing, two parts are discarded and put back in place and photos are taken, both the sample and the field.

Exploration:

Field inspection to locate areas where there is presence of the mineral economically profitable. Includes perforations on soil following the protocol and Venezuelan norms, as well as satellite tracking of mineralized areas and collection of samples from geologists to know which minerals form it.

Project feasibility analysis:

While the geologist sends drilling, the cost engineer is taking accounts to evaluate the project feasibility.



Project design:

In this stage it is decided if a plant is going to be installed and which must be depending on the type of gold to exploit. It also includes geometalurgy studies about the shape gold is presenting (cochano, lollipop, vein, etc). This analysis is carried out by the laboratory of the School of Metallurgical Engineering at the Central University of Venezuela.

Build up:

Feasibility studies measure the size of the reserve and the estimated time it will take to its profit. It determines if it is going to be invested in a big or a small plant. "The mining business is an expensive and risky project. You have to count on a good capital for sure. A serious geologic study, including the initial phases of prospection and exploration can take from three to five years. From the fifth year and not before is when the investment starts to revert. For example, the exploration phase of company Barrick Pueblo Viejo⁶⁰ of group Barrick Gold Corporation in Santo Domingo mine took eight years investing at loss", affirms.

The previous stages contain the description of what it should be, precisely what is not accomplished in the Orinoco Mining Arc.

On the mega mining project in south occupying approximately 12% of the national territory, prospection and exploration studies that mandatorily should be considered for any mining project are unknown.

"What is happening is that more and more holes are opened without previous studies, creating mines at open sky with uncertain profit. I dare to say that 95% of projects in the Mining Arc respond to a chaos and disorder pattern. In any ravine (vertical mines) you can see a disaster", says the geologist.

This situation aggravates by the fact that the gold-bearing sand deposits accumulated in recent decades would be running out. The need to produce new materials to be processed in cyanidation plants promotes uncontrolled excavations, soil movements and water pollution with the use of mercury, and river sedimentation. Without previous geologic studies, it is about an unsustainable operation with which there is no guarantee of finding gold on those areas.

There is no information of public politics of environmental protection, investment plans in exploration projects, and if they existed, those are not public either.

The Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development has announced there are around 50 environmental impact studies, which is questioned by experts such as the geologist interviewed for this investigation. "If those existed, could be forged", he assures. There is not controller labor known over these processes.

In 2018, the Strategic Office for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies of the Office of the Vice Ministry of Exploration and Eco-Mining Investment, ascribed to the Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development announced that 1.048 brigadiers and environmental

60 Barrick Gold. "República Dominicana". Available in: <https://www.barrick.com/Spanish/presencia/republica-dominicana/default.aspx>



guardians⁶¹ were added. The alliances with small mining count on at least two environmental guardians for detection of illegal mining activities and promoting impact mitigation and environmental recovery measures. The follow-up of this measure is also unknown.

Besides the steps for professional development of economically sustainable mining, environmental organizations also demand the accomplishment of protection regulations for sensitive ecosystems and recovery policies. It is unknown if authorities have considered those programs, but images seen by all during years give faith of the destruction of great extensions of land qualified as national parks due to their rich biodiversity, its weak ecologic balance and the importance of its conservation.

Lack of public information does not allow to know recent data about microbiologic quality and levels of pollution found in pastures and fluvial fishing, nor about poisoning on miners and neighbors due to inhalation.

Academic institutions are interested on doing such studies but confess not to count on the equipment and capacity to test mercury levels on waters. Expensive equipments are required and those are not available in the area.

61 AVN. (2019). "2018: Año de grandes logros en el Arco Minero del Orinoco", January 05th. Available in: <http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/2018-a%C3%B1o-grandes-logros-arco-minero-orinoco>

CHAPTER 3



CRIMINAL GROUPS BEHIND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA



Both in the most populated cities of Venezuela and in the most inhospitable localities there is presence of criminal organizations, which use mainly violence to attract funds through control of illicit economies, such as drugs, gasoline, gold and even scrap traffic. The nature of these groups varies depending on the area of the country where they are located and the origin of its members.

A paradigmatic case is the one registered in Bolívar State, where in mining towns a delinquency structure was established, dedicated to control illegal exploitation of gold business. They charge vacunas (extortion) to whom decide to work in the activity; they authorize who can enter or exit each mine; they order how much and how the work is done; define what can be said and what not. All of that is imposed by the power of fire and despite the presence of State security corps.

In this report it is described how mining unions, now known as systems, were formed, those who control gold reservoirs in Bolívar. Besides, data sheets are presented with information about other criminal groups considered as the most powerful of Venezuela, their leaders, crimes, fire power, structure, alliances with other delinquent bands, as well as participation of women in it.



3.1 TREN DE GUAYANA

3.2 BANDA DEL TOTÓ Y ZACARÍAS

3.3 ORGANIZACIÓN R

3.4 BANDA DEL "NEGRO FABIO"

3.5 BANDA DE "JUANCHO"

3.6 TREN DE ARAGUA Y ALIADOS

3.7 CARTEL DE PARAGUANÁ

3.8 MEGABANDAS DE EL KOKI Y RICHARDI

3.9 CUADRILLA DE PAZ, RED ELCO Y FUERZAS ESPECIALES CÍVICO MILITARES PATRIA NUEVA

3.10 GRUPO ARMADO YEICO MASACRE

3.11 SINDICATO DE BARRANCAS

3.12 EJÉRCITO DE LIBERACIÓN NACIONAL



3.1 TREN DE GUAYANA (THE TRAIN OF GUAYANA)

LEADERS

Ronny Yackson
Colomé Cruz,
alias "Ronny Matón"

Santos José
Ordinola Martínez,
alias "Cabezón".

OPERATING AREAS



500
NUMBER
OF MEMBERS

Caroní, Roscio
and El Callao
municipalities



History

The Train of Guayana started operating in year 2010 in Ciudad Guayana, Bolívar, and while it kept growing and gaining key supports, it spread to mining towns of the state. Since it was created it has had at least three leaders, the most exposed has been his creator, Yorman Pedro Márquez Rodríguez, also known as "Gordo Bayón", who led the organization together with his right hand Phanor Vladimir Sanclemente Ojeda, alias "Capitán".

El Gordo Bayón was inscribed as active worker on the State company Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor) In May 07th, 2012, even when he had an arrest order for having participated in the homicide of three people. Few days later he turned himself before the Public Ministry through General Julio César Fuentes Manzulli¹.

Five months later he was released and travelled to Caracas as part of the Sidor's outsourced commission, who were attended

by the then vice-president of the Republic, Elías Jaua. In 2013, he was detained again due to illicit carry of weapon and released with preventive measure. In 2014 he travelled to Caracas to participate in discussion of Sidor's collective agreement and he was murdered coming out of the Miraflores Palace².

After Gordo Bayón's death, the Train of Guayana passed to be led by Sanclemente Ojeda, till 2018, when he was murdered by a commission of the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dgcm) in an alleged confrontation³.

Since "Capitán" death, the leadership of the organization was left in hands of current leader, Ronny Yackson Colomé Cruz, alias "Ronny Matón", while the second in power is Santos José Ordinola Martínez, alias "Cabezón", who represents the urban wing of the Train of Guayana and identifies himself as member of Simón Bolívar collective.

- 1 Runrunes. (2014). "El «Gordo Bayón» era un consentido de los gobiernos regional y nacional". June 05th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/runrunes-de-bocaranda/127172/el-gordo-bayon-era-un-consentido-de-los-gobiernos-regional-y-nacional/>
- 2 La Razón. (2014). "El 'Gordo Bayón' es asesinado al salir de una reunión de Sidor en Miraflores". June 03rd. Available in: <https://larazon.net/2014/06/el-gordo-bayon-es-asesinado-al-salir-de-una-reunion-de-sidor-en-miraflores/>
- 3 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). "El salvavidas económico en manos de bandas criminales". Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-salvavidas-economico-en-manos-de-bandas-criminales/>



In two reports made by the Sebin ex-commissary José Gregorio Lezama Gómez and the first lieutenant of National Army, Jesús Leonardo Curvelo, it is denounced the alleged support of Bolívar governorship officials to the Train of Guayana.

The first lieutenant Curvelo pointed that assistance from Julio César Fuentes Manzulli, Citizens Security secretary of Bolívar State in the management of Francisco Rangel Gómez was the key to allow the band to get control of important mines in a matter of months, just as Las Vainitas, in Guasipati and eight more in El Callao.

More recently, the criminal organization has been linked to the current commander of 51 Jungle Infantry Brigade of the Venezuelan Army, brigadier general Jorge de la Cruz Rivas Acosta.

In August 2021, it was published a video in which one of the sergeants of 51 Brigade denounces the alleged complicity between the Army and the Train of Guayana⁴.

Likewise, in April 2022, it was spread a video attributed to the band El Perú in El Callao where criminals assure the Train of Guayana operates with the support of commander Rivas Acosta and State other security corps to which they allegedly pay 5 kilos of gold every month.

The band was also linked to Freddy Bernal, current governor of Táchira State and with which General Jesús Rafael Suárez Chourio, former commander of the Army and actors close to Diosdado Cabello. The alleged relation transcended after these travelled to south Bolívar in May 2019 and gave support to collective Simón Bolívar that takes part of the Train of Guayana.

More recently, the criminal organization has been linked to the current commander of 51 Army Jungle Infantry Brigade of Venezuela, Brigade general, Jorge de la Cruz Rivas Acosta.

Crimes



Illegal mining



Drug traffic



Homicides



Extortion

Besides gold traffic, this group has been accused of committing other crimes, such as homicides, drugs micro-traffic and extortion to merchants, according to testimonies compiled. They have access to large weapons, mostly fixed stock Fal⁵, AK 47, AR-15, machine guns, grenades, guns with accessories such

as super clips and revolvers, according to the photos and videos observed, published by the members of the Train of Guayana.

A source specialized in citizen security source in Bolívar assured that this band counts on a force of around 500 men. About recruitment, it was known that presence of an ex-military

4 Twitter. @Tamara_suju. Cuenta de Tamara Suju, presidenta del Instituto Cala. August 03rd, 2021. Available in: https://twitter.com/TAMARA_SUJU/status/1422528132284882964

5 Facebook. Tren Jorda Tren. Train of Guayana member Account. 2019 - 2020. Published in: <https://www.facebook.com/El.menor.de.la.RUMBA/videos/676054176588743>



known as “el Cóndor”, who would be in charge of recruiting adolescents and others to train them in the use of firearms⁶.

Women in Guasipaty town assured that in the last years the Train of Guayana just knock the door and take adolescents, husbands and force them to enroll the organization to face their enemies.

Status

After 2017, the Train of Guayana weakened, several of their leaders were arrested and began to be more attacked by other criminal bands seeking for control of mining territories.

These attacks became more visible since 2020, with strengthening of the R Organization, a group led by the pran Eduardo Natera, alias “Pelón Natera”, who allegedly ordered the murder of El Gordo Bayón and has kept a war active with the Train of Guayana since more than a decade, first in Ciudad Guayana and then in the mining areas.

Both bands have been involved in several confrontations, which have allowed the R Organization to obtain mines that were in control of the Train of Guayana⁷. In the last months, the Ronny Matón’s band seems to be benefitted of some treat or maybe agreements with political and military actors. But these pacts and rearrangements are normally very fragile and utilitarian.

In April 2022, it was spread a video in which masked men form a group called Frente Revolucionario de El Perú (in El Callao), declared war to the Train of Guayana and accuse them of operating with support from security forces.

6 Twitter. @GEDV86. Germán Dam account, events journalist, exreporter in Bolívar. September 11th, 2021. Published in: <https://twitter.com/GEDV86/status/1436804741045145608>

7 Correo del Caroní. (2021). “Tras enfrentamiento armado Organización R tomó control de otro yacimiento aurífero en El Callao”. September 13th. Published in: <https://www.correodelcaroni.com/region/tras-enfrentamiento-armado-organizacion-r-tomo-control-de-otro-yacimiento-aurifero-en-el-callao/>



3.2 BANDA DEL TOTÓ Y ZACARÍAS (TOTÓ AND ZACARÍAS BAND)

LEADERS

Alejandro Rafael
Ochoa Sequea,
alias “Totó”

Eleomar José
Vargas, alias
“Zacarías”

OPERATING AREAS



EL CALLAO MUNICIPALITY
(SECTOR EL PERÚ)

History

This criminal organization was born in 2013 and since then it has been consolidating as one of the most combative and bloody of mining areas in Bolívar State. Its fire power has allowed them to maintain control of important auriferous mines in El Callao, specifically in the sector known as El Peru. Its bloody acts make them to be compared with the Cartel of Sinaloa, in Mexico.

Unlike other delinquent groups of the area, El Perú band or El Perú Base, as it is also known, has not counted on important government or military supports, which has made them loose many members, who have died in hands of security corps of the State in alleged confrontations, or arrested for their actions, according to data gathered⁸.

One of the main leaders is Alejandro Rafael Ochoa Sequea, alias “Totó”, who was believed dead in 2016 as consequence of operation of the so-called People’s Liberation (OLP). Nonetheless, the body was never found and El Callao inhabitants declared for this report that El Totó is still alive and has capacity to leave or enter the country easily.

The second in command is Eleomar José Vargas, alias “Zacarías”, a young man from Ciudad Guayana who has been identified by journalists and security bodies of the state in photos and videos, where he exhibits different large weapons.

Both men are in the list of the most wanted criminals of Bolívar. Among the other members of the band there is also an individual called “Frankenstein”, who according to sources interviewed is the author of several dismemberments.

8 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). “El salvavidas económico en manos de bandas criminales”. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-salvavidas-economico-en-manos-de-bandas-criminales/>



There are no solid reports of links between the members of El Perú Band with public officials or State security corps members. However, in November 2019 circulated in El Callao two communications⁹ attributed to El Totó, in which there were strong accusations against the former major of the area, Alberto Hurtado.

On the texts that allegedly wrote the leader said: “We gave you (the major) half kilo of gold for your Congress campaign and you won. You came back and I gave you 650 grams to reach the majority and you won. You sold us and did nothing for us”.

Months before, Hurtado was also linked to the criminal band, but he denied that it was true.

Crimes



Homicides



Personal Injuries



Illegal mining



Extortion

The State security corps have attributed different crimes to El Totó and Zacarías band, among which are homicides on shootings and mutilations, gold smuggling and extortions.

Among the most employed weapons by this group stand out grenades. Besides, they have been seized with AK-103, M-16 and R-15 rifles, with its respective munitions¹⁰, a rocket launcher AT4¹¹, drugs and even a notebook used to register all extortions¹².

Status

El Totó and Zacarías band has a history of confrontations with State security corps, specifically with members of the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (Dgcm), who have tried to reduce their power.

Nonetheless, this has resisted and keeps evidencing its power with cruel scenes such as public dismemberments.

In January 2019, the band would have been responsible of taking off eyes, cutting off tongue and hands of a soldier named Leocer José Lugo Maíz, 19 years old, who was found outside the mine Yin-Yan in El Callao¹³.

Cicpc also gave them responsibility for an attack performed in July 2019, in a San Félix bus stop, in which seven people turned out dead, as well as the murderer of the ex-councilor of El Callao and leader of Primero Justicia, Rosalba “Mara” Valdez, occurred in December 2019. Furthermore, in May 2020 the group was accused of killing the mining leader and popular worshiper, Carlos Clark, who allegedly would have resisted to pay an

9 Crónica Uno. (2019). “Pran de El Callao dio ultimátum al alcalde para que renuncie”. November 06th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/pran-de-el-callao-dio-ultimatum-al-alcalde-para-que-renuncie/>

10 Siverio, J. Correo del Caroní. (2020). “Vinculan a uno de los cinco fallecidos en enfrentamiento en El Callao a asesinato de exconcejala”. August 31st. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/region/sucesos/vinculan-a-uno-de-los-cinco-fallecidos-en-enfrentamiento-en-el-callao-a-asesinato-de-exconcejala/>

11 Flores, G. El Pitazo. (2020). “GN mata a cinco hombres en El Callao e incauta armas de guerra”. August 23rd. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/guayana/gn-mata-a-cinco-hombres-en-el-callao-e-incautan-armas-de-guerra/>

12 Ostos, P. El Nacional. (2020). “Dictan privativa de libertad a 19 integrantes de la banda de Toto y Zacarías en Bolívar”. July 01st. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/dictan-privativa-de-libertad-a-19-integrantes-de-la-banda-de-toto-y-zacarias-en-bolivar/>

13 Tal Cual. (2019) “Mutilan a supuesto «desertor» del Ejército en Bolívar porque habría robado en una mina”. January 14th. Disponible en: <https://talcualdigital.com/mutilan-a-supuesto-desertor-del-ejercito-en-bolivar-porque-habria-robado-en-una-mina/>



extortion. Even though this version has been questioned by inhabitants of the area.

In March 2021, the band was accused of kidnapping the former chavista constituent in Tumeremo, Wuihelm Nolberto Torrellas Martínez, and cutting the throat of his escort, Herney Alirio Ruiz Olivares¹⁴.

It is presumed that this organization is behind the video where war is declared to the Train of Guayana band¹⁵.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, PHOTOS OF ALIAS "ZACARÍAS" AND MEMBERS OF EL PERÚ BAND. COURTESY OF JOURNALIST GERMÁN DAM.

- 14 Infobae. (2021). "Horror en Venezuela: un ex constituyente chavista fue secuestrado, degollaron a su escolta y pidieron oro como rescate". March 30th. Disponible en: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/03/30/horror-en-venezuela-un-ex-constituyente-chavista-fue-secuestrado-degollaron-a-su-escolta-y-pidieron-oro-como-rescate/>
- 15 Twitter. @GustavoAzocarA. Gustavo Azocar account, political consultant. April 11th, 2022. Available in: <https://twitter.com/GustavoAzocarA/status/1513510806650068998?s=20&t=gkSc0YG-BHq4H-cwSIWoqA>



3.3 ORGANIZACIÓN R (R ORGANIZATION)



History

The R Organization (OR) beginnings date from 2008, when his leader started selling drugs, kidnapping and robbing vehicles, banks and stores in Ciudad Guayana, but after the gold fever released, the band decided to migrate to mining municipalities.

In Sifontes municipality, specifically in Tumeremo, there started to be reports of activity of this band, around 2018, that is why it is considered one of the youngest criminal organizations in the zone. Two years later, it extended its presence to El Callao municipality.

Its creator and leader is Eduardo José Natera Balboa, alias "Run" or "el Pelón", an ex-professional soccer player who belonged to the team Minerven FC of El Callao. In 2008 he was arrested for robbing a fusil to a Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) officer.

In June 2009 he was sentenced to 14 years of prison for aggravated robbery, occultation of a war weapon and preachment of a motor vehicle¹⁶. He should have accomplished his sentence in the Orient Penitentiary Center, also known as El Dorado prison, due to its location in the homonymous town of Bolívar state. But one month later he escaped prison.

His quarter is known as La Casa de Papel, in allusion to the Spanish criminal series from Netflix, according to an Armando Info investigation¹⁷. He figures on the list of the 10 most wanted by the Corps of Scientific and Criminalistics Investigations (Cicpc of Bolívar state).

16 Poder Judicial. (2009). "Decisión de la Corte de Apelaciones del estado Bolívar". October 05th. Available in: <http://lara.tsj.gob.ve/DECISIONES/2009/OCTUBRE/1021-5-FP01-R-2009-000210-FG012009000528.HTML>

17 Ramírez, M y otros. Armando.Info. (2022). "El quién es quién de los cárteles criminales al sur del Orinoco". February 03rd. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-quien-es-quien-de-los-carteles-criminales-al-sur-del-orinoco/>



The R Organization adopted a formula contrary to the Train of Guayana and other bands that have taken gold mines by assault. The group searched for alliances with criminal organizations that were already settled in auriferous zones and presented themselves before the community as an ally to improve their life conditions, even though not because of that they stop extorting and showing their fire power whenever they desire.

With the aim to win confidence and support from the population, the band has opted for exercising State functions and attend basic needs such as food, health, education and recreation. For that, they constituted a supposed philanthropic organization called Foundation of Integral Social Management RRR or 3R, which exhibits its actions in social media¹⁸.

Despite Foundation 3R denied having nexus with the R Organization¹⁹, inhabitants confirm that is it about the same group of people and that activities are financed with the rent left by illicit economies. Originally, the criminal band of “El Run” or “El Pelón” was denominated Organization RRR or 3R, but they decided to change it to mark distance from the foundation²⁰.

Through the activities of Foundation 3R there has been evidence of links between the criminal band and other delinquent groups and relations with members of the Venezuelan government.

The Foundation tags on its Instagram publications the officialism collective Tres Raíces (three roots), whose quarters are located in 23 de Enero parish, Caracas²¹. This collective is a group formed by police officers²². It is also linked to the State security forces.

Besides, on the activities made by Foundation 3R has participated Alexander “Mimou” Vargas²³, deputy to the National Assembly, high presidential commissioner of Movement for Peace and Life.

The R Organization has also been linked to the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM), because according to media reports, the criminal group has helped the state company to recover mines that were in power of the Train of Guayana²⁴.

Alias “Run” has also tried to involve himself in politics. RO supported Daniel Romero’ candidacy to Sifontes majority in elections celebrated on November 21st, 2021, according to sources consulted for this report. Romero ran with the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), close to officialism, and he requested to repeat elections because he was excluded from voting due to a resignation he never signed²⁵.

- 18 Social network accounts of Foundation Integral Social Management 3R linked to R Organization criminal group. Twitter: @3rFgsi <https://twitter.com/3rFgsi> and Instagram: [fundacion3rrr_oficial](https://www.instagram.com/fundacion3rrr_oficial/) https://www.instagram.com/fundacion3rrr_oficial/
- 19 Suniaga, C. El Pitazo. (2021) “Bolívar | Fundación 3R desmiente nexos con grupo delictivo de Tumeremo”. May 06th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/guayana/bolivar-fundacion-3r-desmiente-nexo-con-grupo-delictivo-de-tumeremo/>
- 20 Ramírez, M y otros. Armando.Info. (2022) “El quién es quién de los cárteles criminales al sur del Orinoco”. February 03rd. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-quien-es-quien-de-los-carteles-criminales-al-sur-del-orinoco/>
- 21 Instagram @fundacion3rrr_oficial. Official account of Foundation Social Management 3 Roots. March 12th, 2022. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CbB2NWmta8N?utm_medium=copy_link
- 22 El Estímulo. (2018). “Heyker Vásquez, con doble identidad y licencia para matar”. January 24th. Available in: <https://elestimulo.com/climax/heyker-vasquez-con-doble-identidad-y-licencia-para-matar/>
- 23 Twitter @3rFgsi. Official account of Foundation Social Management 3 Roots linked to R Organization criminal group. <https://twitter.com/3rFgsi/status/1399378560079499269>
- 24 Clisánchez, L. Correo del Caroní. (2021). “Tras enfrentamiento armado Organización R tomó control de otro yacimiento aurífero en El Callao”. September 13th. Available in: <https://www.correodelcaroni.com/region/tras-enfrentamiento-armado-organizacion-r-tomo-control-de-otro-yacimiento-aurifero-en-el-callao/>
- 25 Siverio, J. Crónica Uno. (2021) “CNE declina al TSJ impugnación de elecciones en Sifontes estado Bolívar”. December 06th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/cne-declina-al-tsj-impugnacion-de-elecciones-en-sifontes-estado-bolivar/>



Crimes



Homicides



Illegal mining

Traffic of
weapons

Extortion

To the R Organization are attributed, among other crimes, homicides, gold smuggling, traffic of weapons and extortion or charge of bribery to mine workers and merchants of the area.

Reports from security corps indicate that the RO owns war weapons and they have been seized with at least four assault rifles AK-47, M-16 and Ruger, a M-14 grenade and more than 350 cartridges and magazines²⁶.

Regarding recruitment, alias “el Pelón” has incorporated to the R Organization members of mining bands that operated previously in Tumeremo and allegedly reinforced the group with deserters from the Army, according to data gathered.

Status

In the last years, the R Organization has efforted to offer a more “social” face, helping the communities through its foundation. Nonetheless, there has not been doubts on using their weapons arsenal to conquer spaces and isolate their adversaries.

The death of lieutenant colonel Ernesto Solís León, a commander of the Jungle Infantry Battalion of Tumeremo and his driver on April

06th, 2020, are attributed to a gunman shooting ordered by the RO. The security organisms practiced at least 6 arrests, released a dozen of capture orders against members of the gang and reported the death of six alleged members of the group in confrontations with the public force²⁷.

More recently, in 2021, the band had several clashes, during months, with the Train of Guayana, fighting for control of El Callao mines, which allegedly passed to hands of the CVM. These actions seem to indicate that R Organization would be working in alliance with the state company to get out of the way to their enemy, which responds to other interests.

The war between OR and the Train of Guayana started long time ago when its leader “El Pelón”, attributed to the band the murdering of “El Gordo Bayón”, leader of the Train of Guayana in Caracas, June 2014.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, PHOTOS OF EDUARDO JOSÉ NATERA BALBOA ALIAS “RUN” OR “EL PELÓN” AND TWITTER PUBLICATION OF FOUNDATION 3R IN AN ACTIVITY WITH ALEXANDER “MIMOU” VARGAS.

26 El Nacional. (2021). “GNB incautó material de guerra tras enfrentamiento contra grupo criminal en Tumeremo”. November 22nd. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/sucesos/gnb-incauto-material-de-guerra-tras-enfrentamiento-contra-grupo-criminal-en-tumeremo/>

27 Reporte Confidencial. (2020). “Faes asesina a sexto implicado en asesinato de dos militares en Tumeremo”. May 08th. Available in: <https://www.reporteconfidencial.info/2020/08/05/faes-asesina-a-sexto-implicado-en-asesinato-de-dos-militares-en-tumeremo/amp/>



3.4 BANDA DEL NEGRO FABIO (NEGRO FABIO BAND)

LEADER

FABIO ENRIQUE GONZÁLEZ ISAZA,
ALIAS "NEGRO FABIO"

OPERATING AREAS

SIFONTES MUNICIPALITY
(EL DORADO)

History

Fabio Enrique González Isaza, best known as "Negro Fabio" or just "Fabio", is one of the oldest pranes in the mining areas of Bolívar state, specifically in El Dorado, located in Sifontes municipality.

There is no certainty about the date on which it started operating in the sector, however, the population of El Dorado can give faith of his ascending as criminal leader governing in big mines of the locality, including El Chivato, La Pelota, La Pelotica, and other reservoirs in Cuyuní and Yuruari rivers²⁸.

His *system* is one of the most consolidated in the region, and that has allowed him to move with tranquility, even when he has at least two capture orders against him, one from 2018 and another in 2021²⁹.

It is not possible to locate his face in official reports or communications media, but tracking made for this report allowed to get his social media account, with dozens of owned images, that were confirmed later by people who have met him.



Till 2013 he showed himself enjoying national and international trips, from that date he started to hide his face some more on publications. In his profile picture he is jumped on a backhoe as the ones used in gold exploitation.



28 Transparencia Venezuela. (2019). "El salvavidas económico en manos de bandas criminales". Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/project/el-salvavidas-economico-en-manos-de-bandas-criminales/>

29 Flores, G. El Pitazo. (2021). "Tribunal ordena capturar a pran minero vinculado a directora de Sambil Model". April 24th.. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/tribunal-ordena-capturar-a-pran-minero-vinculado-a-directora-de-sambil-model/>



“Negro Fabio” has managed to consolidate his parallel State in El Dorado thanks to the alleged support from government and security corp officials, who meet him and support him, affirm sources consulted. “The ministers of mines arrive and reunite with Fabio, Run, El Viejo. The governance in the frame of illegality is exercised (...) with tranquility people name members of the government who meet them to play cockfight matches”, adds a source interviewed by the Observatory for Life Defense (Odevida)³⁰.

Beyond testimonies, facts occurred in the last year seem to back up alleged links of band with persons politically exposed.

In April 2021, the general attorney of Venezuela, designated by the questioned National Constituent Assembly, Tarek William Saab, denounced the alleged human trafficking network with end of sexual exploitation in which would be involved “Negro Fabio”. According to the official version, Jenni Lorena Rosales de Sousa, director of Sambil Model Venezuela, Ana Victoria Meneses Olivo, Antonio José Parada Montilla, Héctor David Guanare and Fabio González conspired to capture seven young women in Caracas to take them to El Dorado, the pran’s birthday³¹.

According to the story, the seven women were taken from Caracas to Puerto Ordaz (Bolívar) in an airplane coming out of the military base Generalísimo Francisco de Miranda, located in La Carlota. This airport renders services mainly to military and government officials. Also, one of the implied Antonio Parada, is brother-

in-law of William Hernández Cova, a mayor general of the Army, who has been identified as one of the favorite contractors of the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security (IVSS), during the management of the also military Carlos Rotondaro Cova³².

The criminal process initiated in Bolívar state was taken to Caracas because the accused could “persuade institutions to get rid of the criminal responsibility against him”³³.

As in the case of RO, the band of “Negro Fabio” also created an alleged benefit organization called Sugar Heart Foundation, through which they offer help to communities, repair schools, give food and supply for ambulatories. The Foundation even has come to contract foreign singers to perform in shows³⁴.

Through social media of the Foundation were published photos of Bolívar square re-opening in El Dorado. The act counted on the presence of Alexander “Mimou” Vargas³⁵, deputy to the National Assembly, and high presidential commissioner of Movement for Peace and Life. On the square, with the name of Sugar Heart Foundation, a sculpture was placed, where it is possible to identify the “Negro Fabio”, even though the last names seem to be erased. There can be read: “Solo con Dios en tu corazón se pueden lograr los propósitos. Fabio Enrique, que Dios te bendiga (Only with God in your heart purposed can be reached. Fabio Enrique, God bless you)”³⁶.

30 Observatorio para la Defensa de la Vida (Odevida). (2022). “Lo que traen las arenas del sur del Orinoco”. January 30th. Available in: <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/ambiente/lo-que-traen-las-arenas-del-sur-del-orinoco/>

31 Tribunal Supremo de Justicia de Venezuela. Sala Penal. Sentencia No. 045 del 22 de junio 2021. Available in: <http://historico.tsj.gob.ve/decisiones/scp/junio/312400-45-22621-2021-R21-53.HTML>

32 Deniz, R y Marcano P. Armando.Info. (2020). “Un Mayor del Ejército entre los mayores contratistas”. May 17th. Available in: <https://armando.info/un-mayor-del-ejercito-entre-los-mayores-contratistas/>

33 Supreme Justice Court of Venezuela. Criminal Chamber. Sentence No. 045 of June 22nd, 2021. Available in: <http://historico.tsj.gob.ve/decisiones/scp/junio/312400-45-22621-2021-R21-53.HTML>

34 Instagram @fundacioncorazondeazucar. Account of Foundation Sugar Heart by Negro Fabio in El Dorado. February 25th, 2021. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLu8jh5ABJD/>

35 Instagram @fundacioncorazondeazucar. Account of Foundation Sugar Heart by Negro Fabio in El Dorado. September 12th, 2020. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CFBcttkAfAi/>

36 Instagram @fundacioncorazondeazucar. Account of Foundation Sugar Heart by Negro Fabio in El Dorado. September 12th, 2020. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CFBedJ8guaz/>



CRIMINAL GROUPS BEHIND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA



Crimes



Extortion



Homicide



Kidnapping

Traffic of
weaponsIllegal
miningHuman
trafficking

The band of “Negro Fabio” is attributed with crimes of extortion, homicide, kidnapping, sale of arms, gold smuggling and human traffic for sexual exploitation purposes, among others.

According to reports from State security corps, to the criminal group have seized drugs such as marihuana, and an arsenal of arms, in which there are two assault fusils model M-4, 5.56×45 millimeters, an automatic light fusil model M61-T1, 7.62×51 millimeters, a fusil AK-103, caliber 7.62×39 mm, and a fusil AK-47, cal 7.62×39 mm, apart from guns with its respective cartridges³⁷.

“Fabio has at least a thousand armed men. At the beginning you could see children carrying weapons bigger than them, now they are specialized armed ex-officials such as snipers, who charge between 30 and 40 grams a month”³⁸, adds Ovieda.

Status

Sources consulted for this investigation assure Negro Fabio is a great strategy man, that not only appeals to arms to impose himself, but he

also persuades citizen to fight with each other and do what he wants.

Through the Foundation Sugar Heart he brings “support” to communities and has managed to get respect from population, which defines him as a “reachable man, who listens and helps”.

However, he is one of the pranes that has affected most indigenous communities in South Bolívar state, due to the location of his dominion areas. In March 2018, members of his band beaten, dismembered and disappeared Óscar Eliézer Meya Lambos, 36 years old, indigenous from the Pemón Taurepán community on his father’s side, Manuel Meya, and Arekuna on his mother’s side, Julia Lambos. The man would have been accused of supporting military during operations against the system. He was brother of Omar Meya, captain of San Luis del Morichal community³⁹.

Indigenous interviewed for this report assure that in 2022, “Negro Fabio”, together with the labor or system of “Juancho”, have been taking their territories.

37 Ostos, P. El Universal. (2017). “Acabaron con la banda del «Negro Fabio» en el estado Bolívar: 8 muertos”. July 30th. Available in: <https://noticiasaldiayalahora.co/sucesos/acabaron-con-la-banda-del-negro-fabio-en-el-estado-bolivar-8-muertos/>

38 Observatorio para la Defensa de la Vida (Odevida). (2022). “Lo que traen las arenas del sur del Orinoco”. January 30th. Available in: <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/ambiente/lo-que-traen-las-arenas-del-sur-del-orinoco/>

39 Vitti, M. La Vida de Nos. (2019). “Me están llevado para matarme”. November 14th. Available in: <https://www.lavidadenos.com/fosasdelsilencio/me-estan-llevando-para-matarme/>



3.5 BANDA DE "JUANCHO" (EL JUANCHO BAND)



History

The Juancho band is the oldest of criminal organizations known in south Bolívar state. It governs in Sifontes municipality, specifically in Las Claritas and Km 88, up to the entrance of Gran Sabana municipality.

Under their dominion are largest gold reservoirs of Venezuela, located between the fourth most important of the world, the mines Las Brisas-Las Cristinas⁴⁰, where the government previewed to install the mixed company Siembra Minera, in alliance with the same directives of Canadian company Gold Reserve, given that it already had a concession there.

Its main leader is Juan Gabriel Rivas Núñez, alias "Juancho", a Colombian origin individual who nationalized as Venezuelan that counts on at least two identity documents. His other name is Wilson Starling Aponte Rodríguez and allegedly got it thanks to links with government officials.

In June 2012 he was arrested with their collaborators by a commission of the Unified Anti-kidnapping Command of Bolívar state and they were seized, besides a great number of weapons, credentials of Bolívar state police department. They were put to orders of the prosecutor but were released the next day and then they handed over all materials seized, according to reports of de José Gregorio Lezama López the sheriff that directed the procedure⁴¹.

Juancho operates with other pranes identified as Humberto Martes, alias "el Viejo Humberto" and his son, who has the same name and receives the alias of "Humbertico". Besides, there is also Darwin Guevara, known as "El Viejo", who is linked to Johan Petrica, one of the leaders of the so-called Train of Aragua, ranked as the most powerful criminal band of Venezuela, with international reach⁴².

40 EFE. (2018). "Venezuela tiene la cuarta mina de oro más grande del mundo, según el Gobierno". March 20th. Available in: <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/economia/venezuela-tiene-la-cuarta-mina-de-oro-mas-grande-del-mundo-segun-el-gobierno/20000011-3558922>

41 López, E. Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project y Efecto Cocuyo. (s/f). "Una mafia disfrazada de sindicato está al mando del yacimiento de oro más grande de Venezuela". Available in: <http://arcominerodelorinoco.com/capitulo-01/>

42 Ramírez, M y otros. Armando.Info. (2022). "El quién es quién de los cárteles criminales al sur del Orinoco". February 03rd. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-quien-es-quien-de-los-carteles-criminales-al-sur-del-orinoco/>



The alleged alliance between the “Juancho” band and the government of Bolivar state in Francisco Rangel Gómez management was widely denounced on the report delivered by the first Army lieutenant Jesús Leonardo Curvelo before the National Assembly of Venezuela⁴³.

Curvelo was arrested on **October 24th, 2015, when he was going through Road 10 with 33.034.920 bolivars in cash, packed in 31 cardboard boxes. On the report elaborated later he assured that the money seized was a package from Fuentes Manzulli and “it would be employed to purchase gold by Juan Gabriel Rivas Núñez, Juancho”.**

Curvelo also states that Fuentes Manzulli managed to eliminate police records belonging to “Juancho”, registered on the Integrated System of Police Information (Siipol) due to homicides committed in Aragua state

and also managed to get him the new identity.

After Rangel Gomez exit from governorship and instauration of a new executive cabinet, the relation of Juancho with power did not seem to be affected.

Sources consulted for this report and by other civil society organizations affirm that “Juancho is capable of reuniting central regional government officials and with security corps effectives with complete normality.

The same pranes boast their relations with high ranks officials, civil and military, which allows them to operate with absolute discretion, without authorities interfering in their actions⁴⁴.

Crimes



Homicide



Illegal mining



Extortion



Traffic of weapons



Drug traffic



Gasoline smuggling

“Juancho” and his allied pranes are accused of homicide, gold smuggling, extortion, illegal traffic of weapons, drugs, gas, among others. They have an operations base in a sector called El Mecate, in which they charge bribery to all who want to transit that area in their way to mines, in exchange of an alleged protection.

Among the reports of security bodies, it is referred the seizing of Pietro Beretta .92 guns Glock 18 pistols with shooting selector,

5 shot pump reload shotguns, 12 millimeters shotguns and mini shotguns, among others.

Status

In Las Claritas, Km 88 and surroundings of Gran Sabana municipality, it is public and notorious that the government is exercised by “Juancho” and his allied pranes. They operate without security corps opposing resistance and part of the population turn to them in

43 La Causa R. (2016). “Informe del comisario Jesús Curvelo revela nexos de la Gobernación con pranes mineros al sur del estado Bolívar”. Available in: <https://es.slideshare.net/LaCausaRve/informe-de-comisario-curvelo-del-sebin-revela-nexos-de-la-gobernacin-con-pranes-mineros-al-sur-del-estado-bolvar>

44 López, E. Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project y Efecto Cocuyo. (s/f). “Una mafia disfrazada de sindicato está al mando del yacimiento de oro más grande de Venezuela”. Available in: <http://arcominerodelorinoco.com/capitulo-01/>



CRIMINAL GROUPS BEHIND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA

search of help to pay for expenses and even solving family conflicts.

Few years ago, OCCPR reporters visited the Viejo Humberto house and found that many people go there to ask for help. "In fact, the place is known as Humberto's consulting office", highlights the text⁴⁵.

More recently, the band has been accused of propitiating conflicts with indigenous communities with the intention to displace them from their lands. At beginnings of 2022, members of the criminal organization hurt three members of the Joboshirima community,

formed by the Arawaco town, but with presence of Pemón and Caribe indigenous⁴⁶. The case and its testimonials are detailed in chapter two of this report.

Among the criminal groups controlling gold mines in Bolivar state, have also been identified the labor unions or systems of alias "el Ciego" and alias "el Sapito", who are dominating gold reservoirs of La Paragua, located in Angostura municipality⁴⁷.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, PHOTOS OF "JUANCHO" AND PHOTO OF GENERAL JULIO CÉSAR FUENTES MANZULLI WITH "JUANCHO" AND, PHOTO OF "EL VIEJO HUMBERTO" WITH TWO ESCORTS. TAKEN FROM THE REPORT MADE BY LIEUTENANT CURVELO AND FROM THE REPORT PUBLISHED BY OCCPR AND EFECTO COCUYO.

45 Ídem.

46 Ramírez, M. Correo del Caroní. (2022). "Grupo armado arremete contra comunidades indígenas tras intento de ocupación de galpón en Km 86". January 14th. Available in: <https://correodelcaroni.com/region/grupo-armado-arremete-contra-comunidades-indigenas-tras-intento-de-ocupacion-de-galpon-en-km-86/>

47 Ramírez, M y otros. Armando.Info. (2022). "El quién es quién de los cárteles criminales al sur del Orinoco". January 03rd. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-quien-es-quien-de-los-carteles-criminales-al-sur-del-orinoco/>



3.6 TREN DE ARAGUA Y ALIADOS (THE TRAIN OF ARAGUA AND ALLIED)

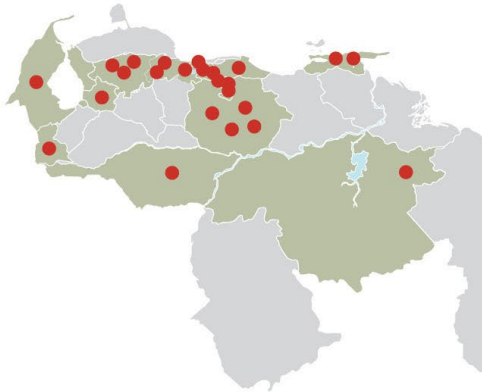
LEADERS

TREN DE ARAGUA:
HÉCTOR RUTHERFORD
GUERRERO FLORES,
ALIAS "NIÑO GUERRERO"

**MEGABAND OF
"SANTANITA":**
JOSUÉ ÁNGEL
SANTANA PEÑA,
ALIAS "SANTANITA"

**PRANATO OF
"EL LORO":** ÁLVARO
MONTILLA, ALIAS
"EL LORO"

LOCATION



Aragua: Girardot, Santos Michelena, José Rafael Revenga, José Félix Ribas, Francisco Linares Alcántara, Bolívar, Santiago Mariño, Sucre and Zamora municipalities
Lara: Iribarren, Palavecino and Jiménez.
Yaracuy: San Felipe and Veroes.
Bolívar: Sifontes.
Sucre: Arismendi and Valdez.
Miranda: Guaicaipuro.
Táchira: Cárdenas.
Guárico: José Tadeo Monagas, San José de Guaribe, Chaguaramas, Julián Mellado
Carabobo: Mariara.
Also in states Trujillo; Apure y Zulia

NUMBER OF MEMBERS



COUNTRIES

Colombia,
Perú, Brazil, Chile,
Ecuador, Bolivia
and Costa Rica

History

The Train of Aragua is the largest and most powerful criminal organization of Venezuela. Represents the first delinquent group of Venezuelan origin that has managed to expand their activities to other countries in Latin America. It is identified with the qualification of "mega-band" because it is integrated by an army of more than 4,000 men, disposes of war weapons and has a

defined hierarchic structure, clear and solid, according to an investigation published in 2021⁴⁸.

The band was born with the name of Train of Aragua between 2013 and 2015, but operated since a little before. It has its origin in labor unions of workers who labor in construction of a railway project that would connect the center-occidental part of the country, which was never finished.

48 Rísquez, R y Erazo, L. Runrunes. (2021). "El Tren de Aragua tiene parada en Ecuador". October 20th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/457721/el-tren-de-aragua-tiene-parada-en-ecuador/>



By then, Héctor Rutherford Guerrero Flores, alias “Niño Guerrero”, was already the pran of Aragua Penitentiary Center, better known as Tocarón jail. Even though the criminal organization raised up outside the jail, the prison rapidly turned into their operations base.

Its creators were Johan José Romero, alias “Johan Petrica”, who now operates from the mines of Bolívar state and José Gabriel Álvarez Rojas, alias “el Chino Pradera”, who died in a confrontation with the police in 2016.

Carolina Girón, director of the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons, explained that the multiple plans to humanize penitentiaries, created by Tareck El Aissami, minister of Internal Affairs (2008-2012) and then Aragua governor (2012-2017), only served as excuse to give control of jails to inmates, under the pretext of avoiding violence.

For 2010, it was considered that he already had taken the ‘pranato’ in Tocarón. There are photos showing that it was the year when construction of some areas of the jail were made⁴⁹ and with it started forming what now is called the Train of Aragua.

According to reports compiled, in 2015 the Train of Aragua stole 70 vehicles per week, of which, at least 20 were motorbikes, and payments or searches of those were done inside the prison.

That same year, Tocarón was described by relatives of the prisoners as a paradise, a place where children could enjoy of a pool and animals, adults could go to Tokyo Disco,

and besides, food could be purchased and even enjoy sports events⁵⁰.

With time, the Train of Aragua started expanding to other municipalities, until having presence in 13 states of Venezuela. This process, started in 2016, was possible thanks to the support of several criminal bands. Short after initiated the expansion to other countries of the region. Currently, they are at least in seven nations⁵¹.

The band has a great quantity of satellite groups inside and outside the country, which makes difficult to calculate the number of members of the organization. Nonetheless, the Brazilian government assured that only in that country there are 740 men⁵². According to some media reports, since 2021, the Train of Aragua has a war with members of ELN⁵³ in Venezuela for control of the Colombian frontier.

Structure and leaders

The structure of this criminal organization is similar to the ones in other Venezuelan prisons ruled by criminals. There is a pran or a head, who is the boss, and several pranos or lieutenants, who are a type of minister for the pran, “luceros de la alta” or high star, which are closer to the pran, and “luceros de la baja” or low star, who are closer to the jail prisoners; there is also a new category that is “escudero” or squire, whose function is to protect the pran and at the end there are the “gariteros” or watchmen, who surveil.

49 Facebook. Tocarón Penitentiary Account. It is identified as a Aragua Penitentiary Center inmate. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=penal.tocoron&set=a.104999859559242>

50 Runrunes. (2015). “En Tocarón, el riesgo es que te quieras quedar”. August 07th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/investigacion/217111/en-tocoron-el-riesgo-es-que-te-quieras-quedar/>

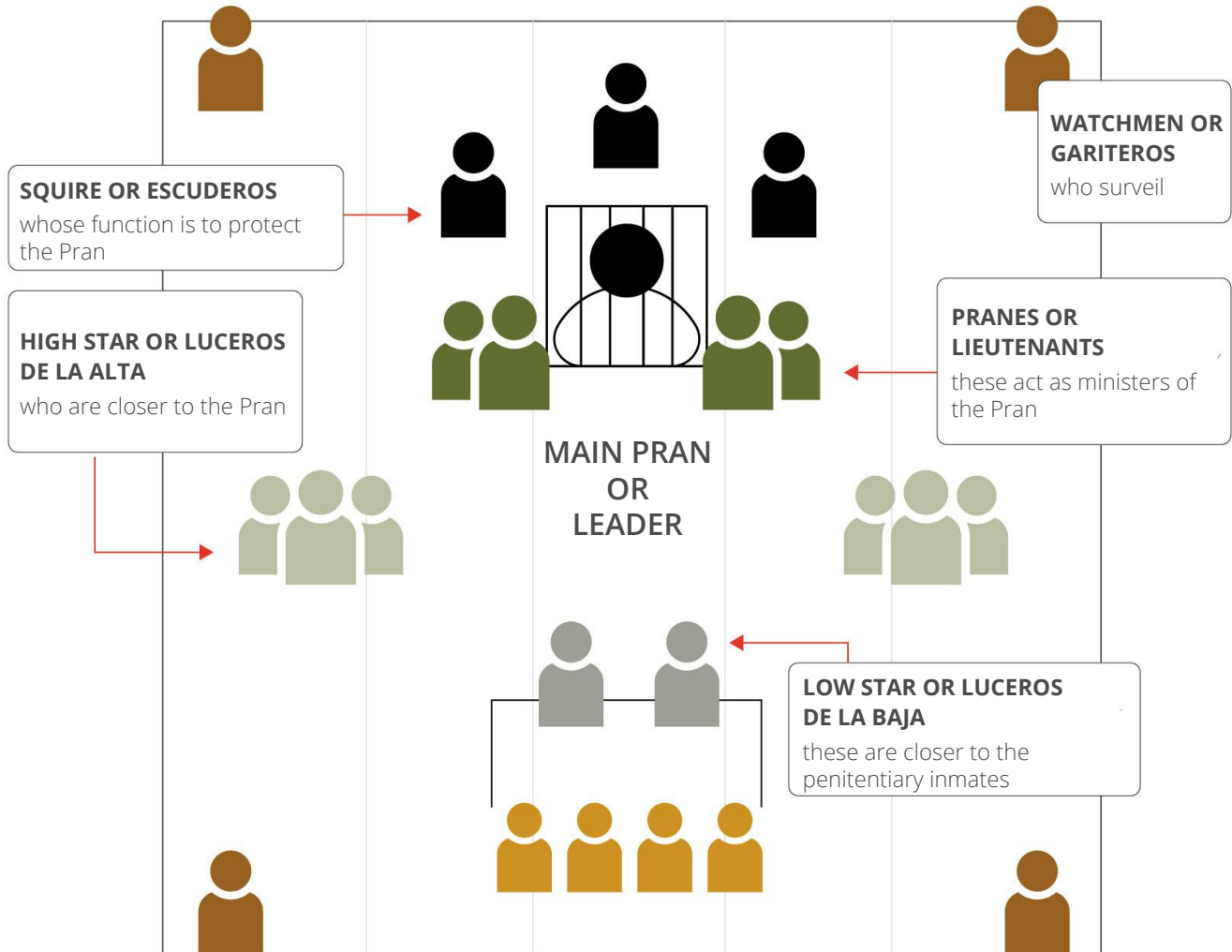
51 Rísquez, R y Erazo, L. Runrunes. (2021). “El Tren de Aragua tiene parada en Ecuador”. October 20th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/457721/el-tren-de-aragua-tiene-parada-en-ecuador/>

52 Alessi, G. El País. (2021). “El principal grupo criminal brasileño se rearma con un millar de emigrantes venezolanos”. February 08th. Available in: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-02-08/delincuentes-venezolanos-ganan-fuerza-dentro-del-grupo-criminal-brasileno-pcc.html>

53 Infobae. (2021). “Qué es El Tren de Aragua, la terrible banda venezolana que se disputa a sangre y fuego el control de la frontera con el ELN”. December 21st. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/12/21/que-es-el-tren-de-aragua-la-terrible-banda-venezolana-que-se-disputa-a-sangre-y-fuego-el-control-de-la-frontera-con-el-eln/>



INSIDE PRISON



There is no precise information about the quantity of lieutenants with which counts the Train of Aragua, but there are versions pointing that in the prison there are at least 12. Some of them are the minds behind the crime in municipalities, states and countries where the group operates.

The Train of Aragua works with several bands on streets, and each one dominates their territory. The criminal organizations count on a leader or pran that responds to alias "Niño Guerrero". In the regions exist a representative of the Train of Aragua that leads, but they all know that their main leader is the Tocarón's pran.



Outside the prison, the band has persons who work as informants. Besides they have allies who charge extortions through the *Foundation We are the Barrio J.K.*⁵⁴, created in San Vicente neighborhood, of Girardot municipality, Aragua state, for such end. They also use children from 8 to 12 years of age as messengers. Among their members there are also women that do different jobs. The foundation is led by a woman named Irene Hernández, who indicated that there were at least 200 members and, besides, 66 Local Committees of supply and Production (CLAP) from the community integrate it, and that they are in charge of distributing food in the area⁵⁵.

The leader of Train of Aragua in San Vicente is a delinquent named “el Flipper” who controls the area.

The Train of Aragua has persons in frontier trails to take care of drugs, gold, weapons and scrap loads. Their function is to act massively as custody of the material, to spread terror on the areas in which the criminal action is committed so no one gets closer and, in certain cases, free the way off obstacles, informed a specialist that does studies with members of communities led by the band.

Héctor Rutherford Guerrero Flores alias “Niño Guerrero”, in the main leader of the Train of Aragua and the pran of the Aragua Penitentiary Center, known as Tocarón.

Report about his criminal career indicate that in 2005 he was arrested for the homicide of an official and that in 2010 he was arrested again, this time for robbery. In that moment



he was transferred to Tocarón jail. In September 2012, when the alias “Niño Guerrero” was already known by communication media, it was reported that he escaped from jail. His escape was a scandal because it revealed the corruption inside the penitentiary, due to the payment

made to the director and other officials⁵⁶. Besides, his scape was linked to Jimena Araya, a Venezuelan actress who was arrested for alleged complicity in the case. Araya allegedly took women to the jail in order to charge for meeting inmates.

In 2013, “Niño Guerrero” was captured in Barquisimeto, Lara state⁵⁷. According to the information published then, he had been there for two months with a false identity. He was taken to Los Llanos Penitentiary Center (Cepella) in Portuguesa state, but short time late he returned to Tocarón.

During his absence of Tocarón, the leadership was exercised by Johan José Romero known as “Johan Petrica”.

In 2015 started to come out to public eye more news about the details of Tocarón and all that “Niño Guerrero” had managed to build inside the jail, such as pools⁵⁸ and zoos for children, as well as the Tokyo Discotheque⁵⁹.

54 Instagram @Fundacionsomelbarriojk. Foundation We are the Barrio JK account, linked to the Train of Aragua. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/fundacionsomelbarriojk/?hl=es>

55 Facebook. (2022). El Siglo account, Aragua communications media. January 11th. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=670643050762378>

56 Aporrea. (2012). “Ministerio Público acusó a director del Internado Judicial de Aragua por fuga de Niño Guerrero”. October 25th. Available in: <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n216948.html>

57 El Impulso. (2013). “El Niño Guerrero tenía dos meses delinquiendo en Lara”. June 11th. Available in: <https://www.elimpulso.com/2013/06/11/el-nino-guerrero-tenia-dos-meses-delinquiendo-en-lara/>

58 Runrunes. (2015). “En Tocarón, el riesgo es que te quieras quedar”. August 07th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/investigacion/217111/en-tocoron-el-riesgo-es-que-te-quieras-quedar/>

59 Facebook. DJ Gustavo Bracho account, he identifies as a person present at the discotheque. November 25th, 2015. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/djgustavo1/videos/10208065984306073/>



In December 2016, “Niño Guerrero” was sentenced to 17 years, 2 months and 2 days of prison, after accepting his participation in twelve crimes, of which stand out intentional homicide, hiding war weapons, drug traffic and identity theft. In 2018, the Penal Chamber of the Supreme Justice Tribunal considered his rights were vulnerated in that case⁶⁰.

For 2017 “Niño Guerrero” ratified as the pran of pranes by murdering Wilmer Brizuela “Wilmito”, known as the first pran of Venezuela and known as the spoiled child of Iris Varela, the then minister of Penitentiary Affairs⁶¹.



Wilmer José Pérez Castillo “Wilmer Guayabal”, is one of the leaders of the Train of Aragua and lieutenant of “Niño Guerrero”, he is in charge of Magdalena area, located in Zamora Municipality, Aragua State.

He is one of the confidence men of the main leader and

is who has executed important actions inside the organization. He is pointed for murdering in May 2019 Jackson Alexis Silva Zapata, Brigade General of the Air Force⁶².

In 2019 he was also attributed with the death and robbery of a policeman, who was going to the sector in order to purchase a vehicle⁶³. In the same modality were murdered two

Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin) officials who also were going to purchase a vehicle⁶⁴. They were using Facebook page MarketPlace.

Likewise, in 2021 he was the commander of an attack to a National Bolivarian Police (PNB) office. There are suspicions that he wanted to take control of the Magdalena ambulatory community⁶⁵.



Josué Ángel Santana Peña

“Santanita”, is a man from Lara state that in short time passed from being another member of the Train of Aragua to become a leader.

“Santanita” started offending between 13 and 14 years old,

his family is very numerous, it is estimated that he has around 25 brothers, mostly men. His first criminal antecedent is from 2013, when he was detained for robbery together with his older brother⁶⁶. Short time after he went out with a caution measure.

The name “Santanita” became popular among police officers, because he was constant and repetitive in robbery and extortions. In 2017 he was captured by the National Command of Anti-extortion and Kidnapping (Conas) in the midst of an extortion, he was sent to David Vilorio Penitentiary Center, known as Uribara, and in a movement to the Central Hospital of Barquisimeto city, he ran away.

60 Tribunal Supremo de Justicia. (2018). “Ponencia de la Magistrada Doctora Elsa Janeth Gómez Moreno”. May 31st. Available in: <http://historico.tsj.gob.ve/decisiones/scp/mayo/211889-151-31518-2018-C18-57.HTML>

61 Martínez, I. El País (2017) “Muerte de un ‘pran’”. April 04th. Available in: https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/04/05/america/1491345220_881149.html

62 Insight Crime. (2019). “Asesinato de militares en Venezuela apunta a poder de ‘megabandas’”. May 14th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/asesinato-militares-venezuela-megabandas/>

63 Jatar, B. Reporte Confidencial. (2019). “Se buscan (Foto) miembros de la banda «Wilmer Guayabal» por asesinato de policía”. October 05th. Available in: <https://www.reporteconfidencial.info/2019/10/05/se-buscan-foto-miembros-de-la-banda-wilmer-guayabal-por-asesinato-de-policia/>

64 Martínez, B. Nueva Prensa Digital. (2020). “Buscan a Wilmer Guayabal por matar a policías del SEBIN”. August 15th. Available in: <https://soynuevaprensadigital.com/npd/buscan-a-wilmer-guayabal-por-matar-a-dos-policias-del-sebin/>

65 Crónica Uno. (2021). “Delincuentes atacaron comando de la PNB en Magdalena”. September 06th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/delincuentes-atacaron-comando-de-la-pnb-en-magdalena/>

66 El Impulso. (2013). “PNB desmantela la banda “Los Santanas” que operaban en Barquisimeto”. June 30th. Available in: <https://www.elimpulso.com/2013/06/30/pnb-desmantela-la-banda-los-santanas-que-operaban-en-barquisimeto/>



In 2018, there were news about him again with the murder a Jesús Alberto Guacarán in Barquisimeto, who was physiotherapist of Vinotinto Soccer team. One month later he committed murder again in the city. In 2019 he became one of the most wanted in the country⁶⁷.

In January 2020, "Santanita" appeared in Lara and murdered a policeman's brother, according to a source interviewed. Few days later, in a fake control point in Cabudare, he allegedly kidnapped and later killed an Arabic businessman called Tamam Alshaer⁶⁸. That would be first incursion of "Santanita" in the Train of Aragua.

In 2020, "Santanita" was declared by Douglas Rico, director of CICPC as main objective. In an operation performed in Lara for his search that extended for 7 months the police killed 34 persons⁶⁹, including his father.

He is pointed for perpetrating 14 attacks in Lara state, between 2020 and the first months of 2022. Stands out the launching of grenades to vehicle dealers⁷⁰ and the shooting to houses of extortion victims⁷¹.

"Santanita" was also who opened the doors so Yaracuy also united to the states part of the Train of Aragua. He uses as refuge the mountains of that state, where "Wilmer Bachiller", leads, one of his collaborators and ally. He also participated in the kidnapping of a regional producer⁷².

Johan José Romero, alias "Johan Petrica", this man was detained for several years in the Aragua Penitentiary Center, Tocarón, and is the right hand of "Niño Guerrero". He acted as leader of the jail during the pran's scape in 2012.

Johan Petrica entered and exited the penitentiary constantly⁷³ until, after an incursion of the Operation for People's Freedom he pretended to be dead and scaped towards Bolivar state.

67 González, E. La Prensa de Lara. (2021). "El Santanita", uno de los más buscados por interpol en Venezuela". August 06th. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/34610/2021/08/el-santanita-uno-de-los-mas-buscados-por-interpol-en-venezuela>

68 González, E. La Prensa de Lara. (2020). "Caso Alshaer: muerte por encargo entra en escena". January 24th. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/11775/2020/01/caso-alshaer--muerte-por-encargo-entra-en-escena>

69 Gascón, L. El Pitazo. (2021). "Cuerpos de seguridad cometieron 34 asesinatos en la búsqueda de Santanita en Lara". January 01st. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/claves-cuerpos-de-seguridad-cometieron-34-asesinatos-en-la-busqueda-de-santanita-en-lara/>

70 González, E. La Prensa de Lara. (2021). "En Lara: en un año se contabilizan 10 ataques con explosivos". February 10th. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/27154/2021/02/en-lara--en-un-antildeo-se-contabilizan-10-ataques-con-explosivos>

71 González, E. La Prensa de Lara. (2022). Diario La Prensa de Lara. "Caen cuatro aliados del "Santanita". March 25th. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/44548/2022/03/caen-cuatro-aliados-del-santanita>

72 Twitter. @KaryPerazaR. Karina Peraza account, events journalist in Lara. Published in; <https://twitter.com/KaryPerazaR/status/1508434549579071494?s=20&t=I7PHnHpaFZDZrk2zgWoAAQ>

73 Dobre Llave. (2015). "¿Quién es Johan Petrica?". June 08th. Published in: <https://doblellave.com/quien-es-johan-petrica/>



Illegal economies and crimes



Illegal extraction
of minerals



Drug traffic



Scrap
smuggling



Human
trafficking



Traffic of
weapons



Extortion



Kidnapping



Homicide



Robbery

Gold Traffic

The Train of Aragua operates in auriferous mines of Las Claritas, Sifontes municipality of Bolívar state, under orders of Johan José Romero, alias “Johan Petrica”, as well as Larry Changa, another former inmate of Tocorón penitentiary, according to information gathered.

The group started operating in the mining zone between 2015 or 2016 and allegedly counts on the backup of local bands, such as the labor union or system of alias “Viejo Darwin”.

In September 2021, police and military commissions informed about a procedure in which 680 miners were rescued from an alleged kidnapping by the Train of Aragua in Peramanal, Sucre municipality of Bolívar state, with the fact they confirmed the delinquent group presence in the area⁷⁴.

According to sources, the gold extracted is taken to Brazil. Romero is allegedly settled in Boa Vista, capital of Roraima state.

Drug traffic

The Train of Aragua is mainly associated to micro-traffic of drugs sold inside Tocorón prison and in some communities where they have presence. These practices have been copied in Colombian territory, where the organization is established in several departments⁷⁵.

However, the organization controls great part of the transnational drug traffic coming out of Sucre state, specifically the one departing from Güiria, in Valdez, municipality. One of the sources consulted affirms that the young men trained figure as custody. These are drugs coming from Colombia that are taken to the Caribbean Sea.

74 Rojas, E. Últimas Noticias. (2021). “GNB rescató a 680 pequeños mineros secuestrados por el Tren de Aragua”. September 23rd. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/general/gnb-rescato-a-680-pequenos-mineros-secuestrados-por-el-tren-de-aragua/>

75 La Opinión. (2022). “Cayó el terror de ‘Valencia’ y su combo del Tren de Aragua en La Parada”. 29 de marzo. Available in: <https://www.laopinion.com.co/judicial/cayo-el-terror-de-valencia-y-su-combo-del-tren-de-aragua-en-la-parada>



In Güiria, they have a small army of inmates led from Tocorón prison by one of the pranes, known with the alias of “Pilo”.

The Train of Aragua has had an important participation with the First Capital Commander (PCC), the most powerful organized crime group of Brazil, in charge of drug traffic, control on jails and favelas in Brazil⁷⁶.

There is proof that several Venezuelan members of the Train of Aragua have passed to have important functions inside the PCC. One is in charge of the places where drugs are distributed and other is in charge to punish who violates rules. The Brazilian authorities state that the Train of Aragua collaborates to pass the drugs from Colombia⁷⁷.

Scrap smuggling

The Train of Aragua is allegedly involved in scrap smuggling, in alliance with some military chiefs of Aragua state and the Tachira frontier. The scrap is collected and stored in San Vicente community. There they have taken the garbage dump from where they take the trucks loaded with destination to Tachira. Then they pass it to Colombia through trails controlled by the band members, according to sources consulted for this report.

Charge of the cause

The charge of the so-called cause, that quote paid by the inmates to pranes, inside Tocorón penitentiary is one of the main sources of the organization’s financing. Weekly or monthly,

the group charges from USD 10 to USD 15 for each inmate. For this concept, they can reunite up to USD 1,5 million a year⁷⁸.

Kidnapping, extortion, human traffic are other crimes committed by this criminal organization.

Criminal allies

The criminal organization works in Aragua state hand by hand with other groups as Las Veras band, led by alias “Carlos Conejo”; “el Flipper” band, “Wilmer Guayabal” band; “el Coty” band; “Los Chevrolet” band; “el Abuelo” band; “el Pedrito” band; “el Mariachi” band; “el Patán” band and “Yorbis”; “el Asdrúbal” band; “Erick Villeguitas” band; “el Rey” band and “el Chuky”, who dominate territories of at least eight municipalities.

A new criminal band is helping the Train of Aragua, it is the “Wilmer Bachiller” band in Yaracuy state. These persons move between Veroes mountains, a strategic place for criminal’s movements without being detected by authorities⁷⁹.

Outside the country, the organization has links with organizations like the First Commander of the Capital (PCC), the most powerful organized crime group of Brazil⁸⁰.

76 Galarraga, N y Alessi, G. El País. (2020). “La Hermandad de los criminales”. June 12th. Available in: <https://elpais.com/especiales/2020/pcc-la-hermandad-de-los-criminales-en-brasil/>

77 Alessi, G. El País. (2021). “El principal grupo criminal brasileño se rearma con un millar de emigrantes venezolanos”. February 08th. Available in: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-02-08/delincentes-venezolanos-ganan-fuerza-dentro-del-grupo-criminal-brasileno-pcc.html>

78 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). “Crimen organizado y corrupción en Venezuela: un problema de Estado”. July 05th. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Crimen-organizado-y-corrupcio%CC%81n-en-Venezuela-Un-problema-de-Estado-completo.pdf>

79 Twitter. @KaryPerazaR Karina Peraza account, events journalist in Lara. March 28th, 2022. Published in: https://twitter.com/KaryPerazaR/status/1508434554276691973?s=20&t=lpBnURIVklU9w2Ff_Hrgeg

80 Alessi, G. El País. (2021). “El principal grupo criminal brasileño se rearma con un millar de emigrantes venezolanos”. February 08th. Available in: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-02-08/delincentes-venezolanos-ganan-fuerza-dentro-del-grupo-criminal-brasileno-pcc.html>



ARAGUA STATE

Dominate the territories of at least eight municipalities



Fire power

Members of the Train of Aragua have exhibited AK-47, AK-103 fusils, Fal, AR-15, guns of different calibers, shotguns, rifles and a great arsenal of grenades and even RPG⁸¹.

Recruitment method

The Train of Aragua usually recruits persons who are already in jail, which scale positions inside the group by seniority or loyalty showed to "Niño Guerrero". The investigations show that all inmates inside Tocorón have the approval of the leader and who does not have his approval cannot be moved to the penitentiary. Many inmates are submitted

81 Facebook. Victor Jgo account. Indicates hes is in Aragua Penitentiary Center. April 20th, 2015. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/100004112825520/videos/486327604847663/>



to enslaving treatments. They are moved to mining areas and frontiers as working hand of the organization's businesses, mainly drug traffic, illegal exploitation of gold and scrap smuggling.

Other types of recruitment are made locally in each community in which the band has presence. They attract youngsters of both genders. They invite them to parties, offer them money, food and help to their families. According to a source investigating the organization. It is stated that children of 10, 11 and 12 years old, let them do small things such as run errands. They must go to grocery stores and businesses to deliver notes or look for foods, to be then trained for criminal actions such as assassinations and kidnappings. "The organization has training zones to form delinquents. They take the ones most risked and teach them to use weapons".

There has been detection of training centers in Santiago Mariño and Santos Michelena municipalities, Aragua state, according to the source.

Use of violence

The violence exercised by the Train of Aragua starts in the same Tocarón penitentiary, where they attack the same inmates that do not accomplish their rules. Punishments, go from a shoot in the hand to death⁸².

These punishments are transferred to the communities where they have power. If a person disobeys their rules, they go to the person's house, knock their door, take them out and can even kill that person in front of their family, according to sources.

They have an improvised tribunal at the San Vicente community dumpster, called "the satellite" and there they proceed with their "trials" to the citizens that do not accomplish their rules. The judges are inmates of high hierarchy. They also make communities to protest in their names when there are police incursions.

Participation of women

This criminal organization has among their ranks women who exercise highly relevant roles, many of them are deployed in each of the communities that the Train of Aragua controls and they are in charge of delivering CLAP food boxes.

These women are also the highest authorities of Communal Councils and monitor the zones. When security corps have entered into communities, they are sent to declare to reject incursions. In videos they assure that it is better to be protected by the Train of Aragua than by the police⁸³.

Mothers, sisters and wives of Tocarón inmates forming the Train of Aragua act as the eyes of those inmates on the streets. They also surveil the behavior of others inside the prison. They are used as bait in robberies.

Some women are in charge of charging extortion in dollars or transporting the money. In 2021 it was registered the arrest of a woman in Miranda state with links to the Train of Aragua⁸⁴.

82 El Estímulo. (2017). "Los presos mimados del Gobierno y de Iris Varela". March 09th. Available in: <https://elestimulo.com/climax/los-presos-mimados-del-gobierno-y-de-iris-varela/>

83 El Estímulo. (2015). "San Vicente: decreto de Guerra a muerte". May 20th. Available in: <https://elestimulo.com/climax/san-vicente-decreto-de-guerra-a-muerte/>

84 Yajure, J. Runrunes. (2015). "La guerra sin cuartel declarada en Aragua". June 05th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/nacional/206324/la-guerra-sin-cuartel-declarada-en-aragua/>



3.7 CARTEL DE PARAGUANÁ (PARAGUANÁ CARTEL)



History

The Paraguaná cartel was denominated as such by the Venezuelan authorities, but in practice it is more than a cartel. It is about the union of three family clans from Falcon state that have controlled alternately the smuggling activities in that coastal entity.

The criminal group is led currently by Emilio Enrique Martínez, alias “Chiche Smith” and his family, who have been dedicated to drug traffic and merchandise smuggling in the occident of Venezuela for at least three decades.

This group has its center of operations in coasts and mountains of Falcón, a state with outlet to the Caribbean Sea and limits with the islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao⁸⁵. But their activity extended to other port regions such as Carabobo, Zulia and Anzoátegui.

By its geographic position, Falcón has always been marked by the culture of smuggling gas and other hydrocarbons, copper wires, iron pipes towards the Caribbean islands, Central America and Europe. It also served as enter and exit of drug traffic from Colombia⁸⁶.

The group of “Chiche Smith” exercised a criminal governance in Carirubana, similar to the one of the famous Colombian drug trafficker Pablo Escobar in Medellín, specifically in the Envigado municipality, where besides doing his criminal activities, he attended persons, earning their trust and sympathy.

“Chiche Smith” created the foundation called Carmen Virginia Martínez to give employment to Carirubana inhabitants, he re-built the whole town, from the church to the fronts of houses and ambulatory. He put a wrestling gym to work and created cleaning groups.

85 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). “Crimen organizado y corrupción en Venezuela: un problema de Estado”. July 05th. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Crimen-organizado-y-corrupcio%CC%81n-en-Venezuela-Un-problema-de-Estado-completo.pdf>

86 Ídem.



He also gave food bags to all residents in town in the most critical years of the complex humanitarian emergency. He also raffled vehicles and even gave away cash money, specifically in euros. With this, he earned sympathy and appreciation from people.

The criminal organization was partially disarticulated by the Venezuelan government in April 2020, two months after the seizing of five tons of high purity cocaine by the authorities of Colombia and Aruba. The boat *Aressa* came out from Falcón with destination to Greece. The load was hidden in iron pipes and a load of scrap⁸⁷.

But it was in April 2021, when “Chiche Smith” was arrested in Anzoátegui state, together with his daughter and grandson. The man carried a false identity card and managed to evade the authorities during one year⁸⁸. The government practiced hundreds of forced entries to weaken the cartel. The operation extended to the alleged benefit organization which made the Martínez family to be recognized by Carirubana people. The residents came out to protest in favor of the clan during police deployment in 2020⁸⁹.

In April 07th, 2021, Diosdado Cabello assured that Martínez was a DEA agent. One year before, the then minister of Internal Affairs, Justice and Peace, Néstor Reverol, had affirmed that Martínez had an agreement with the USA agency of anti-drug control “to make see that Venezuela is a permissive country in regards to drug traffic”⁹⁰.

For the ex-General prosecutor of Venezuela, Luisa Ortega Díaz, the operation against “Chiche Smith” was only a retaliation against the group because they did not notify the regime to avoid the payment of bribery⁹¹.

Despite the arrest of his leader in 2021 and the scape of its lieutenants, the Paraguaná Cartel continues with its operations, even though allegedly in a minor scale.

In the first trimester of 2022, Falcon state figured as the second entity with more drugs seizing in Venezuela, after detecting more than 1.288 cocaine bricks according to reports from the National Anti-drugs Superintendence⁹².

Structure and leaders

Control of organized crime in Falcón state is administered by Emilio Enrique Martínez, alias “Chiche Smith”, 69 years old, leader of Paraguaná Cartel. Martínez got into the fishing business together with his brother and then diversified his operations. “He started with a small boat and then started using campaign boats with which, besides fishing, entered into the whisky and gasoil smuggling business. Lastly, he acquired boats for trawl fishing, initiating that way in the business of electro domestic smuggling and then drugs”, according to a report published by Transparencia Venezuela⁹³.

87 Runrunes. (2020). “Detienen en Aruba un barco con mil kilos de droga procedente de Venezuela”. February 25th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/399283/detienen-en-aruba-un-barco-con-mil-kilos-de-droga-procedente-de-venezuela/>

88 Martínez, D. Efecto Cocuyo. (2021). “Ministerio Público anuncia captura de presunto narcotraficante en Anzoátegui”. April 03rd. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/sucesos/ministerio-publico-anuncia-captura-de-presunto-narcotraficante-en-anzoategui/>

89 El Pitazo. (2021). “Chiche Smith: ¿quién es el presunto narcotraficante capturado en Anzoátegui?”. April 04th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/chiche-smith-quien-es-el-presunto-narcotraficante-capturado-en-anzoategui/>

90 Rojas, E. Últimas Noticias. (2021) “Detuvieron a “Chiche Smith”, acusado de dirigir grupo narcotraficante”. April 03rd. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/detuvieron-a-chiche-smith-acusado-de-dirigir-grupo-narcotraficante/>

91 Centro de Comunicación Nacional. (2020). “Ortega Díaz sobre el Cartel de Paraguaná: “El narcotráfico en Venezuela opera en sociedad con jefes de la tiranía madurista”. April 23rd. Available in: <https://presidenciave.com/internacional/ortega-diaz-sobre-el-cartel-de-paraguana-el-narcotrafico-en-venezuela-opera-en-sociedad-con-jefes-de-la-tirania-madurista/>

92 Morón, G. Nuevo Día. (2022) “1,2 toneladas de droga ubican a Falcón como segundo en incautaciones”. March 22nd. Available in: <https://nuevodia.com.ve/2022/03/22/12-toneladas-de-droga-ubican-a-falcon-como-segundo-en-incautaciones/>

93 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). “Crimen organizado y corrupción en Venezuela: un problema de Estado”. July 05th. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Crimen-organizado-y-corrupcio%CC%81n-en-Venezuela-Un-problema-de-Estado-completo.pdf>



CRIMINAL GROUPS BEHIND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA



EMILIO ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ, ALIAS “CHICHE SMITH”, WAS ARRESTED IN APRIL 2021.
PHOTO: TWITTER @GESTIONPERFECTA

CAPTURADO

EMILIO ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ
ALIAS “CHICHE SMITH”

- Solicitado mediante Código Rojo de Interpol No. 00-66-0070-2020.
- Formaba parte de un Grupo Estructurado de Delincuencia Organizada (Gedo) dedicado al tráfico ilícito de drogas a través de las costas caribeñas con destino Europa.
- Presenta una investigación penal desarrollada por el Ministerio Público (MP) y el Comando Antidrogas de la Guardia Nacional Bolivariana (GNB). Por el caso van 12 personas detenidas integrantes del referido Gedo en el estado Falcón.
- Fue detenido por la Dirección Antidrogas del Cuerpo de Policía Nacional Bolivariana (Cpnb) en las Residencias “Las Canoas”, Torre 7, municipio Urbaneja, estado Anzoátegui.
- Para el momento de su detención portaba una cédula falsa a nombre de Valera Guillermo Ramón.

Martinez was arrested in October 1994, after the seizing of 140 kilos of drugs in Valencia, Carabobo state. He remained in jail till 2004⁹⁴ in Tocuyito judicial prison, but he never stopped dealing with drugs. When he came out of prison stayed in Valencia and connected to Walid Makled.

In 2017, “Chiche Smith” went back to Carirubana, Falcón state. After the triumph of Víctor Clark – also natural of Carirubana – in the governorship of the state, Martínez started to finance public works and do social labor with the promise to renovate the image of the locality.

A journalist from Falcón state has followed the criminal investigation against the cartel and assured that “Chiche Smith” has several months outside prison. The drug dealer was arrested in the National Bolivarian Police (PNB) quarter of Valencia, but he would have managed to go out of prison due health issues and advanced age. “It is not about a domiciliary arrest but a privilege”, sustained.

“Chiche Smith” relatives are following in the organization’s control: Héctor Armando Martínez, alias “Lindo” and Delso de Jesús Martínez, alias “Tutu”, may be the lieutenants. Another dozen of relatives are part of the Foundation Carmen Virginia Martínez. Some of them, including “Chiche Smith” daughter and grandson were apprehended between 2020 and 2021. Others are searched and accused of drug traffic, money laundering and association to commit a crime⁹⁵.

The Paraguaná Cartel has armed men who safeguard the drugs from Colombia in farms and rural places of Falcón and they are responsible for transporting it to the beach. From there they hide the stash in speedboats or fishing boats with local crewmembers in charge of doing the transfer the drug into vessels awaiting in open sea and have as final destination the Caribbean islands, countries of Europe, Africa and United States, according to information given by a source protected in an open judicial investigation in 2005⁹⁶.

94 Vlex Venezuela. (2004). “Decisión de Tribunal Primero de Primera Instancia en funciones de Ejecución de Carabobo (Extensión Valencia)”. July 05th. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/emilio-enrique-martinez-286852891>

95 Últimas Noticias. (2021). “Tribunal decretó privativa contra Chiche Smith, su hija y nieto”. April 07th. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/tribunal-decreto-privativa-contra-chiche-smith-su-hija-y-nieto/>

96 Vlex Venezuela. (2010) “Decisión nº S-N de Tribunal de Primera Instancia en Funciones de Control de Falcon (Extensión Punto Fijo)”. February 02nd. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/romer-euclides-privados-safadi-valbuena-301197494>



It is estimated that the organization is integrated by a hundred people.

Currently, the cartel led by Miguel Ángel Romero, a businessman that acts low profile because he is searched by the authorities, assured the incidents journalist consulted for this report.

Illegal economies and crimes



Drug traffic



Gasoline smuggling



Corruption on ports



Scrap smuggling

Drug traffic

The Paraguaná Cartel would be responsible for most loads of cocaine entering to Galicia, Spain for the last 20 years, says a report from *Diario de Pontevedra*⁹⁷. The publication reveals that “Chiche Smith” had historic bonds with the main drug clans of Rías Baixas, the coastal area on the region.

Matínez was known for forces and security corps of Spain and his name came out to light in seizures of almost nine tons of cocaine between 2008 and 2013 in boats San Miguel, Pacífico, Riptide, among others, adds the Spanish media.

“Those loads and many of the ones that authorities never had proof of add thousands of kilos of cocaine, but [Martínez legend] grew up to unsuspected limits when he freights El Almacén, a mega ghost vessel that stood up

in an unknown point of the Atlantic to pick up packs from South America and deliver it on the way back to Europe, most part of the time with Galicians as spearhead”, sustains another report from *Diario de Pontevedra*⁹⁸.

The group’s shipments covered other territories. A publication of *El Pitazo* reveals that the drugs from Colombia distributed by the Paraguaná Cartel first reached clandestine corridors of Zulia, then continued its pass-through Falcón and afterwards it came out of Paraguaná to countries of Central America or Mexico⁹⁹.

Even though there is no certainty about the quantity of cocaine trafficked by “Chiche Smith”, the more than five tons of drug seized in Aressa boat (in Aruba coasts) in 2020 give an idea of the drug dealer’s power.

97 Méndez, V. *Diario de Pontevedra*. (2021). “Chiche Smith: ¿Protegido de Maduro, colaborador de la DEA o ambas cosas?”. April 08th. Available in: <https://www.diariodepontevedra.es/articulo/pontevedra/protegido-maduro-colaborador-dea-ambas-cosas/202104081311081135275.html>

98 Méndez, V. *Diario de Pontevedra*. (2021). “Capturan a ‘Chiche Smith’, acusado de enviar toneladas de cocaína a Galicia”. April 08th. Available in: <https://www.diariodepontevedra.es/articulo/pontevedra/capturan-presunto-responsable-enviar-toneladas-cocaina-galicia/202104081242441135268.html>

99 *El Pitazo*. (2021). “Chiche Smith: ¿quién es el presunto narcotraficante capturado en Anzoátegui?”. April 04th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/chiche-smith-quien-es-el-presunto-narcotraficante-capturado-en-anzoategui/>



Gas smuggling

The name “Chiche Smith” has also been linked to gasoline smuggling, “In one opportunity, military detected that he allegedly had a network of boats that made the transport of gas to Caribbean islands, where it was sold at international prices. To obtain the gas, the boats did not have to reach the coast, but they could supply through a hose installed in a floating platform” according to a profile published by Tal Cual¹⁰⁰.

Officialism ex-directors in Falcon state explained that in this entity the great boats and speedboats transported every kind of merchandise in each trip, this included gas, (diesel and gasoline) till before the crisis on the Venezuelan oil industry.

Even though in 2022 gas smuggling is not so significant, Falcón inhabitants assure that there is still a black market for gasoline.

Corruption on ports

The Paraguaná Cartel has historically used ports to perform their drug traffic operations. The seizure of drugs in Aressa boat, which sailed from an installation guarded by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and the Navy leaves in evidence the activities of the organization in Falcón ports.

When members of the organization were arrested in 2020, PDV Marine branch officials of Punto Fijo were also removed from their positions and incarcerated for allegedly enabling the use of Pdvsa boats to transport drugs, denounced the opposition parliamentary Williams Dávila¹⁰¹.

Scrap smuggling

The seizure of more than five tons of cocaine in Aressa boat not only brought to light the names of Paraguaná cartel and “Chiche Smith”, but also discovered the use of scrap to be commercialized internationally and camouflage drugs.

A governorship official of the Falcón port linked to the Autonomous Institute of Public Ports of that state, explained that governors from Falcón and Carabobo states were searching for licit ways to export scrap from their ports.

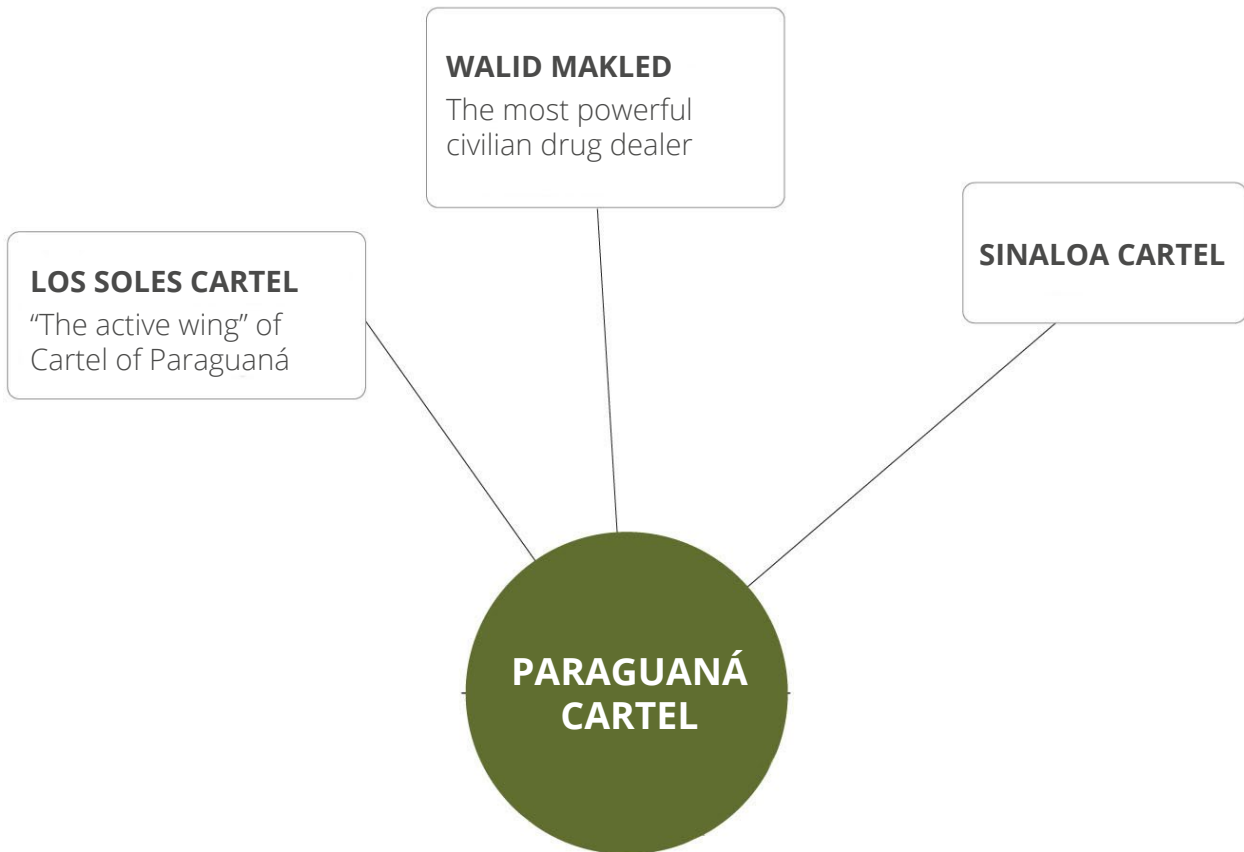
Another activity in which one of the clans “composing” this cartel dedicates to, is the sale of potable water, in a context of great scarcity. They control private filling stations, with the alleged support of corrupted military officers.

100 Mayorca, J. Tal Cual. (2020). “Chichi en las sombras”. April 30th. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/chichi-en-las-sombras-por-javier-ignacio-mayorca/>

101 Centro de Comunicación Nacional. (2020). “Diputado Dávila: “Desmantelamiento del cartel de Paraguaná evidencia que en Venezuela tenemos un Estado narcoterrorista”. April 22nd. Available in: <https://presidenciave.com/parlamento/williams-davila-desmantelamiento-del-cartel-de-paraguana-evidencia-que-en-venezuela-tenemos-un-estado-narcoterrorista/>



Criminal allies



The Paraguaná Cartel came to be catalogued as an active arm of the Cartel de los Soles¹⁰², a denomination used internationally to group military and high rank officials from the government of Nicolás Maduro who are allegedly involved in drug traffic¹⁰³.

“Chiche Smith had been a long time under DEA’s radar, who accused Maduro of protecting him. Not in vain the Drug Enforcement Administration linked him to the Cartel de los Soles” affirms a report from Diario de Pontevedra¹⁰⁴.

The organization was linked previously with Walid Makled, considered the most powerful civilian drug dealer of Venezuela. Makled was able to send loads of drugs from the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) to the Cartel of Sinaloa¹⁰⁵.

According to the Operation Thunder file, name of the drug seizure procedure that led to the arrest of Martínez in 1994, the criminal organization extended their operations from Zulia to Sucre, and had enough autonomy to work with any Colombian cartel¹⁰⁶.

102 Méndez, V. Diario de Pontevedra. (2021). “Chiche Smith: ¿Protegido de Maduro, colaborador de la DEA o ambas cosas?”. April 08th. Available in: <https://www.diariodepontevedra.es/articulo/pontevedra/protegido-maduro-colaborador-dea-ambas-cosas/202104081311081135275.html>

103 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). “Crimen organizado y corrupción en Venezuela: un problema de Estado”. July 05th. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Crimen-organizado-y-corrupcio%CC%81n-en-Venezuela-Un-problema-de-Estado-completo.pdf>

104 Méndez, V. Diario de Pontevedra. (2021). “Capturan a ‘Chiche Smith’, acusado de enviar toneladas de cocaína a Galicia”. April 08th. Available in: <https://www.diariodepontevedra.es/articulo/pontevedra/capturan-presunto-responsable-enviar-toneladas-cocaina-galicia/202104081242441135268.html>

105 InSight Crime. (2020). “Walid Makled”. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-venezuela/walid-makled/>

106 Mayorca, J. Tal Cual. (2020). “Chichí en las sombras”. April 30th. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/chichi-en-las-sombras-por-javier-ignacio-mayorca/>



Fire power and use of violence

There is no precision about the fire power of this group. The weapons are used mainly for custody of drug loads. An opposition manager explained that they have AK-15, AK-103 fusils, shotguns, caliber 9mm guns, among others. But this group does not use to exhibit their guns.

On the other side, the criminal organization does not usually appeal to armed violence to exercise control of territories. This maybe because the protection given by authorities and control almost absolute of drug traffic on Falcon state. In Carirubana, inhabitants refer that there are agreements of no aggression between the traffickers of drugs to continue their operations.

Recruitment methods

The recruitment methods of this criminal group are not known, but it has been known that their relations with officialism allowed them to get closer to State security corp officials, specifically ZODI Falcón. After the detention of “Chiche Smith” security officials loyal to the cartel were removed of their positions or sent to other divisions, according to a source consulted.

In a criminal investigation initiated in 2005, a crew member of a boat property of William Smith – alleged relative of the drug dealer – declared that he was contracted to fish and in high sea the captain informed that they would deviate from the route to transport drugs¹⁰⁷. After completing the operation, this person participated in more cocaine deliveries.

There are not indications of recruitment of beneficiaries of Foundation Carmen Virginia Martínez, belonging to the organization.

Role of women

On the Paraguaná Cartel drug traffic operations and money laundering participate men and women equally. Merlis Martínez Chirinos, daughter of “Chiche Smith”, was accused of illicit traffic of psychotropic narcotic substances, money laundering and association to commit a crime in 2021, after being captured next to her father¹⁰⁸.

María Virginia Martínez, doctor by profession and niece of “Chiche Smith”, was leading the health direction of the Foundation created by the organization. She was arrested in the procedure of 2020 while she was pregnant. In august of that same year, the young woman died due to a severe pneumonia¹⁰⁹.

Vilexis Osleida Bravo Angarita, partner of William Smith, is pointed in a criminal file of 2005 related to seizure of drugs on El Gladiador y Madre Querida boats¹¹⁰.

Personnel on the deck Las Piedras, in Falcón, declared to authorities that the wife of William Smith was in charge of delivering the documentation to request the license of navigation for both boats. One of the boats was intercepted by authorities with 600 kilos of cocaine. A crew member also testified that Bravo even paid them for the trips made to unload the drug in high seas. Bravo denied these accusations of the interrogation, according to the acts included on the document.

107 Vlex Venezuela. (2010). “Decisión n° S-N de Tribunal de Primera Instancia en Funciones de Control de Falcon (Extensión Punto Fijo)”. February 02nd. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/romer-euclides-privados-safadi-valbuena-301197494>

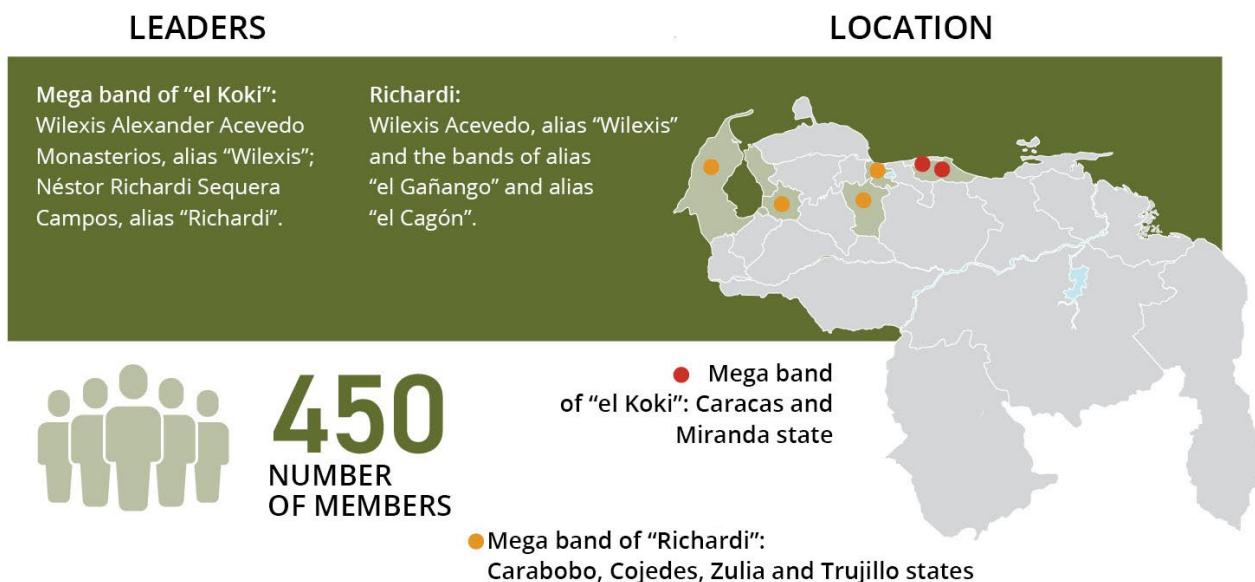
108 Rojas, E. Últimas Noticias. (2021). “Tribunal decretó privativa contra Chiche Smith, su hija y nieto”. April 07th. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/tribunal-decreto-privativa-contra-chiche-smith-su-hija-y-nieto/>

109 Runrunes. (2021). “Tarek William Saab confirmó la detención del presunto narcotraficante «Chiche Smith»”. April 03rd. Available in: <https://runrun.es/noticias/440272/tarek-william-saab-confirmando-la-detencion-del-presunto-narcotraficante-chiche-smith/amp/>

110 Vlex Venezuela. (2010). “Decisión n° S-N de Tribunal de Primera Instancia en Funciones de Control de Falcon (Extensión Punto Fijo)”. February 02nd. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/romer-euclides-privados-safadi-valbuena-301197494>



3.8. MEGABANDAS DE EL KOKI Y RICHARDI (EL KOKI AND RICHARDI MEGA BANDS)



History

The mega bands of “el Koki” y de “Richardi” operate in the center of Venezuela and have established a union that allowed them to diversify their criminal businesses in Caracas and Carabobo state. The two groups sum up around 450 members.

The mega band of “el Koki” was created in 2014 and defied all public forces in Caracas during seven years. The organization became known with the nickname of one of its three leaders for being the most mediatic: Carlos Luis Revete, alias “el Koki”, murdered in a Corp of Scientific, Penal and Criminalistic Investigations (CICPC) procedure, on February 08th, 2022. Nonetheless, the real boss has always been Carlos Alfredo Calderón Martínez, alias “Vampi”, according to an investigation of Runrunes¹¹¹.

This mega-band was one of the most powerful organizations of Venezuela till 2021, given its reach, number of members, evolved levels of organization, fire power as well as its strategic location.

Two facts enabled the consolidation of this band, expanded through the neighborhoods surrounding Cota 905: the creation of peace zones (a government program that allegedly searched for peace, but that ended up strengthening them) and the alliance of several criminal bands to face State security corps¹¹².

In 2015, the State implemented an extermination policy in popular sectors, denominated Operation of People's Liberation and Protection (OLP). This way was born the official persecution of “el Koki” and his allies. But these were never touched¹¹³.

111 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). “Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad”. February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>

112 Ídem.

113 Ídem.



As fundamental support of this group stands out Néstor Richardi Sequera Campos, alias “Richardi”, pran of Tocuyito Judicial Penitentiary, who is the most important ally of “el Koki” band. Tocuyito jail is located in Carabobo, at 178 kms. from Caracas.

In 2010, Wilmer Brizuela, alias “Wilmito”, was moved from Vista Hermosa, located in Bolívar state, to Tocuyito¹¹⁴, then he became the leader on that prison. A report from El Estímulo indicates that “Richardi” got power thanks to Brizuela¹¹⁵.

As in other jails of Venezuela, Tocuyito has been epicenter of massive events and parties by the hand of “Richardi”¹¹⁶. In fact, this pran enjoys recognition in the sports world. A demonstration of his influence in this field is that he counts on an outstanding basketball team.

He also does friendly baseball matches with the presence of Venezuelan major league players inside prison¹¹⁷.

“Richardi” is also in charge of charging “the cause” inside the penal, that survival tax demanded by criminal heads on prisons to the rest of inmates. The Tocuyito pran invoices all operations in dollars. The director of the Venezuelan Observatory of prisons, Carolina Girón, affirms that circulation of currency in jails coincided with transactional dollarization occurred in Venezuela.

Tocuyito jail has more than 4.000 men¹¹⁸. But only the group close to the pran is armed. Some members can even enter or exit jail without any inconvenient. Besides, he has messengers outside the jail, according to sources consulted.



114 Armando Info. (2017). “El gobierno de Wilmito”. March 19th. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-gobierno-de-wilmito/>

115 El Estímulo. (2017). “Los presos mimados del Gobierno y de Iris Varela”. March 09th. Available in: <https://elestimulo.com/cimax/los-presos-mimados-del-gobierno-y-de-iris-varela/>

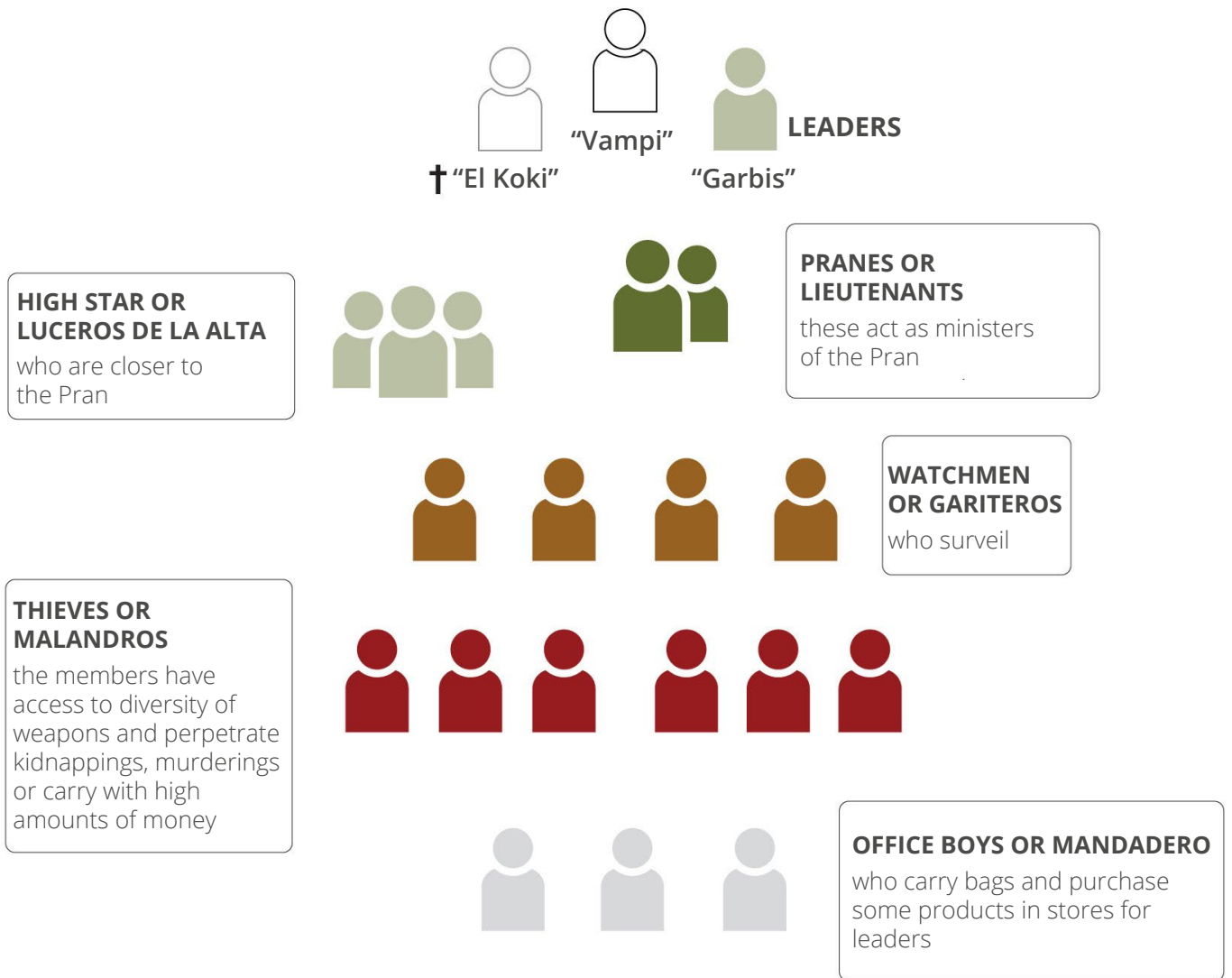
116 Instagram. @rossenouffofficial. Ronald Rossenouff account, musical producer and international DJ. June 21st, 2017. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BVmPoMFB5ah/>

117 Connectas. (2022). “Pranes en las Grandes Ligas”. February 10th. Available in: <https://www.connectas.org/especiales/venezuela-bandas-criminales-beisbol/#>

118 Instagram @oveprisiones. Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP) account. October 29th, 2021. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVndW0rkCL/>



Structure and leaders





The leadership of “el Koki” mega band was shared between Carlos Luis Revete, alias “el Koki”; Carlos Alfredo Calderón Martínez, alias “Vampi” and Garbis Ochoa Ruíz, alias “Garbis”; being “Vampi” the highest leader.

The band opted, since their beginnings, the hierarchic structure of jails where there are one or few main leaders, lieutenants, “luceros” and watchmen. Besides, it is characterized by construction of control points in the highest part of mountains on the territories they control. This allows them to have visual control of everything happening around and anticipate before a possible incursion of security corps.

An investigation made by NGO Cecodap in sectors dominated by this mega-band highlights the structure¹¹⁹ associated to recruitment of children of both genders and adolescents. The experience and loyalty determine the ascend of members to more lucrative positions and, even though these may be more risky, also more powerful.

The lowest position on the armed group is “mandadero” or office boy, who is in charge of taking bags and purchasing some products in grocery stores for the leaders. Upper in the scale are the “malandros” or thieves. In these positions, the members have access to a diversity of weapons and perpetrate kidnappings, murders or carry high amounts of money that enter to the leader’s chests¹²⁰. At least 300 men integrate this armed group with presence in El Paraíso, La Vega, El Valle, Coche and Santa Rosalía parishes in Caracas.

After the murdering of “el Koki”, the other two bosses keep leading the armed group that

operate in at least five parishes of the Capital District, part of Miranda state and dominates territories next to seven police and military quarters¹²¹.

Carlos Alfredo Calderón Martínez, alias “Vampi”,

is the mega-band head. He leads the list of the 10 most wanted criminals in the country for offenses such as kidnapping, homicide, drug traffic and extortion¹²². An inhabitant of Cota 905 declared to El Pitazo that Calderón became known when he kidnapped the musical group Caramelos de Cianuro’s¹²³ manager. At middle 2021, Colombian communication media published the photo of “Vampi” because he had escaped the country towards the neighbor country after police persecution intensified against the mega-band in Venezuela and confrontations between criminals and security corps increased¹²⁴.

Garbis Ochoa Ruíz, alias “Garbis”,

is “Vampi’s” lieutenant and second in command of the group. Just as “Vampi” his name figures in the updating of the most wanted list. According to police sources, he is required for 22 homicides and 4 kidnappings. “Vampi” would have a connection with “Richardí” since 2021 to enter in illegal mining and scrap smuggling business¹²⁵.

Néstor Richardi Sequera, alias “Richardí”,

even though he is not direct member of “el Koki” mega-band, he has a very important alliance with the group. Richardí” exercises prantos in Tocuyito jail just as other criminal leaders.

119 Cecodap. (2022). “Esclavizar para delinquir: De mandadero a malandro”. March 30th. Available in: <https://esclavizarparadelinquir.cecodap.org/demandaderoamalandro/>

120 Ídem.

121 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). “Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad”. February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>

122 Fernández, G. El Pitazo. (2022). “Vampi” y “Garbis” lideran la lista actualizada de los 10 más buscados”. February 22nd. Available in: <https://www.elpitazo.net/sucesos/vampi-y-garbis-lideran-la-lista-actualizada-de-los-10-mas-buscados/>

123 Fernández, G. El Pitazo. (2021). “Vecino de la Cota 905 relató la trayectoria del “Vampi”, “Koki” y “Garbis” en el barrio”. July 20th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/vecino-de-la-cota-905-relato-la-trayectoria-de-vampi-koki-y-garbis-en-el-barrio/>

124 La Opinión. (2021). “Estaría en Cúcuta “El Vampi”, jefe de peligrosa banda de Caracas”. August 03rd. Available in: <https://www.laopinion.com.co/judicial/estaria-en-cucuta-el-vampi-jefe-de-peligrosa-banda-de-caracas>

125 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). “Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad”. February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>



This praan is characterized for his great interest in sports and because of that he tries to relate to outstanding athletes. For this reason, every year he organizes friendly softball competitions in prison with the participation of big leagues players. He also promoted the creation of a basketball team with inmates participating in a league.

His face is unknown, but many of his criminal actions are pretty known in Carabobo. "Richardi" is arrested since 1999. In 2000 he was sentenced to 20 years of prison for the crime of aggravated homicide¹²⁶. In 2008, the Appeals Court reduced his sentence to 17 years and 6 months of prison¹²⁷. Even though he should have gone out in 2017, "Richardi" is still inside the penitentiary.

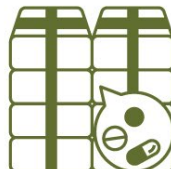
Illicit economies and crimes



Illegal mining



Scrap smuggling



Drug micro traffic



Extortion



Kidnapping



Charge of bribery



Homicide



Robbery



Weapons traffic

Gold smuggling

The band of "Richardi" entered into the illegal mining world after knowing about the existence of gold in Bejuma, Carabobo. The lands closest to the vein were rapidly taken by the criminal group to exercise ferreous control over extraction.

This illegal practice started in 2017. An investigation made by Mongabay¹²⁸ warned, at that time, about the increasement of danger in the area and the power accumulated by a Cicpc sheriff that is allegedly part owner of the lands where the gold extraction went on.

126 Vlex Venezuela. (2005). "Decisión de Tribunal Primero de Primera Instancia en funciones de Ejecución de Carabobo (Extensión Puerto Cabello)". January 13th. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/penado-sequera-campos-nestor-richardi-287167479>

127 Vlex Venezuela. (2008). "Decisión de Corte de Apelaciones Sala Uno de Carabobo". February 20th. Available in: <https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/penado-nestor-richardi-sequera-campos-282080719>

128 Gutiérrez, J. Mongabay. (2018). "Venezuela: invasión de mineros ilegales en Carabobo provoca redada militar y 3000 detenciones". April 30th. Available in: <https://es.mongabay.com/2018/04/venezuela-mineros-ilegales-en-carabobo/>



In this activity the members of “el Koki” band, the Richardi pranato and Wilaxis mega band work as allies.

Scrap smuggling

The Tocuyito pran is pointed for financing the purchase of scrap coming out smuggled to Colombia. The Bolivarian Police Corp of Zulia state (Cpbez) confirmed that in these operations participated members of the band, such as alias “el Cagón”, a dangerous criminal operating in Zulia and Trujillo, accused of robbing strategic material from Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvsa)¹²⁹, the state company plant. “El Koki” mega band would be allied with “Richardi” to traffic gold and scrap since 2021.

Drug traffic

Drugs micro-traffic is one of the most lucrative businesses for the mega band led by “Vampi” and “Garbis”.

“While the minimum salary – calculated in base to the parallel dollar – was about USD 10 a month in Venezuela for July 2015, each one of the band bosses affiliated to El Koki obtained around USD 570 a month (400.000 Bs) only on drugs sale”, according to a Runrunes¹³⁰ publication.

“Richardi” delegates his trusted men the commercialization of drugs inside and outside the jail. An inmate revealed that inside those places the consumption of substances is quite high, for which it generates substantial incomes.

Extortion

Since five years ago, “el Koki” mega band incorporated extortions to their illicit businesses. Charge of “vacunas” was implemented in El Cementerio, El Valle and Cota 905, in Caracas. “These extortions were charged by their allied bands, they divided territories and the amount obtained went to a pot, to then be shared among the group members”, details Runrunes¹³¹.

On his part, “Richardi” also did extortions to inmates who enter and exit Tocuyito jail without limitations from the jail authorities, according to local media.

The charge of the “cause”, an internal form of extortion, is one of the main businesses in Tocuyito. In 2020, “Richardi” charged USD 1 per inmate every week¹³². With a population of 5.000 men, “Richardi” earned USD 20.000 every month. Recently, the pran started charging USD 10 per inmate and charged also USD 50 for visitors to stay overnight.

129 Instagram @diariopanorama. Account of Panorama newspaper of Zulia state. February 19th, 2021. Available in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLfg-osMDdW/?igshid=15kc18y1w8fv>

130 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). “Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad”. February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>

131 Ídem.

132 Ramsay, S. Sky News. (2020). “The prisoner earning \$5500 a week inside one of the world's ...”. August 17th. Available in: <https://news.sky.com/story/where-the-prisoners-are-armed-and-in-charge-inside-the-worlds-worst-jails-in-venezuela-12038551>



Criminal alliances

MEGA BAND OF "EL KOKI"

RICHARDI:

BAND OF ALIAS
"EL GAÑANGO"

DARWIN ANTONIO
RIVAS GARCÍA,
ALIAS "EL CAGÓN"
Presence in Trujillo
and Zulia states

NESTOR RICHARDI
SEQUERA CAMPOS,
ALIAS "RICHARDI"

holds 'pranato' in Tocuyito jail

WILEXIS ALEXANDER
ACEVEDO
MONASTERIOS,
ALIAS "WILEXIS"

Leader of a mega band
operating in José Félix
Ribas neighborhood of
Petare

MEGA BANDS OF
"EL KOKI" AND
"RICHARDI"

"El Koki" and "Richardí" mega-bands would have joint operations since 2021 to traffic gold and scrap. To this alliance would have also summed up Wilexis Acevedo, alias "Wilexis", leader of a mega-band operating in barrio José Félix Ribas of Petare, Miranda state, formed by at least 200 men¹³³.

Inmates of Tocuyito penitentiary said that alias "Vampi" frequently visits that jail to hold meetings with "Richardí".

On the other hand, the "Richardí" band has links with the one of Darwin Antonio Rivas García, alias "el Cagón", present in Trujillo and Zulia states. This armed group counts on more than 50 men and authorities attribute them the authoring of more than 40 murderings¹³⁴. It is with this organization that they operate in smuggling of scrap.

Fire power

"El Koki" mega-band owns grenades, AR-15 and AK-103 rifles, 9-millimeter caliber pistols, submachine guns, old rifles from the National Bolivarian Guard (GNB), known as FAL and RPG, even a bazooka. Most weapons and munitions are from the National Bolivarian Armed Force (FANB), warns Runrunes¹³⁵.

Meanwhile, "Richardí", supplies weapons to his "luceros" and he usually uses fusils. On the arsenal there are AK-103, AR-15, FAL¹³⁶, besides grenades, pistols and revolvers.

133 Insight Crime. (2021). "Wilexis Alexander Acevedo Monasterios, alias "Wilexis". October 30th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-venezuela/wilexis-alexander-acevedo-monasterios-alias-wilexis/>

134 D Hoy, C. Runrunes. (2018). "El Cagón" la banda andina implicada en más de 40 asesinatos que planificó la masacre de El Valle". March 19th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/nacional/342322/el-cagon-una-banda-andina-implicada-en-mas-de-40-asesinatos-planifico-la-masacre-de-el-valle/>

135 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). "Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad". February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>

136 Connectas. (2022). "Pranes en las Grandes Ligas". February 10th. Available in: <https://www.connectas.org/especiales/venezuela-bandas-criminales-beisbol/#>



Use of violence

“El Koki”, “Vampi” and “Garbis” earned the “respect” of authorities and inhabitants of the territories under their dominion with the use of force. According to reports, they imposed exemplary punishments to citizens who did not accomplish their rules¹³⁷.

One of their most common practices was to murder their enemies or who disobeyed their orders, to then launch their bodies through a garbage downpipe from the highest part of the mountain, which ended in one side of El Paraiso highway.

The criminal group has been characterized by the use of extreme violence against public force officials. Besides murdering a great quantity of policemen in Caracas, they also chase and murder their relatives. In 2016 they murdered the son of a police officer when he was visiting family in El Cementerio, then they burnt the body. They also caused the displacement of more than a dozen of policemen who lived in “their territories”¹³⁸.

Recruitment methods

The forced recruitment of youngsters and the death of residents in the midst of shootings¹³⁹ is another of the consequences of the criminal group spread in southwest Caracas.

“El Koki” mega-band formed his army with young people who live in the neighborhoods where they operate. At first, they were not too selective with their members but as the band

grew up and expanded, they started applying filters and controls to sum up to their group persons considered loyal and useful.

To reach this goal, the armed group does follow up to the poorest teenagers and young people to then come close and offer them to solve all their economic lacks if they join the organization¹⁴⁰.

Recruitments include children from 10 to 12 years old, warns a Cecodap investigation. Another way of recruitment identified by the NGO is through meetings coordinated by a woman offering them dollars, shoes, brand clothing and food bags for their families if they joined the band¹⁴¹.

Role of women

In “el Koki” mega-band there is active participation of women. The investigation made by Cecodap NGO indicates that there are women in the scale of “drug dealers”¹⁴². Usually, they are ordered to deliver drugs outside the community. Others belong to the “watchmen” division, as evidenced in the leak of some photographs of a young woman with the nickname of “La Peluda”¹⁴³. They are also in charge of reuniting and recruiting adolescents and youngsters¹⁴⁴.

137 Rísquez, R. Runrunes. (2022). “Perfil | El Koki creció alimentado por políticas erradas de seguridad”. February 09th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/466528/perfil-el-koki-crecio-alimentado-por-politicas-erradas-de-seguridad/>

138 Ídem.

139 El Diario. “Deisy Rivas, la mujer que murió por una bala perdida del tiroteo en la Cota 905”. March 20th, 2021. Published in: <https://eldiario.com/2021/03/20/deisy-rivas-murio-por-una-bala-perdida-tiroteo-en-la-cota-905/>

140 Cecodap. (2022). “Esclavizar para delinquir: De mandadero a malandro”. March 30th. Available in: <https://esclavizarparadelinquir.cecodap.org/demandaderoamalandro/>

141 Ídem.

142 Ídem.

143 Twitter. Lysaura Fuentes account. Events journalist in Caracas. July 20th, 2021. Published in: https://twitter.com/lysaurafuentes/status/141751975783063143?s=20&t=arE_gn8uT2avul4hvWw6Qw

144 Cecodap. (2022). “Esclavizar para delinquir: De mandadero a malandro”. March 30th. Available in: <https://esclavizarparadelinquir.cecodap.org/demandaderoamalandro/>



3.9. CUADRILLAS DE PAZ, RED ELCO Y FUERZAS ESPECIALES CÍVICO MILITARES PATRIA NUEVA (PEACE CREWS, ELCO NETWORK AND PATRIA NUEVA CIVIC-MILITARY SPECIAL FORCES)

LEADERS

Cupaz:

José Castillo in Lara state; José Harris and Yonathan Gil in Portuguesa and Edgar Zavarce in Yaracuy.

Red Elco:

Richard Escalona and Dixay Cáceres.

Fecmpn:

Jean Carlos Agüero, alias "Chavecito".

NUMBER OF MEMBERS



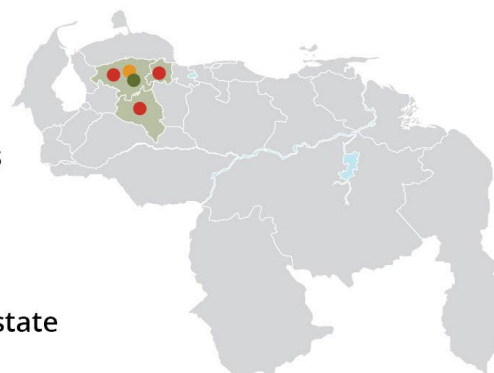
between
and
250 and **300**
in Lara state

100

between
and
25 and **50**

between
and
25 and **50**

OPERATING AREAS



- **Cupaz:** Lara, Portuguesa and Yaracuy states
- **Red Elco:** Iribarren and Palavecino municipalities of Lara state
- **Fecmpn:** Iribarren municipality of Lara state

History

Collectives in Venezuela were born as social, communitarian or student organizations, but their objectives diversified, according to the Venezuelan Program of Education Action in Human Rights (Provea). "Now they control territories to impose their authority, defend political parcels and act outside the law: they extortion, kidnap and charge tolls"¹⁴⁵.

In Lara, Portuguesa and Yaracuy states, located at the occident of Venezuela, these groups have had a more political and of revolutionary defense role. They participate in mobilizing officialism voters, they exercise repression in anti-government protests and exercise control over distribution of subsidized food with the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP)¹⁴⁶ and delivery of gas¹⁴⁷ cylinders for cooking. More recently they administrate the sale of gasoline in service stations¹⁴⁸.

145 Provea. (2019). "Colectivos se fortalecen con la anuencia del Estado". April 02nd. Available in: <https://provea.org/paramilitarismo/colectivos-se-fortalecen-con-la-ausencia-del-estado/>

146 Uzcátegui, A. La Prensa de Lara. (2021). "Control social somete por el estómago a los más vulnerables". September 03rd. Available in: <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/35915/2021/09/control-social-somete-por-el-estomago-a-los-mas-vulnerables>

147 Instagram cupazlara4f. Cupaz account in Lara. March 25th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CM2F4XFBqXW/?utm_medium=copy_link

148 Instagram cupazportuguesa2021. Cupaz account in Portuguesa. April 22nd, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CN91ofGpTbZ/?utm_medium=copy_link



In the past, this kind of organization fomented properties or asset invasions in cities or rural lands¹⁴⁹.

That is the case of the Revolutionary Front of Invaders and Occupants (FRIO) in Barquisimeto, an armed group led by Carlos Sieveres, who gained relevance since 2010 in the illegal taking of several houses and buildings, some of them declared cultural and architectural patrimony¹⁵⁰.

Later, other collectives grabbed headlines for the incursion in different crimes. In March 2019 a civilian identified as José Gustavo Montilla was detained for robbery of a telephone, he carried a credential of Collective Alí Primera 4F of Barquisimeto, that allegedly “authorizes the carry of weapons if homeland requires it”. In April that same year, four men linked to the Revolutionary Network of Resistance – union of collectives from Barquisimeto- were arrested after impersonating officials of the Special Actions Forces (FAES)¹⁵¹. At least three of them would have participated in the attack to a demonstration summoned by civil society at the gates of Central Hospital Antonio María Pineda of Barquisimeto during the visit of a delegation sent by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet¹⁵². In that occasion an Ipad was robbed to a reporter and the electronic device was hidden in Iribarren Majority, according to the geolocation made by the owner.

In February 2020, these same groups, with support from State security corps, councilors and municipal officials from Iribarren, acted on the attack to a march convened by Juan Guaidó in a popular sector of west Barquisimeto¹⁵³.

In January 2021, men with FAES uniforms were implied in a robbery and two murderings in the Lara state capital. The police investigation determined that the responsible belonged to pro-government collectives¹⁵⁴.

Cuadrillas de Paz or Peace Squads (Cupaz)



In March 2019, the leader Nicolás Maduro ordered in national transmission the creation of the Peace Defender Squads, lately called (Cupaz)¹⁵⁵.

149 Seijas, C. Tal Cual. (2020). “Colectivos rurales roban cosechas y amenazan con invadir fincas en Portuguesa”. April 01st. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/colectivos-rurales-roban-cosechas-y-amenazan-con-invadir-fincas-en-portuguesa/>

150 Reportero24. (2011). “El grupo FRIO se autodenomina defensor de invasores”. May 20th. Available in: <https://reportero24.com/2011/05/20/lara-el-grupo-frio-se-autodenomina-defensor-de-ocupantes/>

151 El Pitazo. (2019). “Trece colectivos de Lara están implicados en escándalos y detenciones”. May 26th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/reportajes/trece-colectivos-de-lara-estan-implicados-en-escandalos-y-detenciones/>

152 Espacio Público. (2019). “Impiden cobertura periodística a la misión de la ONU En Lara”. March 21st. Available in: <https://espaciopublico.org/impiden-cobertura-periodistica-a-la-mision-de-la-onu-en-lara/amp/>

153 El Pitazo. (2020). “Las contradicciones del oficialismo sobre el ataque a la marcha de Guaidó”. March 05th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/politica/las-contradicciones-del-oficialismo-sobre-el-ataque-a-la-marcha-de-guaido/>

154 Gascón, L. El Pitazo. (2021). “Hombres con indumentaria de las Faes cometieron un robo y dos asesinatos”. January 22nd. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/lara-hombres-con-indumentaria-de-las-faes-cometieron-un-robo-y-dos-asesinatos/>

155 PSUV. (2019). “Cuadrillas Defensoras de la Paz: Máxima organización del pueblo en el territorio”. April 03rd. Available in: <http://www.psuw.org.ve/portada/cuadrillas-paz-defensa-patria-chavez-preparacion-formacion-estructura-psuv/>



At that moment, he nominated the governor of Yaracuy, Julio León Heredia, as the coordinator of that instance. Civilians and recruited of the Bolivarian Militia participated in exercises made in that state under the supervision of Diosdado Cabello, vice-president of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and Carmen Meléndez, who was governor of Lara for that date¹⁵⁶.

Further, the government gave uniforms to the organization members, with hats and Cupaz suits. The groups initiated operations in Lara and Portuguesa at beginnings of 2021, opened owned quarters and created social media profiles to disseminate their procedures¹⁵⁷.

Even though Yaracuy was the pilot state for conformation of Cupaz, the deployment of its members on that entity is only evidenced in electoral campaigns, voting days, political acts or when they confront and dissolve protests, explained two sources consulted for this report.

“Since 2021 these have been functioning with a low profile. It is common to see a group of 30 motorized giving bags of food or in charge of logistics for a social act, but they procure not to be so visible”, agreed a journalist and a defender of human rights in Yaracuy interviewed for this report.

Instead, in Portuguesa and Lara the organization is in charge of gasoline distribution in service stations¹⁵⁸; it does cleaning and maintenance jobs in public spaces, schools and health centers¹⁵⁹; it does security organisms functions and has participation in meetings of the Operational Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI) of each entity¹⁶⁰. Likewise, Cupaz give helps to pay medical studies and donate treatments.

In Portuguesa, Cupaz are described as intimidation forces in service stations, according to denounces made by inhabitants of the entity. In Morán, a foreigner municipality of Lara, they sanction with communitarian work to people who litter on streets or sidewalks.

The Elco Network is in Lara and operates since April 2021 as an “organization pro-citizen security” that links communities and communal councils with security corps and politic authorities. The organization assures that their objective is to train, update and inform high level professionals in matters of security and integral prevention.

Its quarters are located in calle 40 entre carreras 29 and 30, at the center of Barquisimeto. Since the operations initiated, they have spread photos of their participation in National Bolivarian Police (PNB) operations and visits to commands of the National Bolivarian Guard (GNB) in Ana Soto Parish of Barquisimeto¹⁶¹.

156 Twitter @gestionperfecta. Account of Carmen Meléndez, ex-governor of Lara state. March 29th 2019. Available in: https://twitter.com/gestionperfecta/status/1111693385943994368?t=QoQbBZzcFOXUFwBU4r_uA&s=19

157 Instagram cupazlara4f. Cupaz account in Lara. May 20th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CMqa9P-Bvnl/?utm_medium=copy_link

158 Instagram cupazlara4f. Cupaz account in Lara. March 07th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CMlGYflnu1O/?utm_medium=copy_link

159 Instagram acaldiadeguanare. January 13th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ_82g4nioD/?utm_medium=copy_link

160 Facebook Cupaz Barquisimeto, Lara state. June 09th, 2021. Available in: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=316180553314359&id=100047672496043

161 Instagram red_elco. Red Elco account. October 29th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ0t0rCh0Zi/?utm_medium=copy_link



On Instagram, this group is followed by several public institutions, including Minas Lara, the state coordination of Peace Squads, the Area of Integral Defense 132 of the Bolivarian Militia, the National Service for Disarm (Senades) and Public Defense of Lara.

Fuerzas Especiales Cívico Militares Patria Nueva or Patria Nueva Civic Military Special Forces (Fecmpn) also have been visible since beginnings of 2021, but their commander, Jean Carlos Agüero, alias “Chavecito”, has been working for several years as officialism collective. When scarcity of gas worsened in Lara, the group tried to control several service stations in downtown and west city, and they also implemented a system to supply gas¹⁶².



Even though its members assured they were doing joint labors with GNB to avoid re-sale of quotas and corruption in lines¹⁶³, users denounced that a black market just formed. Collectives allegedly charged USD 20 to pass the drivers to the pump without making the line; they also re-sold the so-called dollarized gas (fixed in USD 0,5 per liter) and the subsidized (USD 0,023) in USD 1 per liter.

Several dependencies in Lara governorship follow social media administrated by Agüero: Minas Lara, the Regional Women's Institute (IRE), the Lara State Sports Institute, Agrolara, the Barquisimeto International Airport and the Commissioners for the Defense of Socioeconomic Rights (Codese) – in charge of supervising and control the sale of gasoline in subsidized or premium gas stations–.

The organization has its quarters in Fuerzas Armadas avenue of Barquisimeto and takes care of donating institutional use medicines, distributed by the Health Secretary to chronic patients¹⁶⁴.

162 Instagram chavecitoespatrianueva. Fuerzas Especiales Cívico Militares Patria Nueva account. September 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CUWW5r6oZFt/?utm_medium=copy_link

163 Facebook Cupaz Barquisimeto, Lara state. June 09th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CUoGwpPI8xF/?utm_medium=copy_link

164 Twitter @ChavecitoL. Libertad para Chavecito account. December 22nd, 2021. Available in: <https://twitter.com/ChavecitoL/status/1473835451597443073?t=MmX9xldjmYV25MqUe1ukQw&s=19>



Structure and leaders

IN LARA



**JOSÉ GREGORIO
CASTILLO JUÁREZ**

Commander

IN PORTUGUESA



JOSÉ HARRIS

Commander



YONATHAN GIL

Second in command
of the organization

IN YARACUY

In Yaracuy, unlike the rest of states, Cupaz acting is more reserved. It does not have owned quarters, nor a known structure, but it is related to Edgar Zavarce, official from San Felipe Mayoralty, who is allegedly leader of clash groups operating in the entity.

ELCO NETWORK

This group is led by Richard Escalona and Dixay Cáceres



RICHARD ESCALONA



DIXAY CÁCERES

FECMPN

The organization is led by Jean Carlos Agüero



JEAN CARLOS AGÜERO

Cupaz

The hierarchic structure of the organization in each state is headed by a commander, followed by municipal coordinators. The members are distributed in committees (surveillance, social work, gas supply). Persons authorized to assist gas stations are the closest to the organization's leaders, a journalist consulted for this investigation said. In Portuguesa case, there is another division

known as the Tactic Squad of Urban Combat (CTCU).

José Gregorio Castillo Juárez, is the commander of Cupaz in Lara¹⁶⁵. He comes from the lines of Collective Alí Primera 4F, whose operations center is located in Alí Primera neighborhood, a group of 4.032 apartments built by the Great Mission Housing Venezuela, an officialism program. The regional quarter of Cupaz is also found inside this habitational complex¹⁶⁶.

165 Instagram cupazlara4f. Cupaz Lara account. August 17th 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CSs1e3zNFSS/?utm_medium=copy_link

166 Instagram cupazlara4f. Cupaz Lara account. March 20th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CMqa9P-Bvnl/?utm_medium=copy_link



At the end of 2020, Castillo threatened with retracting protests on lack of basic services in the entity on a video in which he appears next to several hooded individuals. “If you get out to the streets to ‘guarimbear’, collective 4F will find you. Country or death. ¡We shall prevail! Affirms Castillo in the recording¹⁶⁷.”

José Harris, is the commander of Cupaz in Portuguesa. He is leader of PSUV, Deputy to the Legislative Council of the state and president of the Permanent Commission of Communal Development in that instance.

Yonathan Gil, is the second in charge of the organization in Portuguesa. He is PSUV leader in Páez municipality. In July 2012 he got an arrest order for the crime of qualified intentional murder in frustration degree. In 2014, he got domiciliary arrest and two years later he was released of his charges under the regime of presentation, according to records on file 7284-17 according to Portuguesa State Judicial District.

In Yaracuy, unlike the rest of states, the acting of Cupaz is more reserved. They do not have owned quarters or known structure.

Elco Network

This group is led by **Richard Escalona** and **Dixay Cáceres**¹⁶⁸. Escalona is a professor graduated from Experimental Pedagogic University Libertador (Upel) in Lara. He was leader of PSUV youth and coordinator of collectives linked to political managers such as the ex-governor of the entity Luis Reyes Reyes and the Major of Iribarren, Luis Jonás Reyes. Escalona is also linked to Diosdado Cabello.

On the other hand, Cáceres was elected as deputy of Legislative Council in Lara state (CLEL) in November 2021. She takes part of the PSUV Agitation, Propaganda and Communications commission (APC) in Iribarren municipality. She is pointed of proportioning information to the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and the Special Action Forces (FAES) for their incursions in popular sectors of Barquisimeto, indicated a source interviewed.

Fecmpn

The organization is led by Jean **Carlos Agüero**, who refers to himself as the “Chavecito” of Lara. He usually dresses a red beret and military uniform to emulate Chávez. Agüero polished shoes in Bolívar square of Barquisimeto and lived on the streets.

In 2018, he directed the invasion of a building in construction on carrera 18 with calle 31 of the city. “Chavecito” is pointed for coordinating more invasions in downtown city.

On the regional elections in 2021, Agüero was candidate to deputy of CLEL by the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV).

The Body of Scientific, Judicial and Criminalistic Investigations (Cicpc) detained “Chavecito” in December of that same year for a robbery¹⁶⁹. According to the police minute, Agüero entered on a Cicp detective house, in south Barquisimeto, with more than 30 armed civilians with AK103 fusils, M12 shotguns, 9MM pistols and explosives. The armed group subdued the officer and his relatives, including a baby and spread them with gasoline while they were taking the victims belongings.

167 Gascón, L. El Pitazo. (2020). “Lara | Colectivo 4F amenaza con replegar protestas en Barquisimeto”. October 01st. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/lara-colectivo-4f-amenaza-con-replegar-protestas-en-barquisimeto/>

168 Instagram red_elco. Red Elco account. October 23rd, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CVYyOYgs63z/?utm_medium=copy_link

169 Gascón, L. El Pitazo. (2021). “Lara | Cicpc detiene a colectivo señalado de robar la casa de un funcionario”. December 07th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/lara-cicpc-detiene-a-colectivo-senalado-de-robar-la-casa-de-un-funcionario/>



Agüero was accused of crimes of homicide in frustration degree, illegitimate privation of liberty, explosive detonation, illicit carrying of weapons and association to commit a crime. Since December he is incarcerated in a Cicpc quarter.

Yesica Arroyo and Génesis Hernández are leading the collective after Agüero's detention¹⁷⁰.

They both created a social media account to plead for "Chavecito" liberation and continue with the delivery of medicines to chronic patients donated by the Governorship of Lara.

Illegal economies and crimes



Gasoline smuggling



Corruption



Invasion to private property

Gasoline smuggling

Members of Peace Squads have been pointed of re-selling subsidized gas and charge drivers to avoid them passing too much time on lines. "I have paid them USD 20 for 40 liters of gasoline in a subsidized service station to avoid lines", said a resident of Acarigua interviewed for this report.

In Portuguesa, members of Cupaz created a register of motorized in municipalities Páez and San Rafael de Onoto, to sell them gasoline with more regularity than the established by the governorship of the state in its Combustor system (whose frequency can be monthly). It means, motorized registered on the Cupaz system can purchase gasoline once a week. In exchange to this privilege, motorized must give out some liters of the gas acquired. This gas is emptied in barrels by the members of collective and then auctioned in public raffles.

On the service stations at the edge of José Antonio Páez highway, the Cupaz have quotas

to purchase certain quantity of gas. These quotas are sold in dollars to persons who are not from Portuguesa state and must use that way.

Fecmpn collective has also incurred in sale of gas line spots. In Barquisimeto service stations, this group was in charge of organizing lines and moving out drivers at night, even with threatening, to make sure the first spots were available the next day.

"Chavecito" started doing it in 2020 and then kept doing it with other members of his group the following year, due to gas scarcity. The collective also enjoys preferential access in stations only by carrying their camouflage uniform and a credential.

Both organizations offered direct pass to suppliers in the own service stations or through Whatsapp, they generally contacted referred persons by other drivers spotted in lines. Two members of the Peace Squads, identified as Markius Montilla and Jorge

170 El Informador. (2021). "Allegados del "Chavecito": Buscan inculparlo en hechos y delitos que no ha cometido". December 10th. Available in: <https://www.elinformadorve.com/sucesos/allegados-del-chavecito-buscan-inculparlo-en-hechos-y-delitos-que-no-ha-cometido/>



Luis Aroa Arriechi, were arrested in Araure, Portuguesa state, in June 2021, for extraction and smuggling of diesel from a service station. These persons would act in complicity with a captain of Armed Forces and the owner of the establishment¹⁷¹.

Extortion

Jean Carlos Agüero, alias “Chavecito” is pointed for charging “vacunas” to small merchants of center Barquisimeto and the families who live in invasions coordinated by the group, but there is no information about the amounts negotiated.

Invasion

Alias “Chavecito” allegedly had control of an unfinished building in a central zone of the Lara capital and from there he watched other abandoned properties in the area.

Fire power

The Patria Nueva Civic Military Special Forces (Fecmpn) have large weapons such as AK 103 rifles, M12 shotguns, 9MM pistols and grenades. The CUPAZ have access to official use arms in practices and military exercises and use radio transistors in their deployments, but it is unknown if they have these weapons to their entire disposition.

About the Elco Network, there is no information available of their fire power, even though the usually go to procedures of PNB divisions.

Use of violence

There is evidence about the use of weapons, official vehicles and public institutions from the collectives to dissuade social or politic

protests. These groups are pointed of mobilizing electors under threat to favor PSUV candidates.

There are denounces in Lara about the participation of collectives in FAES operations, also with other divisions of PNB. In communities, there is also repression of protests for water, natural gas or electricity.

Recruitment methods

The Cupaz recruit military from PSUV and beneficiaries of missions or government social programs from Nicolás Maduro. It is mandatory to be inscribed in PSUV to belong to the organization. Motorized are usually the main objective of Cupaz. At least in Portuguesa, they have come to raffle liters of gasoline and offer new motorcycles for sale in order to attract people. The access to subsidized service stations is another way to attract members, both in Portuguesa and Lara.

The Fecmpn collective took for their lines families that live in properties invaded by alias “Chavecito” and does approaches to individuals who receive donations of medicines from this group.

Role of women

On the three organizations participate men and women. In Lara, the Peace Squads have a women’s division and in Portuguesa women have a participation in different committees.

In The Elco Network, the second in command of the organization is a woman, Dixay Cáceres. While the collective of “Chavecito” is led by two women since ends of 2021.

171 Villavicencio, M. Última Hora Digital. (2021). “Aumentan detenciones en Portuguesa por extracción ilegal y contrabando de combustible”. June 26th. Available in: <http://diarioultimahoradigital.com.ve/2021/06/26/aumentan-detenciones-en-portuguesa-por-extraccion-ilegal-y-contrabando-de-combustible/>



3.10. GRUPO ARMADO YEICO MASACRE (YEICO MASACRE ARMED GROUP)

LEADERS

Erick Alberto Parra Mendoza, alias “Yeico Masacre”

OPERATING AREAS



Santa Rita, Cabimas and Miranda municipalities of Zulia state



150
NUMBER OF MEMBERS

History

The oil richness and strategic location of Zulia state, with frontiers with Colombia and the Gulf of Venezuela, for years have attracted guerrilla groups, paramilitary, mega-bands and other criminal organizations that use the entity as a corridor for drug traffic and smuggling¹⁷².

The band of Erick Alberto Parra Mendoza, alias “Yeico Masacre” is one of those criminal groups. It operates on the Oriental Coast of Maracaibo Lake, a subregion formed by seven of twenty-one Zulia municipalities.

This group has occupied press titles in Venezuela and Colombia for its violent actions in the last three years, even though their members have been in crime for more time. “Yeico Masacre” became known in the criminal scene when he was security chief of a family clan named Los Meleán, but in 2019 he opted for independence.

Yeico Masacre tried to keep control of the band Los Meleán after the arrest of the group’s head, Tirso Meleán, at that moment a rivalry originated, which forced him to walk away.

With the aim to defeat los Meleán, between 2020 and 2021, “Yeico Masacre” allied with another band or family clan named Los Leal. This vendetta left more than 30 deaths in eight Colombian cities, according to official reports¹⁷³.

The “Yeico Masacre” band dedicates to extortion, hired gunmen, drug micro-traffic and sexual exploitation of migrants, according to Colombian organisms that have identified cells of this group in at least seven cities of that country: Barranquilla, Valledupar, Santa Marta, Riohacha, Ibagué, Soacha and Bogotá, published Runrunes¹⁷⁴. For that reason, it is considered a binational band.

172 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). “Corrupción y crimen en las regiones: estados sin ley”. Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/corruptcion-y-crimen-en-las-regiones/>

173 El Pitazo. (2021). “Quién es Yeico Masacre, uno de los 10 delincuentes más buscados de Venezuela”. November 19th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/quien-es-yeico-masacre-uno-de-los-10-delincuentes-mas-buscados-de-venezuela/>

174 Rísquez, R y otros. Runrunes. (2021). “#NegociosCarcelarios: Escombros del retén de Cabimas sepultan años de control de los pranes”. October 29th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/r-r-es-plus/458582/negocioscarcelarios-escombros-del-reten-de-cabimas-sepultan-anos-de-control-de-los-pranes/>



"YEICO MASACRE", IS A FORMER OFFICER OF THE NATIONAL BOLIVARIAN GUARD. PHOTO: DIARIO SUSPENSO

"Yeico Masacre" financed Yorman Rosendo Coronado, alias "Yormita" and José Gregorio Gavidia, alias "Chiveco", two of four pranes in the Center of Preventive Arrests and Detentions at the Oriental Coast of Maracaibo Lake, also known as Cabimas reclusion center. These men used the detention center as operations base to coordinate extortions and other criminal activities¹⁷⁵.

"The reclusion center was controlled by four inmates, one for each pavilion, who responded to powerful criminal organizations of the state. It stayed that way for almost four years, since 2017 when Omar Prieto assumed governorship of Zulia state till October 2021, a month before the regional elections for the next period", adds the media¹⁷⁶.

Precisely in 2021 ended up the alliance between Yeico Masacre and Los Leal clan.

Between January and November 2021, authorities reported the arrest of fifteen members of "Yeico Masacre" band, who were located in five places of the Oriental Coast of the Lake¹⁷⁷.

175 Ídem.

176 Ídem.

177 El Pitazo. (2021). "Quién es Yeico Masacre, uno de los 10 delincuentes más buscados de Venezuela". November 19th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/quien-es-yeico-masacre-uno-de-los-10-delincuentes-mas-buscados-de-venezuela/>

178 Facebook Noticias Venezuela en Contacto. (2022). "Desmantelan campamento de Yeico Masacre". March 05th. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/100064101330641/posts/331958495617526/?app=fbl>

179 Facebook Notibocono. (2022). "Conas no le da tregua a la delincuencia". March 16th. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/224491336216268/posts/358422559489811/?app=fbl>

180 El Pitazo. (2021). "Quién es Yeico Masacre, uno de los 10 delincuentes más buscados de Venezuela". November 19th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/quien-es-yeico-masacre-uno-de-los-10-delincuentes-mas-buscados-de-venezuela/>

181 Ídem.

In March 2022, commissions of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) murdered Alberto Araujo, a member of a band called "El Ñeño"¹⁷⁸ and arrested three members in two procedures effected in Miranda municipality of Zulia state¹⁷⁹.

Structure and leaders

Erick Alberto Parra Mendoza, is the name of the band's leader, but he became known as alias "Yeico Masacre", the same name used for the criminal organization. Parra Mendoza belonged to the National Bolivarian Guard (GNB) lines in 2015 and two years later he became security chief of Los Meleán¹⁸⁰ band.

"Yeico Masacre" is 29 years old, leads a criminal organization that generates incomes with drug traffic, extortion, kidnapping and gunman shots, with presence in Santa Rita, Cabimas and Miranda, three of the seven municipalities forming the Oriental Coast of the Lake, Zulia state, at the occident of Venezuela. Since 2018 it extended its operations to Colombia, Ecuador and Chile.

According to local authorities, Parra Mendoza ran away to Chile in order to avoid his capture in Venezuela or Colombia. Police sources have revealed to El Pitazo that he could be moving between Colombia and Ecuador¹⁸¹.

"Yeico Masacre" is on the list of the most wanted criminals made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Justice and Peace of Venezuela, due to robbery, homicide, gunmen shootings and forced disappearance. Likewise, he has a red alert on Interpol. On the circular sent, he is requested for robbery



of vehicles and is described as “armed, dangerous, propense to evasion and violent”, highlights El Pitazo.

In 2018, he was blamed for the kidnapping of Ana Isabel Soto, mother of baseball player Elías Díaz, from Pittsburgh Pirates; the murdering of Benito Cobis Director of Intelligence and Preventive Strategies (DIEP) of Zulia police, together with his escorts;

and several attacks with grenades, adds El Pitazo.

Parra has at least 150 men on the band. Jesús Ignacio Betancourt Pimentel, alias “Huérfano Masacre”, is one of the five heads of the group, according to reports of National Command Anti-extortion and Kidnappings (Conas) cited by the local press¹⁸². The group’s structure is not clear.

Illegal economies and crimes



Drug traffic



Gasoline smuggling



Corruption on ports



Extortion

Drug smuggling

“Yeico Masacre” is associated with drug micro-traffic operations in Santa Rita. In this municipality, they accuse Parra of depopulating communities with access to the Lake of Maracaibo in order to exercise a ferreous control over the entry and exit of drug in fishing boats. In Colombia, the band has also been pointed for micro-traffic.

Gasoline smuggling

Since 2020, in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, scarcity of gas in Venezuela aggravated, and gas smuggling through La Guajira inverted. Instead of taking gas out of the country towards Colombia, it started to enter cars and trucks loaded with gas

from Colombia to Venezuela, explained a social leader from Paraguaipoa. “The pass of sixteen-wheel trucks at three in the morning became frequent, custodied by military. Even though we don’t know who is the owner of that business.

In May 2021, Prieto assumed absolute control of gas distribution in the state with the argument of fighting mafias and deviation of loads. This way, he had the faculty to decide which service stations would receive dispatches of gasoline at subsidized price or dollarized price¹⁸³.

One month before this measure, Prieto assumed control of several service stations due to denounces of bribery and irregularities in which officials from San Francisco¹⁸⁴ police were implied.

182 US Department of the Treasury. (2019). “Treasury Sanctions Governors of Venezuelan States Aligned with Maduro”. February 25th. Available in: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm616>

183 Twitter @Omar_PrietoPSUV. Exgovernor of Zulia state, Omar Prieto account. May 12th, 2021. Available in: https://twitter.com/Omar_PrietoPSUV/status/1392476916297474049?t=FKMDMjSkaGHW-bY7j3c2HA&s=19

184 Tal Cual. (2021) “Gobernación del Zulia se apropió de seis estaciones de servicio”. April 14th. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/gobernacion-del-zulia-se-hizo-de-seis-estaciones-de-servicio/>



Corruption on ports

In 2018, governor Omar Prieto assumed the re-activation of Maracaibo Port. On the Oriental Coast of Maracaibo Lake, a Pdvsa drilling tower was dismantled, located in Transcoal decks, in San Francisco municipality.

It was not possible to obtain further information regarding port management.

Extortion

The “Yeico Masacre” band obtains the most profit through extortions or charge of “vacunas” to merchants. The amounts variate according to purchase power of each victim, and go from USD 5.000 to USD 15.000 per month, explained a merchant from Santa Rita interviewed for this report.

At Cicpc there are reports of charges that overpass USD 50.000. According to sources from this organism, the criminal group usually contacts victims through Whatsapp using Colombian telephone lines.

Parra Mendoza sends videos and messages with threats to merchants or businessmen to force them. If they ignore him, he orders attacks with grenades to their stores or properties.

Criminal alliances

Alias “Yeico Masacre” allied with Los Leal group to attack a common enemy: Los Meleán band. But this alliance would have dissolved in 2021, according to Cicpc.

While the alliance was kept, they took advantage of some alleged links with power held by Los Leal. Some officers from the Municipal police of San Francisco, also called Polisur, have been arrested transporting drugs¹⁸⁵ or in extortions.

A source from Cicpc explained that in 2021 detained a high rank official from the Municipal Police of San Francisco who was the connection with Guillermo Boscán, alias “Yiyi”, another powerful band operating in Zulia state for extortions.



Fire power

“Yeico Masacre” has fragmentation grenades, rifles and pistols modified for shot repetitions. A Runrunes investigation details that in November 2020 Cicpc captured an officer from that body and another from state police “for supplying explosives, fire weapons and munitions of different caliber to members of “Yeico Masacre”¹⁸⁶ band.

In March 2022, the Anti-extortion and Kidnapping Group (GAES) and the Unit against Terrorism of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) in Cabimas municipality, seized radio transmitters and high displacement motorcycles to the band, besides a FAL, according to local media¹⁸⁷.

185 Versión Final. (2018). “Supervisor jefe de la Policía Bolivariana del Estado Zulia (Cpbez) lideraba banda de narcotraficantes”. October 30th. Available in: <https://www.aporrea.org/contraloria/n333611.html>

186 Runrunes. “#NegociosCarcelarios: Escombros del retén de Cabimas sepultan años de control de los pranes”. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/458582/negocioscarcelarios-escombros-del-reten-de-cabimas-sepultan-anos-de-control-de-los-pranes/+&cd=2&hl=es-419&ct=clnk&gl=ve&client=firefox-b-d>

187 Facebook Madrugador Valera. Madrugador Valera news portal page. March 7th, 2022. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/100051292897962/posts/498253801894379/?app=fbl>



In that operation, they also seized anti-bullet vests, camouflaged uniforms and badges with the initials G.A.Y.M. These initials correspond to the “Armed Group Yeico Masacre” according to the minute cited by communications media. The organization marks its arms with skulls to identify themselves.

The police handles account adjustment as motive between bands dedicated to drug traffic¹⁸⁸.

The criminal organization moves between Venezuela and Colombia, a tendency followed by several criminal groups moving with the Venezuelan diaspora to convert migrants in their first victims, through the use of violence.

Use of violence

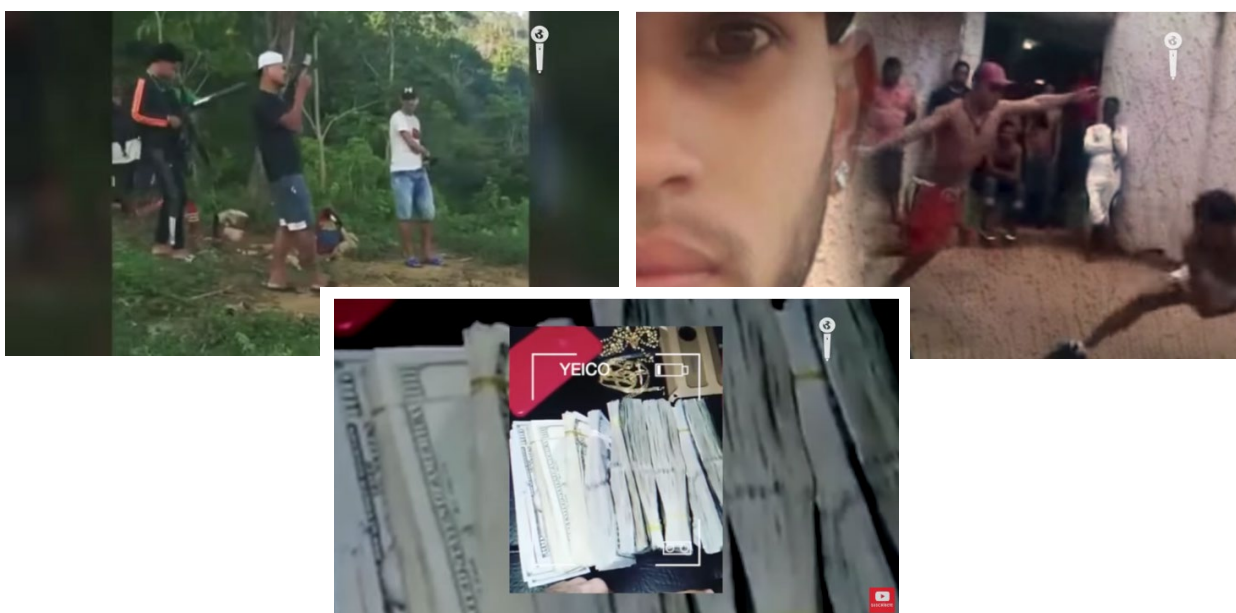
The “Yeico Masacre” band perpetrates kidnappings, assassinations and attacks with explosives to intimidate extortion victims and force them to pay, according to police investigations.

The recording of murderings is a common practice for this organization, as well as spread of threats through social media.

Parra’s band is blamed for killing three guajiro men in Maicao in March 2022. “This is from Yeico Masacre”, says one of the killers in a video spread in social media.

Recruitment methods

Security forces and unions from the Oriental Coast of the Lake denounce that criminal organizations operating in the region usually arm youngsters from 15 years old, to replenish their lines. An inhabitant from Santa Rita explained that “Yeico Masacre” group recruits known adolescents or relatives of other band members, Parra offers payments of USD 1.000 to whom perpetrate a murder and record the action, according to videos spread in social media by the own leader¹⁸⁹.



188 El Pregonar. “VIDEO | Sicario grabó asesinato de indígena wayuu en masacre ocurrida en Maicao”. March 2nd, 2022. Available in: <https://web.elpregonar.co/video-si%c6%88ario-grabo-as%2d1%94si%ce%b7ato-de-indigena-wayuu-en-%c9%b1asa%c6%88re-ocurrida-en-maicao/>

189 YouTube Impacto Mundo. (2022). “Yeico Masacre: el criminal más cruel que el KOKI y que opera en Colombia”. March 18th. Available in: <https://youtu.be/qwqxvQmhlmU>



THE BAND OF "YEICO MASACRE" HAS UNIFORMS AND INSIGNIAS WITH THE LEADER ACRONYM. PHOTO: NOTICIAS24 CARABOBO

Role of women

Criminal bands in Zulia state normally follow a pattern: they use women as bait to get close to victims and analyze their routines.

This way, they identify the family and labor core and locate properties and businesses of possible extortion victims: merchants, businessmen, contractors or cattle owners, explained two sources from Cicpc and company labor unions of the Oriental Coast of the Lake.

In the case of "Yeico Masacre" group, Conas has evidenced participation of women in both environments. The security corp sustains that the criminal band supports on women to get means of transport, food, arms and munitions or refugees¹⁹⁰. Two women belonging to the band were arrested in 2021 and 2022 for their participation in charge of "vacunas" and kidnappings whose rescues are worth USD 80.000 and USD 200.000, according to press notes.

190 Facebook Madrugador Valera news portal. (2022) "Conas captura a dos mujeres integrantes de los Tancol Yeico Masacre". March 07th. Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/100051292897962/posts/498253801894379/?app=fbl>



3.11. SINDICATO DE BARRANCAS (BARRANCAS LABOR UNION)

LEADERS

16 leaders

There are no names, only aliases:
Valencia, Tabaco, Glendys Álvarez,
Mario, Lucho, Candelario, Morris,
Samuel, Piri, Brayan, Machu, Josías,
Miguelito, Goris, Gabrielito
"El Patuleco" and El Mocho



300
NUMBER
OF MEMBERS

OPERATING AREAS



History

Barrancas labor union started operating as a syndicate group defending workers of Guayana basic companies, such as Ferrominera, Sidor or Proforca, in Bolívar state, and workers from Barrancas majority, Sotillo municipality, south Monagas. Insiders on the matter assure that when declination of these industries started, the group began to exercise armed control. The criminal organization has been operating for more than 10 years and is formed by more than 300 men.

The Barrancas labor Union operated silently till 2016, when it started confronting another band led by alias "El Piojo", to keep the drugs, gas, persons and food traffic route. In the search for a leader to this organization, their members and relatives were killed in a highly cruel bloody way.

The deaths unleashed a war between both organizations, but the union ended up displacing "El Piojo" band, who at that moment controlled Barrancas del Orinoco.

After "El Piojo" was dethroned, the Union completely took control of their route and settled in Barrancas del Orinoco, where they imposed a criminal governance which allowed them to exercise control over its citizens.

Barrancas del Orinoco is a fishing and cattle area. But to be able to work there every producer must pay a "vacuna" to the Union, affirmed an investigator about violence subjects on the region.

The organization kept expanding and in 2019, after the death of "El Evander", the head of that criminal band in an alleged confrontation with security corps, Barrancas Labor Union passed to take control of Orinoco River. Some members of the "El Evander" band joined Barrancas Union and others migrated to Trinidad and Tobago.

In Barrancas del Orinoco, the Union is also known as "The System". In that town they created the foundation Hermanos Álvarez, through which they do social work. They paint town, changed the name of a square and in August they opened a sports court¹⁹¹.

191 El Bolivariano. (2021). "Inauguran espacios deportivos en Barrancas". August 23rd. Available in: <https://elbolivariano.com.ve/2021/08/23/inauguran-espacios-deportivos-en-barrancas/>



On the end of year 2021 celebration, members of Barrancas Labor Union expected an attack, as they know their route through Orinoco River is much coveted. However, they did not prohibit parties, they even put speakers in the middle of the street, but they did forbid to launch fireworks¹⁹² during celebrations, to be alert.

The early morning of January 01st, 2022, the band was attacked by men dressing in black and using large weapons. The fact left seven deaths and two injured¹⁹³, all members of Barrancas Labor Union.

Those were 10 hours of intense shootings, a situation that made security corps to run towards the town of Barrancas del Orinoco¹⁹⁴ Extra-official versions and testimonials of journalists from Monagas state assure that attackers were members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) of Colombia.

Even though this version has not been confirmed by authorities, it would not be the first time ELN is used as armed wing for the government of Maduro to end up or displace criminal organizations that do not enjoy his approval anymore. Something similar allegedly happened in Apure¹⁹⁵.

In March 2022, Barrancas del Orinoco was militarized and the Union members had moved to other areas such as Maturín, where they would be operating together with inmates from La Pica penitentiary.

Structure and leaders

At least 16 people lead the Barrancas labor Union, according to a report from El Pitazo¹⁹⁶. Their names are not known, is such their power in town that no one dares to talk about them. Citizens fear because they do not know who works for *The System* and who does not.

Valencia, Tabaco, Glendys Álvarez, Mario, Lucho, Candelario, Morris, Samuel, Piri, Brayan, Machu, Josías, Miguelito, Goris, Gabrielito “El Patuleco” and El Mocho are the alias heard by people whom allegedly direct this powerful criminal organization.

It was known that in each municipality or place in which they operate, there is a supervisor that represents the organization and leads the operation, for this reason it has been difficult to identify the criminal group's head.

In Barrancas del Orinoco there are at least 20 young men known as “gariteros” or watchmen, their job is to be attentive about who enters and exits town. They move in motorcycles, use radio transistors and carry small weapons.

There is another group also moving in motorcycles, in control of charging extortions and threatening people if they consider it necessary.

Besides, there are children to which they give phones so they communicate and offer some information, they are trained also to deliver drugs because they are not noticed¹⁹⁷.

192 El Pitazo. (2022). “Miembros de banda criminal El Sindicato de Barrancas habían prohibido usar fuegos artificiales”. January 02nd. Available in: <https://epthelinkdos.tk/sucesos/miembros-del-sindicato-de-barrancas-habian-prohibido-usar-fuegos-artificiales/>

193 El Pitazo. (2022). “Al menos 7 hombres asesinados tras incursión armada en Barrancas del Orinoco”. January 02nd. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/al-menos-7-hombres-asesinados-tras-incursion-armada-en-barrancas-del-orinoco/>

194 Andara, A. Efecto Cocuyo. (2022). “PNB instala primer comando en Barrancas del Orinoco tras tiroteos”. January 17th. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/sucesos/pnb-instala-primer-comando-barrancas-del-orinoco-tiroteos/>

195 Human Rights Watch. (2022). “Colombia/Venezuela: Abusos de organizaciones criminales en zona fronteriza”. March 28th. Available in: <https://www.hrw.org/es/news/2022/03/28/colombia/venezuela-abusos-de-grupos-armados-en-zona-fronteriza>

196 El Pitazo. (2022). “16 hombres comandan la megabanda delictiva El Sindicato de Barrancas”. January 31st. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/16-hombres-comandan-la-megabanda-delictiva-el-sindicato-de-barrancas/>

197 Barráez, S. Infobae. (2022). “Barrancas del Orinoco, el pueblo pesquero venezolano ocupado por el narcotráfico que arrancó el 2022 con 10 horas de balacera”. January 02nd. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2022/01/02/barrancas-del-orinoco-el-pueblo-pesquero-venezolano-ocupado-por-el-narcotrafico-que-arranco-el-2022-con-10-horas-de-balacera/>



Illegal economies and crimes



Transnational drug traffic



Fuel smuggling



Gold smuggling



Human traffic



Extortion

Drug traffic

Barrancas labor Union uses the route of Orinoco River that has less surveillance to get drugs out towards the Atlantic Sea. They do it through small fishing boats of their own, informed a source of the entity.

Constantly, the band also takes from cheese producers' part of their merchandise. This is used later to camouflage drugs launched to the sea so it is collected by members of cartels and international drug traffickers.

There is not an estimation of how much drugs could be mobilizing, but experts and inhabitants of the area presume that it must be large amounts of tons. Trinidad & Tobago would be one of the main destinations for drugs coming from Delta Amacuro.

Gasoline traffic

The Union administrates a gas station in Barracas del Orinoco, named El Águila, where subsidized gas was commercialized, according to a source consulted. There occurred a confrontation in January 2022 and since March, the gas passed to be sold in dollars.

The organization allegedly kept the gas to re-sell it many times over its value. In January the Union was seized with a load of 20.000 liters of gasoline¹⁹⁸.

Gold smuggling

The Barrancas Labor Union allegedly controls a mine called "El Terror", in Delta Amacuro, which limits with the claimed area between Venezuela and Guyana.

There they occupy of taking gold extracted to later smuggle it.

In the town of Barrancas del Orinoco there are no mines, but gold does arrive through some miners and members of the Union, who purchase in town with this mineral and search for implements to work on mines¹⁹⁹.

Human traffic

The members of Barrancas Labor Union also use the Orinoco River route to traffic with humans, who desire to get out of the country in search for better life conditions. They are charged with up to US 300 per person and get transported to Trinidad and Tobago. Authorities on the region calculate that every week depart two or three boats.

Additionally, the Labor Union also transport young women that are used for sexual exploitation in Trinidad and Tobago, where human traffic organizations pay up to USD 1.000 per victim²⁰⁰.

198 198 Sánchez, N. Crónica Uno. (2022). "Incautan en operativo 20.000 litros de gasolina en Barrancas del Orinoco". January 07th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/incautan-en-operativo-20-000-litros-de-gasolina-en-barrancas-del-orinoco/>

199 El Pitazo. (2022). "Barrancas del Orinoco, el pueblo sin oro que ofrece suministros para el minero". January 03rd. Available in: <https://epthelinkdos.tk/oriente/barrancas-del-orinoco-el-pueblo-sin-oro-que-ofrece-suministros-para-el-minero/>

200 Transparencia Venezuela. (2020). "Corrupción y crimen en las regiones: estados sin ley". Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/corruptcion-y-crimenen-las-regiones/>



Extortion

The band extorts fishermen, merchants and cattle producers. It was known that they are charged with between USD 5 and USD 10 a week in exchange of preserving their lives and allowing them to work. In case they do not pay, the products they are going to pick up or take out of the port are seized. They also take the cattle when transporting it, they even take documents and vehicles, explained a journalist from Monagas state that has investigated the group.



MOVEMENT FOR PEACE AND LIFE IN ACTIVITY WITH ÁLVAREZ BROTHERS FOUNDATION, LINKED TO THE BARRANCAS LABOR UNION. PHOTO EL ORIENTAL NEWSPAPER



BAND OF EL EVANDER. PHOTO TAKEN FROM MINISTER NÉSTOR REVEROL TWITTER ACCOUNT



Criminal allies

"TRAIN OF ORIENTE"
(In Oriente Penitentiary Center, known as La Pica)

BARRANCAS LABOR UNION

The Train of Orient, formed by pranes of the Oriental Region penitentiary center, known as La Pica, in Monagas, has become the main ally of Barrancas Labor Union. Both organizations operate together in drug traffic in Maturín city, according to a person interviewed for this report, who was forced to use his/her vehicle to transport merchandise.



Fire power, recruitment and use of violence

The members of Barrancas Labor Union started using shotgun-type firearms and cutting weapons called machetes. With the pass of years, the organization grew up and improved. Currently they count on large weapons such as rifles K103 and R15, short guns such as pistols and revolvers as well as grenades and other explosives.

Regarding recruitment, they put pressure and seduce with money youngsters and children to operate with this band, likewise, they offer incentives to family and children, like cell phones.

On the other hand, they exercise violence against persons who do not accomplish their orders or give information about this criminal group to authorities. Stockmen that do not pay the “vacuna” requested, are victims of cattle theft. The owner of a commercial store who refused to pay vacuna had her establishment burned, said an activist of Human Rights in Monagas.

Residents of Barrancas del Orinoco say that members of the Union give them security and keep the town in peace, but at the same time they prefer that no one visits them in that town so they are not frightening with their presence or feel threaten, because of that they prefer to get out of town to visit their relatives²⁰¹.

Participation of women

In this band women have no leadership positions, but they do participate in an active way. Some are in charge of doing phone call to extortion and charge for extortions. Others prepare food for organization’s members, according to a source that investigates the criminal band.

201 El Pitazo. (2022). “Barrancas del Orinoco: habitante cuenta cómo es vivir bajo dominio de banda criminal”. January 06th. Available in: <https://epthelinkdos.tk/oriente/barrancas-del-orinoco-habitante-cuenta-como-es-vivir-bajo-dominio-de-banda-criminal/>



3.12. EJÉRCITO DE LIBERACIÓN NACIONAL (NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY)



History

The National Liberation Army (ELN) was founded in 1964 as a Marxist-Leninist nationalist movement in Colombia, inspired by the Cuban revolution. Initially, it was formed by Catholic priests, academics and radical members of the Liberal Party of Colombia.

The departments of Arauca and Norte de Santander, frontier with Venezuela, have been their main operation bases, where they linked to farmers organizations. This was key for ELN to make an entrance into Apure state. The incursions of this organization in Venezuelan territory date from the 80's decade.

"In the mid-nineties, the ELN reached its top, with an army close to 5.000 combatants and at least three times that number of students, labor unions and sympathetic politicians. The group regularly bombed the largest oil ducts of Colombia, including those that supplied oil from BP and Occidental Petroleum areas in Occidental plains (...) the group gained

incomes from "war taxes" paid by coca and marihuana producers, particularly in the south part of Bolívar department, where the ELN direction had established their operations base" sustains a profile of *Insight Crime*²⁰².

Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias "Pablito", positioned as one of the chiefs of Compañía Simacota which in 1998 already had presence in Arauquita.

The signature of peace and demobilization of arms agreement by FARC in 2016, paved the way for ELN to become the strongest criminal organization in the Venezuelan frontier²⁰³. The group passed to exercise dominion in Norte de Santander and Arauca, territories disputed by other subversive groups with less presence in the area.

A 2 Orillas investigation sentences that the ELN receives protection from the Venezuelan government, in exchange of being one of its military supports. The publication points that commander Ramiro Torres Rodríguez, alias "Len" or "Lenin", moved through both sides

202 InSight Crime. (2021). "Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)". October 19th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-colombia/eln-colombia/>

203 Ídem.



of the frontier with approval of Venezuelan authorities.²⁰⁴ There are reports that indicate that “Lenin” would have died of a heart attack in Apure at the end of 2021²⁰⁵.

The ELN has a ferrous control over diverse localities of Apure. Historically, their presence in the Venezuelan entity has been larger than FARC. Being Arauca one their main operation areas, it is natural that the Venezuelan frontier state became a refugee and relief.

Since more than five years, some ELN leaders in Venezuela are Venezuelan young men that were recruited by this guerrilla. “One of my partners from high school, from Guas dualito, since a long time has been one of ELN leaders here”, said a citizen of Guas dualito, interviewed for this report.

On the other side, penetration in communities has been growing in an accelerated way. Rumors about participation of this group in distribution of food boxes proportioned through the government program Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP) were confirmed by a citizen of the Venezuelan Guajira interviewed for this report, who was witness of joint acting of “elenos” the responsible for delivering CLAP boxes.

Besides, between 2021 and 2022, the ELN has confronted Venezuelan criminal organizations with high fire power. In December 2021, media reported a shooting in La Parada, near Simón Bolívar frontier bridge, Táchira state,

where members of ELN and the Train of Aragua were involved.

This last is the largest mega-band of Venezuela, which operates also in Colombia²⁰⁶.

In January 2022, FundaRedes denounced the violence escalate left by the armed conflict between this guerrilla group and the Barrancas del Orinoco Labor Union, operating in the locality with the same name in Monagas state²⁰⁷. The NGO denounced the Venezuelan state inaction in front of this dispute that ended up in murderings and militarization of the area.

In Apure there is a ELN column with significant advances in Puerto Páez, La Capilla, Tres Esquinas and El Ripial, to displace FARC dissidences since March 2022. To reach their objective, they have ordered the occupation of farms, assassination of citizens, curfews and collection of war taxes or installation of control points. Infobae confirmed that farms El Diamante and Los Pinos were already taken by guerrilla²⁰⁸.

The Cartel de Sinaloa would have been mediating between the two groups in order to avoid passage of drugs between Venezuela and Colombia being affected by this conflict, according to reports.

204 Las 2 Orillas. (2019). “Comandante Lenin, el duro del ELN que opera en Venezuela”. September 12th. Available in: <https://www.las2orillas.co/comandante-lenin-el-duro-del-eln-que-opera-en-venezuela/>

205 Noticias Arauca. (2021). “Murió en Venezuela Comandante del Frente Domingo Laín del ELN”. October 01st. Available in: <https://aracastereo.co/murio-en-venezuela-comandante-del-frente-domingo-lain-del-eln/>

206 Infobae. (2021). “Qué es El Tren de Aragua, la terrible banda venezolana que se disputa a sangre y fuego el control de la frontera con el ELN”. December 21st. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/12/21/que-es-el-tren-de-aragua-la-terrible-banda-venezolana-que-se-disputa-a-sangre-y-fuego-el-control-de-la-frontera-con-el-eln/>

207 El Nacional. (2022). “Guerrilleros colombianos y sindicatos armados se disputan el control de Barrancas del Orinoco”. February 21st. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/sucesos/guerrilleros-colombianos-y-sindicatos-armados-se-disputan-el-control-de-barrancas-del-orinoco/>

208 Barráez, S. Infobae. (2022). “El ELN enfrentado a las disidencias de las FARC, ocupa fincas en Apure, amenaza a la población y cobra impuesto de guerra”. March 27th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2022/01/16/el-eln-enfrentado-a-las-disidencias-de-las-farc-ocupa-fincas-en-apure-amenaza-a-la-poblacion-y-cobra-impuesto-de-guerra/>



Structure and leaders

The ELN is formed by war fronts. The organization is governed by the Central Command (COCE), which has five commanders. The military commander of COCE is the main figure of ELN. The other positions are in charge of executing specific tasks.

Inside the guerrilla group there are experts in intelligence labors, snipers and explosives. The Military Forces of Colombia estimate that ELN has around 2.350 combatants, of which half of them would be in Venezuela²⁰⁹.

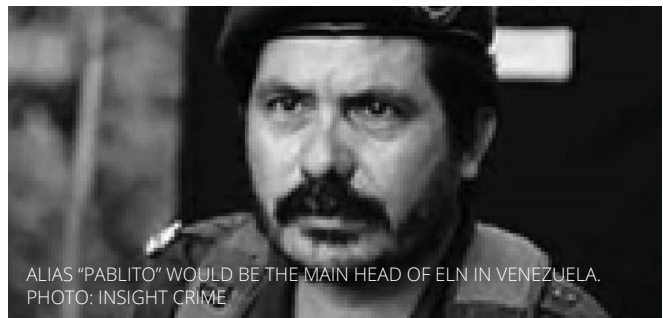
In June 2021, commander Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista, alias “Gabino”, who was leader of the group since the 70’s decade resigned to his position from Cuba, for health reasons. After his exit, the ELN established a new hierarchic order.

Eliécer Herlinto Chamorro Acosta, also known as “Antonio García”, has a long criminal record, according to authorities. He is investigated for several murderings of social leaders and persons in process of reincorporation; besides he is accused of kidnapping, homicide, genocide, personal lesions, forces disappearance, rebellion, terrorism and illicit recruitment²¹⁰.

Israel Ramírez Pineda, alias “Pablo Beltrán”, was the chief of ELN negotiations team in failed peace negotiations between the Colombian government and this group between 2016 and 2019 during managements of Juan Manuel Santos and Iván Duque. He is blamed for the old alliance between the main insurgent groups of Colombia, denominated Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar.

Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias “Pablito”, is considered one of the highest commanders, more belligerent and critical in regards to peace negotiations between ELN and the Colombian government. He was commander of Frente Domingo Laín Sáenz till 2015. In Venezuela, he is the highest authority in this group. He has an operations center in Apure to coordinate his drug traffic networks.

In April 2021, circulated rumors about his death, but the guerrilla group denied the information²¹¹. In June that same year he was ratified as third commander of ELN. “Antonio García” occupied the position of first commander and Israel Ramírez Pineda, alias “Pablo Beltrán” as second in command.



ALIAS “PABLITO” WOULD BE THE MAIN HEAD OF ELN IN VENEZUELA.
PHOTO: INSIGHT CRIME

José Benigno Guzmán Mora, alias “El Rolo” o alias “Julián”, is the leader heading the Central Commander of ELN Urban War Front. He remains in Cuba and is pointed as the author of a terrorist attempt against agents of the Mobile Riot Squad (Esmad) in Cali²¹².

209 Acosta, L. Reuters. (2021). “EXCLUSIVE Some 1,900 Colombian guerrillas operating from Venezuela, says Colombia military chief”. September 30th. Available in: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/exclusive-some-1900-colombian-guerrillas-operating-venezuela-says-colombia-2021-09-30/>

210 Castro, M. Blu Radio. (2021). “Antonio García, nuevo jefe del ELN, tiene largo prontuario por terrorismo, genocidios y más delitos”. June 24th. Available in: <https://www.bluradio.com/judicial/antonio-garcia-nuevo-jefe-del-eln-tiene-largo-prontuario-por-terrorismo-genocidio-y-mas-delitos>

211 InSightCrime. (2021). “Gustavo Aníbal Giraldo, alias Pablito”. November 10th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-colombia/gustavo-anibal-giraldo-alias-pablito/>

212 Fernández, M. Noticias Caracol. (2022). “El dossier de alias “El Rolo” una vida dedicada al ELN y mano derecha de “Antonio García”. January 09th. Available in: <https://noticias.caracoltv.com/colombia/el-dossier-de-alias-el-rolo-una-vida-dedicada-al-eln>



Jaime Galvis Rivera, alias “Ariel”, emerged as new military and financial power of the terrorist group operating between Colombia and Venezuela and sworn loyalty to the regime of Nicolás Maduro²¹³, according to Infobae.

Arturo Archila Rincón, alias “Raúl”, is part of the Oriental War Front. He is wanted for crimes of association to commit a crime, aggravated terrorism, fabrication, carry and traffic of weapons, damage to another's property and aggravated homicide²¹⁵.

Rafael Sierra Granados, alias “Ramiro Vargas”, takes part of COCE Central Commander. He is also located in Cuba and is one of those with links with Cuba and Venezuela²¹⁴.

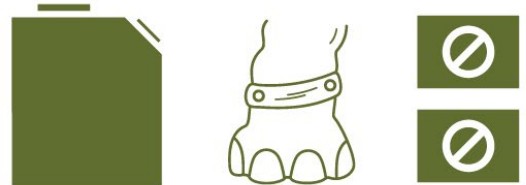
Illegal economies and crimes



Transnational
drug traffic



Drug traffic



Illegal trafficking of fuel,
animals and food



Extortion



Money
laundering

213 Infobae. (2020). “Quién es “Ariel”, el nuevo líder militar y financiero del ELN que opera en Venezuela y juró lealtad al régimen de Maduro”. July 26th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2020/07/26/quien-es-ariel-el-nuevo-lider-militar-y-financiero-del-eln-que-opera-en-venezuela-y-juro-lealtad-al-regimen-de-maduro/>.

214 Semana. (2021). “Orden de captura a cúpula del Eln por el asesinato del director del diario La Opinión”. August 26th. Available in: <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/orden-de-captura-a-cupula-del-eln-por-el-asesinato-del-director-del-diario-la-opinion/202154/>.

215 El Espectador. (2022). “Interpol busca a 31 jefes del ELN, tres de ellos por violencia reciente en Arauca”. January 17th. Available in: <https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/interpol-busca-a-31-jefes-del-eln-tres-de-ellos-por-violencia-reciente-en-arauca/>.



ELN is mainly financed through drug traffic, illegal mining, gasoline smuggling, cattle smuggling, extortion and other crimes. They demand tariffs of protection to migrants and traffickers that pass through their controlled areas on the frontier and it is implied in weapons traffic that end up being for their use.

Illegal mining

Sources interviewed in the Orinoco Mining Arc and cited in the second chapter of this report assure this group operates in mining towns both in Amazonas an occidental Bolivar, but their presence in this last one has been difficult to confirm.

Drug traffic

A report from Foundation Ideas for Peace points that ELN exercises influence in seven of ten municipalities of Colombia with bigger numbers of coca hectares²¹⁶. In the 90's they generated an average of 500 million of Colombian pesos, equal to USD 133.663, with the charge of tax for commercialization of coca base paste²¹⁷.

There is no certainty about money obtained by the group for this concept, but what seems clear is that Venezuela, mainly Apure, Táchira and Zulia are the territories used by them to get the drugs out to different parts of the world.

Gasoline, cattle and food smuggling

In Arauca they control networks of smuggling moving back and forth Colombia and Venezuela.

For years, until the collapse of Pdvsa (Oils of Venezuela), Venezuelan gas smuggling was

the main source of income for ELN, from Apure state.

As almost everything circulating through that frontier is controlled by this group – FARC dissidences also have an important presence- it is very probable that they also receive a rent for gas smuggling, now from Colombia to Venezuela.

A publication of Contexto Ganadero reports the existence of 24 illegal trails used to pass cattle by foot. Besides, they control the entry or exit of loads of gas or cheese, whose earnings overpass USD 13.000²¹⁸.

Extortion

The ELN has a history of criminal tax charges and extortion in territories controlled by them. The organization Fundaredes has denounced before the authorities the “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments, extortion, attempt of sexual assaults, robbery, among other vulnerations” imposed by ELN and other groups against Venezuelan²¹⁹ migrants to charge vacunas and allow the pass of persons or merchandise through trails, the illegal passages in the Colombian Venezuelan frontier. The amounts vary according to the possibilities of each victim.

Money laundering

Colombian authorities warn that ELN employs a variety of methods for money laundering through acquisition of local businesses and properties in Arauca and Apure²²⁰.

216 Navarro, C. Caracol Radio. (2020). “Los negocios de Narcotráfico que tiene el ELN en Colombia y Venezuela”. October 14th. Available in: https://caracol.com.co/radio/2020/10/14/nacional/1602697837_513817.html

217 Ospina, C. El Tiempo. (1995). “El ELN maneja en Arauca 10 mil millones de pesos”. April 02nd. Available in: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-308471>

218 Moreno, P. Contexto Ganadero. (2019). “ELN dueño y señor del contrabando en Arauca”. September 03rd. Available in: <https://www.contextoganadero.com/economia/eln-dueno-y-senor-del-contrabando-en-arauca>

219 Migración Venezuela. (2020). “ONG denuncia agresiones a migrantes que cruzan las trochas”. October 18th. Available in: <https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/ong-denuncia-agresiones-a-migrantes-que-cruzan-las-trochas/2230>

220 DW. (2022). “Colombia realiza la mayor operación contra lavado de activos del ELN”. January 17th. Available in: <https://www.dw.com/es/colombia-realiza-mayor-operaci%C3%B3n-contra-lavado-de-activos-del-eln/a-60443180>



Criminal alliances



The ELN has a portfolio of criminal and ideologic allies to guarantee their illicit businesses. A report about this organization's influence reveals that they usually associate "with dozens of local criminal groups to collect "taxes" which allow drug traffic organizations to pass through their territory or provide protection services to drugs laboratories, marihuana crops, illegal landing tracks and submarine shipyards"²²¹. In parts of Colombia and Venezuela, the rebels act as a legitimate force, capable of governing with more efficiency than state authorities. Among their regular allies figure:

Cartel de Sinaloa

According to Infobae, an organ ascribed to UN in charge of surveilling the accomplishment of anti-drug treatments, evidenced that the Cartel de Sinaloa would be operating in the occidental area of Venezuela to sponsor other criminal groups with the aim to assure drugs reach other territories²²². This cartel operates in at least 50 countries.

Cartel de Los Soles

It is about Venezuelan drug traffic organizations, mostly with participation of military officers, to which have given that identity internationally.

Comando Vermelho y Familia do Norte

According to the Brazilian press, Colombian authorities and members of security forces affirm that ELN works with Brazilian criminal groups such as Comando Vermelho and Familia do Norte with the aim to transport cocaine and gold to Brazil through south Venezuela. The details of these alleged relations continue to be unclear²²³.

Colectivo de Seguridad Fronteriza

A report from the Colombian Foreign Ministry of 2019, alleges that ELN offers logistic and financial support to paramilitary backing up Nicolás Maduro's government grouped in the so-called collectives. The ELN Front Efraín Pabón sponsors a collective on the

221 Voz de América. "Informe: El ELN es el principal grupo criminal de América Latina". February 03rd. Available in: <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/informe-el-eln-es-el-principal-grupo-criminal-de-am%C3%A9rica-latina/5271652.html>

222 Infobae. (2021). "Cartel de Sinaloa estaría operando, junto al ELN, en frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela, según la ONU". March 25th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2021/03/25/cartel-de-sinaloa-estaria-operando-junto-al-eln-en-frontera-entre-colombia-y-venezuela-segun-la-onu/>

223 Renova Midia. (2019). "Comando Vermelho tem parceria com guerrilha da Colombia". November 19th. Available in: <https://renovamidia.com.br/comando-vermelho-tem-parceria-com-guerrilha-da-colombia/>



frontier, and the ELN commander Antonio García compromised to give them vehicles and radios, according to the Colombian government²²⁴.

However, this collective – emerged in Táchira to prevent the entering of humanitarian help in 2019 – does not exist anymore and it is presumed that their members have summed up to ELN lines, according to a source consulted for this report.

Fire power

The ELN disposes of a wide variety of arms. In a seizure of weapons in 2018, it was proved that the group acquired 50 and M60 caliber Browning machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, pistols, 5.56 caliber Galil assault rifles (owned by the Colombian Army) and 45 and 60 caliber mortars. Most of these weapons had as destination the war against the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), in Catatumbo, in the frontier between Venezuela and Colombia.

“The reports in video show that ELN in Colombia receives a great quantity of smuggled arms from United States, including AR-15 rifles and MP-40 submachine guns, even though it is not clear how much of these are moved to Venezuela, add²²⁵.

In a truck transporting fruits to Arauca at beginnings of 2022, Colombian authorities seized 49.000 munitions caliber 7.62 millimeters for fusil AK-47, around 900 electric detonators, 604 improvised explosive artifacts, two night vision goggles, 10 communications radios, 10 systems to encrypt communications.

The official information suggests that this arsenal would be employed by ELN criminal networks and belonged to the Oriental War Front.

Use of violence

The use of violence has been one of the marks identifying this organization since its beginnings. In Venezuela they are accused of taking mines in south Venezuela by force; being behind the bloody episode of January 01st in Barrancas del Orinoco (Monagas); and participating in cruel confrontations with FARC dissidences in Arauca and Apure, that left more than 27 people dead since January 2022, among other events.

Besides, in Colombia they have been responsible for diverse attempts with explosives in military and police quarters.

Recruitment methods

A police commander from Norte de Santander denounced that during Covid-19 pandemic, the ELN recruited young men to train them for war and perform activities in favor of his insurgent group²²⁶.

In Venezuela, FundaRedes has also denounced the recruitment of Venezuelan migrants by this and other groups that fight over control in the Colombian Venezuelan frontier²²⁷.

There are no details of recruitment mechanisms used by ELN, however, economic incentives, penetration and indoctrination work on communities seem to be their main strategies.

224 Cancillería de Colombia. (2019). “Canciller Holmes Trujillo presentó ante la OEA evidencias de vínculos del régimen de Nicolás Maduro con grupos narcoterroristas colombianos”. September 11th. Available in: <https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/newsroom/news/canciller-holmes-trujillo-presento-oea-evidencias-vinculos-regimen-nicolas-maduro>

225 DMAX. (2018). “Armas de USA para guerrilleros marxistas”. December 20th. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frCvrMFnk-g>

226 Infobae. (2022). “Aprehenden a cinco menores por vínculos con el ELN en Norte de Santander”. February 28th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/02/28/aprehenden-a-cinco-menores-por-vinculos-con-el-eln-en-norte-de-santander/>

227 FundaRedes. (2020). “Migrantes venezolanos son reclutados bajo engaño por grupos irregulares en la frontera colombo-venezolana”. May 11th. Published in: <https://www.fundaredes.org/2020/05/11/migrantes-venezolanos-son-reclutados-bajo-engano-por-grupos-irregulares-en-la-frontera-colombo-venezolana/>



Role of women

The ELN promotes actively participation of women, detail reports from the same organization. "In this context, women develop different roles, the military role, the political-administrative role, in fact, we do all functions of guerrilla life. Peasant, afro, indigenous women are playing an important role in defense of territories. Likewise, urban women, in communes, are evolving in fundamental organizational and cultural development roles", assures an ELN combatant in a document published in 2017²²⁸.

Historically, this group has had hundreds of guerrilla women in their lines. Besides doing domestic labors and being forced to have sexual intercourse with guerrilla men, these also have an active participation in confrontations.

228 Resumen Latinoamericano. (2017). "Mujeres del ELN colombiano. La paz para nosotras es diversidad, por lo que la participación es fundamental". January 17th. Available in: <https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2017/01/12/mujeres-del-eln-colombiano-la-paz-para-nosotras-es-diversidad-por-lo-que-la-participacion-es-fundamental/>.



3.13. DISIDENCIAS DE LAS FARC (FARC DISSIDENCES)



History

The dissidences of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is the name given to a faction of the disappeared FARC guerrilla, which resumed arms after the signature of the peace treatment with the Colombian State in 2016, after more than 50 years of armed conflict.

Historically, FARC – a group emerged as a countrymen army in the 60's- had presence in Venezuela, but their influence increased since 1999.

After signing the peace agreement, Front 10, which did not demobilize and never left arms, installed in Venezuela.

This way, FARC dissidences are today a non-state armed group, binational, operating in Colombia and Venezuela. They have activities in 17 municipalities in five states of Venezuela: Apure, Barinas, Amazonas and Zulia, with presence in Tachira state, used as corridor to connect with Colombia, according to sources interviewed for this report.

However, the armed conflict registered in March 2021²²⁹ between FARC dissidences and the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB) in Apure state, ended up in an internal division of the ex-guerrilla and an open confrontation between two factions.

229 Risquez, R. Runrunes. (2021). "Claves de la guerra que se está librando en Apure". March 25th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/439442/claves-de-la-guerra-que-se-esta-librando-en-apure/>



Since then, there are at least two groups originated from the old FARC guerrilla in criminal activities in Venezuela: Front 10 Farc dissidences, led by Miguel Botache Santillana, alias “Gentil Duarte”; and Second Marquetalia FARC-EP, led by Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez”²³⁰.

This last group had demobilized and incorporated to political life in Colombia, but they resumed arms in 2019 and its leaders also refuge in Venezuela. However, in 2021 everything changed for them. Besides division and confrontations with their old friends during armed conflict in Apure, three of its four leaders were murdered in unclear circumstances in Venezuelan territory: Seuxis Hernández Solarte alias “Jesús Santrich”, Hernán Darío Velásquez alias “el Paisa” and Henry Castellanos Garzón alias “Romaña”. As a result of those happenings, the weakening on the group has been so evident that some experts talk about the disappearance of Second Marquetalia FARC-EP²³¹.

In this context, everything seemed to point to a clear strengthening of Front 10, that had already forced the retreat of FANB in March 2021 conflict²³². **But the power and forces chessboard changed again when a new conflict initiated in January 2022, between Apure and Arauca, allegedly due to fight for control of gas smuggling**²³³.

This “war” that still persists at the closure of this report seems to be weakened and cornered the Front 10 group, that has been displaced in some localities of Apure by their Second Marquetalia enemies, FANB and ELN. In parallel, this criminal organization received a hard punch from Colombian authorities²³⁴, after being bombed a camp in Arauca where one of its main heads turned out dead: Jorge Eliécer Jiménez Martínez, alias “Arturo” or “Gerónimo”.



230 Heraldo. (2019). “El disidente de las FARC “Iván Márquez” anuncia que retoma las armas. August 29th. Available in: <https://www.heraldo.es/noticias/internacional/2019/08/29/el-disidente-de-las-farc-ivan-marquez-anuncia-que-retoma-las-armas-1331675.html>

231 La Opinión. (2021). “¿Se acaba la ‘Segunda Marquetalia’?”. December 12th. Available in: <https://www.laopinion.com.co/colombia/se-acaba-la-segunda-marquetalia>

232 La Razón. (2021). “La FANB se retira del frente de guerra y deja al estado Apure en mano de la guerrilla colombiana”. June 02nd. Available in: <https://larazon.net/2021/06/liberan-a-ocho-soldados-y-ordenan-retirada-de-la-fanb/>

233 Runrunes. (2022). “Asesinado presunto contrabandista y narcotraficante de El Nula”. January 03rd. Available in: <https://runrun.es/monitor-de-victimas/463711/monitordevictimastachira-asesinado-presunto-contrabandista-y-narcotraficante-de-el-nula>

234 Caracol Radio. (2022). “Golpe a disidencias de las FARC: Abatidos sus máximos jefes”. February 24th. Available in: https://caracol.com.co/radio/2022/02/24/judicial/1645732932_709574.html



Structure and leaders

The Armed Forces of Colombia calculate that in Venezuela there are around 600 and 700 men of the 2.350 dissidences combatants, according to declarations offered at ends of 2021²³⁵. For 2019, the Colombian intelligence estimated that in the country were 600 members, spread in four residual groups²³⁶.

FARC dissidences are divided in several fronts that possess certain autonomy and difference by their armed capacity, leadership, alliances, disputes, penetration into illegal economies, social control and ideology.

An investigation made in 2021 by the Foundation Conflict Responses (CORE) of Colombia identified that currently there are 30 FARC dissidences structures operating independently in that country²³⁷. This practice repeats in Venezuela, even though with a more reduced presence.

"It is about groups that not necessarily have relation among each other, nor form a structured organization, but that share some common characteristics, such as the fact of being integrated by some old guerrilla members and occupy areas that were previously controlled by FARC"²³⁸.

In this context, the CORE team considers dissidences of alias "Gentil Duarte" as the most consolidated.

Miguel Botache Santillana, alias "Gentil Duarte", is the commander of different fronts, among them Front 10 of dissidences and figures on the list of most wanted criminals in Colombia. He is 58 years old. Authorities of that country offer a reward of

USD 1,7 million for information to enable his capture.



MIGUEL BOTACHE SANTANILLA, ALIAS "GENTIL DUARTE". PHOTO: INFOBAE

In the past, he exercised his leadership in FARC-EP and deserted from the peace process in 2016. From 2018 he embarked in the task of unifying dissidences to keep up in arms and illicit businesses. He is profiled as one of the main actors of the new dynamic in Colombia and exercises control over drug traffic routes from the Colombian department of Guaviare towards Venezuela and Brazil, affirms the organization.

In 2019, alias "Gentil Duarte" moved between Amazonas and Apure states, according to an early alert from the Colombian Ombudsman to which there was access for the elaboration of this report²³⁹. Meanwhile, FundaRedes organization assures that he had an important advance in Bolívar state to diversify financing sources for the group, such as gold, coltan and other minerals extraction²⁴⁰.

235 Acosta, L. Reuters. (2021). "EXCLUSIVE Some 1,900 Colombian guerrillas operating from Venezuela, says Colombia military chief". September 30th. Available in: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/exclusive-some-1900-colombian-guerrillas-operating-venezuela-says-colombia-2021-09-30/>

236 Blu Radio. (2019). "Inteligencia militar detectó a 600 disidentes de las Farc en Venezuela". August 31st. Available in: <https://www.bluradio.com/nacion/inteligencia-militar-detecto-a-600-disidentes-de-las-farc-en-venezuela>

237 Fundación Conflict Responses (2021). "Las caras de las disidencias: cinco de años de incertidumbre y evolución". July 20th. Available in: https://development.amapolazul.com/core/wp-content/uploads/CORE_v10.pdf

238 InSight Crime. (2019). "Ex-FARC Mafia". October 27th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-colombia/ex-farc-mafia/>

239 Ombudsman of Colombia. Early Alert (confidential document), 2018.

240 Velásquez, M. CNN en español. (2021) "¿Cómo murió Jesús Santrich? Lo que sabemos hasta el momento". January 20th. Available in: <https://cnn.espanol.cnn.com/2021/05/20/analisis-muerte-jesus-santrich-colombia-orix/>



The dissidences related to this faction are blamed for the deaths of alias “Romaña”, and alias “El Paisa”, heads of Second Marquetalia, at ends of 2021, in a fight for control of drug traffic routes in Apure state, from where come out tons of cocaine heading to Central America, according to a report of intelligence made by the public force of Colombia cited by Caracol²⁴¹.

Jorge Eliécer Jiménez Martínez, alias “Arturo” o “Gerónimo”, was the leader of Front 10, a group affiliated to “Gentil Duarte”²⁴² faction. He died in Arauca in a bombing from the Colombian army on February 24th, 2022²⁴³.

Fabián Eliécer Jiménez Martínez, alias “Ferley González”, also from Front 10, follows in hierarchy after alias “Arturo”, who is still free. “He keeps connection channels with drug dealers of Mexico y Brazil and receives in exchange military arms sent illegally to FARC dissidences in southeast Colombia”, specifies EsGlobal²⁴⁴ media.

Javier Alfonso Velosa García, alias “Jhon Mechas”, he is 41 years old, identified by the Police of Colombia as head of Front 33 FARC dissidences²⁴⁵. This group is qualified as the armed wing of “Gentil Duarte” faction.

He has an Interpol red circular. The USA government offers a reward of USD 5 million for information that leads to his capture²⁴⁶.

He is qualified as the most wanted criminal of Colombia after leading four terrorist attacks in the last year²⁴⁷.

According to information from the Colombian Army, the front directed by alias “Jhon Mechas” has presence in Tibú, Norte de Santander, and Casigua El Cubo, Zulia state. Colombian authorities locate his operations center in Zulia²⁴⁸.

Even though they are not Front 10, it is important to consider following characters: **Luciano Marín Arango, alias “Iván Márquez” and Géner García Molina, alias “John 40”**, who has been living in Venezuela for several years, directs Front 43 Acacio Medina and leads drug traffic from Amazonas. Both are strong men of Second Marquetalia FARC-EP.

Miguel Díaz Sanmartín, alias “Julián Chollo”, also belongs to this group, he is identified as the second commander of Front 43 Acacio Medina, right hand of alias “John 40”. His group has influence in Amazonas and Apure²⁴⁹ states.

A recent investigation from Armando Info reveals that Sanmartín has dominion of production and smuggling of gold from mines in Yapacana National Park, a natural reserve of 230.000 hectares located in Amazonas state, Venezuela²⁵⁰.

- 241 Navarro, C. Caracol Radio. (2021). “Gentil Duarte estaría detrás de muertes de ‘El Paisa’ y ‘Romaña’”. December 08th. Available in: https://caracol.com.co/radio/2021/12/09/judicial/1639010577_819550.html
- 242 Ombudsman of Colombia. Early Alert (confidential document), 2018.
- 243 Caracol Radio. (2022). “Golpe a disidencias de las FARC: Abatidos sus máximos jefes”. February 24th. Available in: https://caracol.com.co/radio/2022/02/24/judicial/1645732932_709574.html
- 244 Mansilla, R. EsGlobal. (2021). “Las FARC en Venezuela: ¿una guerra de mafias encubierta?”. April 12th. Available in: <https://www.esglobal.org/las-farc-en-venezuela-una-guerra-de-mafias-encubierta/>
- 245 Alcaldía de Bogotá. (2022). “¿Quién es ‘Jhon Mechas’, hombre que se atribuyó atentado a CAI en Bogotá”. March 28th. Available in: <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/seguridad/quien-es-alias-jhon-mechas-senalado-por-el-atentado-cai-en-bogota>
- 246 Caracol Radio. (2022). “Este es ‘Jhon Mechas’, el señalado cerebro del atentado a Duque. July 26th. Available in: https://caracol.com.co/radio/2021/07/26/judicial/1627316030_387923.html
- 247 El Colombiano. (2022). “Jhon Mechas’: el disidente escondido en Venezuela que ordenó atentado en Bogotá”. March 29th. Available in: <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/atentado-terrorista-en-bogota-lo-ordeno-disidencia-de-farc-de-jhon-mechas-y-mato-a-salome-rangel-y-daniel-duque-FB17073556>
- 248 El Nacional. (2022). “Autoridades colombianas sospechan que el guerrillero Jhon Mechas opera desde el Zulia”. March 30th. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/autoridades-colombianas-sospechan-que-el-guerrillero-jhon-mechas-opera-desde-el-zulia/>
- 249 Noticias Caracol. (2021) “El video de las disidencias de las FARC y los correos secretos del ELN que salpican a Venezuela. February 21st. Available in: <https://noticias.caracoltv.com/informes-especiales/el-video-y-los-correos-secretos-del-eln-y-las-disidencias-de-las-farc-que-salpican-a-venezuela>
- 250 Segovia, M. Armando Info. (2018). “La disidencia de la guerrilla colombiana penetra el Amazonas venezolano”. February 11th. Available in: <https://armando.info/la-disidencia-de-la-guerrilla-colombiana-penetra-el-amazonas-venezolano/>



Illicit economies and crimes



Drug traffic



Gasoline smuggling



Gasoline smuggling



Kidnapping



Extortion

Drugs

Historically, drug traffic has been the main source of income for FARC, when they were guerrilla and now dissidences. “Since the first dissident groups were known, there was certainty that the frontier between Colombia and Brazil would be key for Gentil Duarte and Iván Mordisco to continue getting cocaine out in exchange of arms, or that the fluvial frontier between Colombia and Venezuela, marked by Orinoco river, would continue to be essential for other dissident commanders that already had consolidated their networks of metal and mineral extraction, which expand up to the Orinoco Mining Arc in Venezuela”²⁵¹, affirms a CORE report.

The organization adds that currently, from Venezuelan territory, the ex-FARC organize shipments of drug loads from laboratories located in the Colombian side, which are transported through hundreds of trails (clandestine passages) and rivers of the porous frontier to finally be unloaded in Venezuela, where it keeps its way.

Gold

Illegal mining is one of the most lucrative financing sources for the criminal organization installed in south Venezuela. Documents of Colombian intelligence cited in a InfoAmazonia investigation reveal that 70% of income for Front Acacio Medina, commanded by “John 40”, comes from mineral exploitation, such as gold and coltan in Yapacana National Park, Amazonas²⁵².

Gas

Gas smuggling keeps relation with drug traffic due to its importance for production and transport of drugs, concludes the Venezuelan Observatory of Political Ecology²⁵³. “To produce 250 grams of cocaine it is required 175 liters of gasoline. A fourth part of gas²⁵⁴ smuggling towards Colombia could be deriving to the drug business controlled by criminal organizations operating in the zone”.

Due to control exercised on trails, it also generates rents for gas smuggling from Colombia to Venezuela, charging vacunas to smugglers.

251 Fundación Conflict Responses (2021). “Las caras de las disidencias: cinco de años de incertidumbre y evolución”. Available in: https://development.amapolazul.com/core/wp-content/uploads/CORE_v10.pdf

252 InfoAmazonia. (2019). “Venezuela, el paraíso de los contrabandistas”. Available in: <https://smugglersparadise.infoamazonia.org/>

253 Observatorio Venezolano de Ecología Política. (2018). “La verdad sobre el contrabando de gasolina, drogas y la degradación etno-ecológica de las fronteras de Venezuela con Colombia”. Available in: <https://www.ecopoliticavenezuela.org/2018/10/24/la-verdad-contrabando-gasolina-drogas-la-degradacion-etno-ecologica-las-fronteras-venezuela-colombia/>

254 León, A. La Silla Vacía. (2021). “La gasolina legal es combustible de los ilegales en la frontera”. September 14th. Available in: <https://www.lasillavacia.com/historias/silla-nacional/la-gasolina-legal-es-combustible-de-los-ilegales-en-la-frontera/>



Criminal allies



FARC dissidences factions have configured alliances with international drug cartels to sustain drug traffic and the rest of their illicit operations. In March 2022 it was known that the Cartel de Sinaloa and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación would be acting as intermediaries to put an end to the armed conflict between dissidences and the Venezuelan Army in the frontier, with the aim to not affect drug traffic operations²⁵⁵.

Cartel de Sinaloa

FARC dissidences are the main bond of Cartel de Sinaloa for international drug traffic. The cartel tentacles extend from United States to Argentina. In the Venezuelan case, they allegedly have presence in localities of Zulia state, where drug traffic operations are supervised together with FARC dissidences.

Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación

An Infobae publication about the transaction between FARC dissidences and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) reveals that cocaine coming from the Colombian forest is taken out in private jets that are used for executive transport in Latin America and United State²⁵⁶.

On the other side, the faction of alias "Iván Márquez" would contract pilots from Roraima, Brazil, that would be in charge of looking for loads in Apure to take them to Guatemala and later to Mexico, according to RCN News. The Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police announced this modus operandi at beginnings of 2021, after seizing 300 kilos of high purity cocaine transported in an aircraft with Brazilian registration.

255 Independent en español. (2022). "Cárteles de la droga mexicanos quieren negociar la paz en Colombia". March 23rd. Available in: <https://www.independentespanol.com/noticias/america-latina/mexico-colombia-carteles-droga-guerra-b2042626.html>

256 Infobae. (2022). "Las lujosas aeronaves con las que disidencias de las Farc envían cocaína al cartel mexicano Jalisco Nueva Generación". January 11th. Available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/01/11/las-lujosas-aeronaves-con-las-que-disidencias-de-las-farc-envian-cocaina-al-cartel-mexicano-jalisco-nueva-generacion/>



Comando Vermelho

Investigations suggest that “Gentil Duarte” faction proportions drugs to Comando Vermelho, the largest criminal organization in Brazil, in exchange of weapons and munitions²⁵⁷. A report from Exame assures that 35% of drugs production in Colombia is acquired by Brazilian cartels. Other Brazilian groups such as the First Capital Command (PCC) also negotiate loads of cocaine and marihuana with dissidences, adds the publication.

Fire power

FARC dissidences have pistols, machine guns, grenade launchers and rifles in their arsenal²⁵⁸. They also count on portable ground-to-air or infantry anti-aircraft systems, ammunition and hand grenades. A report from El Tiempo newspaper, published in 2019, indicated that Sinaloa, Nueva Generación and Los Zetas, cartels from México; as well as La Familia do Norte, Primer Comando and Familia Vermelho, from Brazil; have proportioned modern weaponry to dissidences in exchange of cocaine loads²⁵⁹.

The Semana magazine has shown evidences of dissidences assets. In February 2021, the media exposed photos of long-range weaponry disposed by the group. It also leaked images of high-end trucks in which they transport to their camps as well as a Cessna airplane with Venezuelan register used to transport drugs²⁶⁰.

Use of violence

FARC dissidences are characterized by coordinating violent attacks and imposing their control by force in communities. It has been that way historically in Colombia and also in Venezuela, where they extortion, kidnap and kill persons who do not accomplish their rules.

The fight occurred against FANB in 2021, which left more than a dozen of Venezuela military officers dead and the bloody conflict kept since January with ELN in Arauca and Apure are a sample of it²⁶¹.

A chronology presented by the League Against Silence shows the dimensions of the armed conflict to exercise territorial control on the frontier²⁶²: in March 2021, the dissidences situated inhabitants of several small villages of La Victoria, Apure, during an attack against military. Around 4.000 inhabitants of La Victoria moved to Araucuita municipality, on the Colombian side, to escape the violence escalade.

In middle 2021, the dissidences broke the pact of no aggression that allegedly kept with the mega-band the Train of Aragua, the largest criminal organization of Venezuela, suggest official reports cited by Blu Radio²⁶³. The dispute started after the murdering of José Leonardo Guerrero Estrada, alias “Mono Guerrero”, head of Front 10.

The FARC dissidences responded with the murdering of a chief of the mega-band: Darwin Rafael González Castillo, alias “El Enano”.

257 InfoAmazonia. (2021). “La historia de «Gentil Duarte», el disidente de las FARC más buscado del país”. February 02nd. Available in: <https://infoamazonia.org/es/2018/04/02/la-historia-de-gentil-duarte-el-disidente-de-las-farc-mas-buscado-del-pais/>

258 El Universo. (2021). “Banda que suministraba armas a disidencias de las FARC fue capturada en Bogotá”. December 18th. Available in: <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/internacional/banda-que-suministraba-armas-a-disidencias-de-las-farc-fue-capturada-en-bogota-nota/>

259 El Tiempo. (2019). “¿De dónde salen las armas con las que están asesinando en Colombia?”. November 17th. Available in: <https://www.eltiempo.com/unidad-investigativa/mafias-y-narcos-que-ingresan-armas-a-colombia-de-brasil-y-mexico-434334>

260 Semana. (2021). “Exclusivo: Así se mueven Iván Márquez, Santrich, Romaña y el Paisa en Venezuela”. February 07th. Available in: <https://www.eltiempo.com/unidad-investigativa/mafias-y-narcos-que-ingresan-armas-a-colombia-de-brasil-y-mexico-434334>

261 Crisis Group. (2021). “Amistades peligrosas: las guerrillas colombianas en la frontera venezolana”. April 28th. Available in: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/es/latin-america-caribbean/andes/rebel-playing-field-colombian-guerrillas-venezuelan-border>

262 Liga Contra el Silencio. (2022). “Portada | 2 años de conflicto en la frontera”. August 19th. Available in: <https://ligacontraelsilencio.com/>

263 Grandas, S. Blu Radio. (2021). “ELN, disidencias de Farc y banda ‘Tren de Aragua’ han sumido a Arauca en la violencia: autoridades”. September 10th. Available in: <https://www.bluradio.com/nacion/eln-disidencias-de-farc-y-banda-tren-de-aragua-han-sumido-a-arauca-en-la-violencia-autoridades>



Recruitment methods

The Colombian Ombudsman and Venezuelan organizations have documented cases of forced recruitment of Venezuelans, no matter age or gender, from FARC dissidences in both sides of the frontier. The forced recruitment of children from 5 years old has occasioned the movement of indigenous community families on the Venezuelan side²⁶⁴.

Media and Colombian authorities report that FARC dissidences attract Venezuelan migrants in poverty conditions. In some cases, they threaten or pressure, but in most cases, they only offer them a small payment and three meals a day.

In 2018, the dissidences offered the equivalent of USD 300 a month to each member (150 minimum wages in Venezuela for the date). Dissidences use these people to materialize extortions and drugs, arms or minerals traffic operations.

Venezuelan combatants captured in National Police of Colombia operation affirmed in an interrogation that they were taken by FARC with an offer of a secure salary, which never received. "One of them, according to intelligence information from the police, was a Venezuelan military officer and he would have left the institution for misbehavior, then he accepted the proposal of dissidences four years ago" published RCN News²⁶⁵.

This version was confirmed by officials of Colombian Ombudsman in Arauca and by inhabitants of diverse sectors of Páez municipality in Apure, interviewed for this report.

Role of women

In Colombia, between 20% and 27% of individuals who combat with FARC have been women that do not overpass 30 years old²⁶⁶. In Venezuela, they have also had an active role.

The death of two Venezuelan women in a FARC dissidences camp in Arauca in 2018²⁶⁷, and testimonials of people interviewed in Apure confirm the presence of women, most of them young, in camps of Front 10 FARC dissidences.

Since its conformation, FARC have submitted women to sexual violence, sterilizations and forced abortions, sexual slavery and exploitation²⁶⁸. The dissidences seem to continue with these practices.

In February 2022, the Colombian Ombudsman alerted about the responsibility of dissidences in most cases of forced recruitment of minors, including girls, registered by the institution since May 2020²⁶⁹.

264 Escudero, I. EFE. (2022). "Iban a reclutar niños": hablan desplazados de Venezuela por las guerrillas". January 28th. Available in: <https://www.fundaredes.org/2018/09/11/boletin-007-jovenes-venezolanos-son-reclutados-por-grupos-armados-irregulares-en-la-frontera/>

265 Noticias RCN. (2018). "Disidencias de las Farc estarían reclutando ciudadanos venezolanos, según la Policía". September 11th. Available in: <https://www.noticiasrcn.com/colombia/disidencias-de-las-farc-estarian-reclutando-ciudadanos-venezolanos-407165>

266 Alacip. (2019). "Ciudadanas femininas desde la insurgencia; una mirada desde el enfoque de género. Mujeres Excombatientes de las Farc-EP: Tensiones y reconfiguraciones del espacio público y privado". Available in: <https://alacip.org/cong19/274-castano-19.pdf>

267 Diario La Nación. (2018). "Identificados 8 de 16 disidentes de las Farc que murieron tras el bombardeo en Arauca". June 21st. Available in: <https://lanacionweb.com/sucesos/identificados-8-de-16-disidentes-de-las-farc-que-murieron-tras-el-bombardeo-en-arauca/>

268 Universidad Sergio Arboleda. "Violencia Sexual de las Farc, una guerra en el cuerpo de las mujeres". Available in: <https://www.usergioarboleda.edu.co/violencia-sexual-de-las-farc-una-guerra-en-el-cuerpo-de-las-mujeres/>

269 Defensoría del Pueblo Colombia. (2022). "Disidencias de las Farc son responsables de la mayoría de casos de reclutamiento forzado de niños, niñas y adolescentes". February 11th. Available in: <https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/10747/Disidencias-de-las-Farc-son-responsables-de-la-mayor%C3%ADa-de-casos-de-reclutamiento-forzado-de-ni%C3%B1os-y-adolescentes-Reclutamiento-manos-rojas-Defensor%C3%ADa-Defensor-Camargo.htm>



CHAPTER 4



ILLICIT ECONOMIES BY REGION



The surge of illicit economies in Venezuela and the different actors involved in them, such as criminal bands and members of the corrupted network, represent a threat to the exercise of human rights of all citizens located in national territory, but their incidences vary according to the Venezuelan region analyzed.

One of the most emblematic cases is the one of Bolívar state, where the denominated Orinoco Mining Arc (widely reviewed in chapter two of this report) is located and where many illicit economies come together, such as drugs, gasoline and gold smuggling, committed by different non state armed organizations, allegedly linked to political officials or military officers. The situation varies in other states, but the severe impact on population maintains.

Starting from information gathered in interviews to academics, investigators, journalists, community leaders, labor union managers,

public officials, security corps officers and members of civil society organizations, it was possible to identify the types of illicit or black economies taking place in 12 states of Venezuela, the actors involved, their dynamics, the participation of persons close to political or military power and relevant cases that back up denounces.

It was compiled and systemized information on Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Barinas, Carabobo, Delta Amacuro, Lara, Mérida, Nueva Esparta, Táchira, Yaracuy and Zulia states and it was detected, among other things, that drug traffic, gasoline smuggling and/or deviation of gas from formal service stations to black market are the most reported illicit economies on the states. Illegal traffic of gold was registered in eight entities investigated.

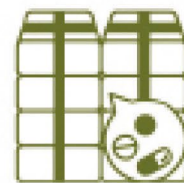
Graphic. Types of black identified in states investigated



13 of 13 states
gas smuggling



8 of 13 states
traffic of gold



13 of 13 states
drug trafficking



5 of 13 states
corruption in
management of ports
and customs



13 of 13 states
scrap smuggling

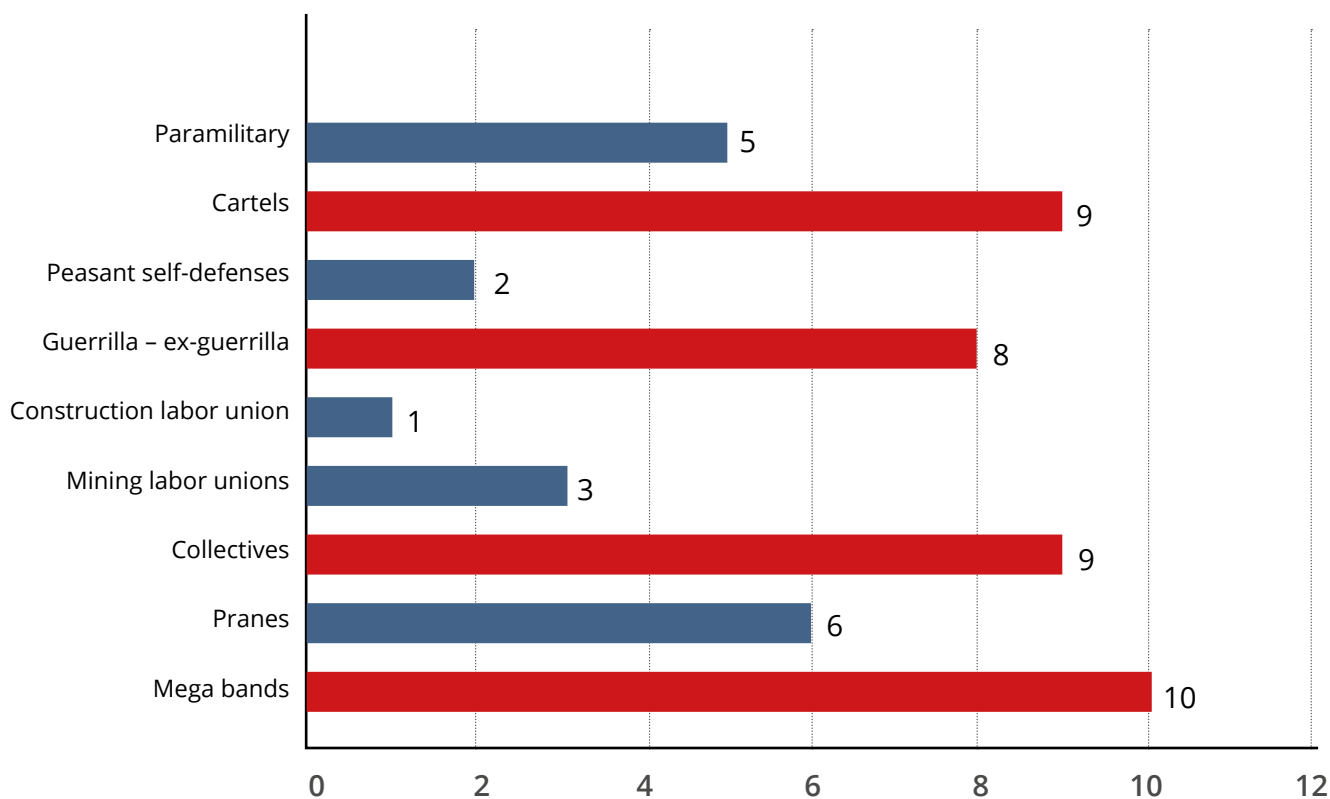


In most states analyzed it was identified the existence of a criminal governorship, that sustains on illicit economic activities and that has great influence over citizens that live or transit those entities.

Groups of organized crime that have presence in a good part of states considered are collectives, guerrilla, cartels and mega-bands.

Before the existence of these irregular groups and the criminal activities performed in Venezuela, it is necessary a re-institutionalization of public administration and security corps; the design and application of national public policies, specific for each region that allows to revert a situation affecting institutions, economy and society.

Graphic No. 2. Quantity of states where different types of NSAG were identified





Amazonas

Amazonas state is located in south Venezuela and receives its name for being part of Amazonia region.

Population

187.000
habitants

Surface

183.000 Km²
The second entity with the largest area in the country



Municipalities 7 **Parishes 23**

Irregular groups present



GUERRILLA



COLLECTIVES

Types of illicit and actors

According to information gathered, on the entity are developed several illicit economies identified in this report, being the most relevant the illegal exploitation of gold and drug traffic. Although in Amazonas state is forbidden any exploitation of minerals since ends of the XX century, in the last years the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM), under the management of general mayor Carlos Osorio, has been increasing its presence in the territory.

Sources consulted agree that these activities are dominated mainly by the National Liberation Army (ELN) and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents. The guerrilla usually presents before indigenous communities with a mediating attitude, they affirm they count on the support from the national government and their

aim is to render security and even “economic supports”. They have managed to convince some people; nonetheless, who oppose and defend actively their territories are forced to run away to other areas.

There are reports of violations to indigenous communities, such as kidnappings, extortions and forced recruitment, even to minors. Women belonging to these groups occupy roles of combatants, logistics, recruitment of members and maintenance on camps.

These groups not necessarily behave as they did in Colombia, when they emerged dozens of years ago. Their efforts are directed to obtain financing at any cost.

In the case of FARC dissidences, Miguel Díaz Sanmartín, alias “Julián Chollo” or “JJ” is identified as the head, who allegedly acts as chief of guerrilla in the zone of Yapacana.



In Amazonas state is also reported the presence of other irregular groups, such as the Brazilian *garimpeiros* that historically have occupied frontier territories and have submitted indigenous communities. Denounces have been formalized by three indigenous organizations of the state, that in August 2021 alerted the delegated Ombudsman about incursion of more than 400 Brazilian *garimpeiros* strongly armed, with about 30 machines used to extract mineral in their territories¹.

Another irregular actor present on the entity is the denominated *Indigenous Committees*, which act as a type of collective, formed by around 550 people and operate in fluvial control points, where they demand for “vacunas” to merchants (money and products). In each control point there are around 15 individuals. They foment illegal mining in Atabapo municipality. According to reports, these control points were created by lack of social attention from national and regional governments. In these committees also participate women.

Some individuals interviewed pointed that criminal organizations, mainly guerrilla groups operating in Amazonas state, they have links with Venezuelan military officers and officials from the State governorship and majorities. However, they did not specify names of individuals involved. These state entities are allegedly passive before the presence of groups doing activities of illegal mining, drug traffic, gas smuggling and corruption.

Impact of irregular groups and illicit economies

The raise of illicit economies in Amazonas state is impulsed mainly by economic crisis, high levels of poverty and absence of controls from State security corps which, far from fighting illicit, are constituted as another actor on irregularities.

In this context, indigenous communities see altered their traditional ways of life. Fractures are generated among who choose to sum up to those groups and who continue to defend their territories from invasions. There are reports of intimidations that lead to movements of population and there are also denounces about forced recruitment and floodings of areas with drugs. At the same time, the use of polluting substances such as mercury for gold exploitation end up affecting soils and waters where the indigenous live, with direct consequences over their health.

Sources consulted assure that many citizens prefer to stay quiet about what happens to them by fear to retaliations, not always denounce because they mistrust security bodies or State institutions.

1 Ramírez, M y otros. Armando.Info. (2022). “El quién es quién de los cárteles criminales al sur del Orinoco”. February 03rd. Available in: <https://armando.info/el-quien-es-quien-de-los-carteles-criminales-al-sur-del-orinoco/>



Highlighted cases:

Amazonas military officer arrested for drug traffic

In June 2020, the Bolivarian National Guard detained Navy Captain, Intimo Gerónimo García Santiago, chief of the Fluvial Training and Coastal Center Cacique Aramare 73, located inside Puerto Ayacucho Air Base, Amazonas state, for his alleged link with traffic of two tons of marihuana².

Marihuana seized in Colombia had Venezuela as destination

In January 2021, the General Prosecutor of Colombia informed the seizure of more than half ton of marihuana, *crippy* type, in Guainía department, that would have as destination the Venezuelan territory. According to the official entity, the 614 kilos of drugs were moved in a boat with double bottom that sailed through Inírida river, frontier with Amazonas state³.

11,6 kilos of gold seized in frontier with Amazonas

In April 2021, the Colombian police seized 11,6 kilos of gold in César Gaviria Trujillo airport of Inírida city, that was intended to be taken out illegally in a commercial flight with destination to Bogotá. According to the journalist Bram Ebus, investigator of illicit commerce of gold, Puerto Inírida is a known point of transit for gold extracted in Yapacana National Park, Amazonas state⁴.

2 Marcano, M. (2020). "Guardia Nacional detiene a militar de Amazonas por narcotráfico en Anzoátegui". June 22nd. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/detienen-a-director-de-escuela-naval-de-amazonas-por-narcotrafico-en-anzoategui/>

3 El Morichal. (2021). "Marihuana incautada en Guainía tendría como destino Venezuela, según la Fiscalía". January 27th. Available in: <https://elmorichal.com/marihuana-incautada-en-guainia-tendria-como-destino-venezuela-segun-la-fiscalia/>

4 Twitter @BramEbus. Journalist Bram Ebus account, illicit gold trade investigator. April 10th 2021. Available in: <https://twitter.com/BramEbus/status/1380889279753256969>



Anzoátegui

It is located in the northwest of the country. There is located the important international port of Guanta.

Surface

43.300 Km²

the sixth largest in Venezuela



Municipalities 21 **Parishes 57**

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



BANDS



CARTELS



PRANES

Types of illicit and actors

In Anzoátegui state, the illicit economy with greatest weight is drug traffic. Nonetheless, there have also been identified cases related to gas smuggling, illegal sale of gold, corrupted management of ports and customs, and irregular handling of scrap, according to testimonials gathered.

On drug traffic activities allegedly participate organized criminal groups together with military, policemen and officers of State entities; behind gold traffic there would be structures also linked to public sector; while cases of gas smuggling are mainly associated to military and armed bands led by pranes.

The reports received about irregular handlings in ports and customs point the participation of public officials that direct involved institutions, such as Bolipuartos, Seniat and FANB. Same happens with denounces about opaque exports of scrap that allegedly come from dismantling

Pdvsa installations, cement companies and the Anaco railway line.

Among irregular groups that have participated in drug traffic activities in Anzoátegui is the denominated Cartel de Paraguaná, which has its operations center in coasts and highlands of Falcón, but that has extended to other port regions, according to a judicial investigation opened in 2020. In fact, its leader, Emilio Enrique Martínez, alias "Chiche Smith", was arrested in April 2021 in Anzoátegui state, next to his daughter and grandson.

Regarding scrap smuggling, in the state have been identified local bands that commit this kind of crimes. In October 2021, Cicpc in Puerto La Cruz arrested three adults and a minor, members of a criminal group called "el Tococo", who would be the responsible of several robberies committed inside Guanire Pdvsa installations. From there were subtracted electrical conductors to be sold as foundation material⁵.

5 0800 Noticias. (2021). "Detenidos cuatro integrantes de la banda de «El Tococo» en Anzoátegui". October 29th. Available in: <https://800noticias.com/detenidos-cuatro-integrantes-de-la-banda-de-el-tococo-en-anzoategui>



On the entity there is presence of other bands known by the names of their maximum leaders or pranes, that have been identified since years by security corps of the State⁶. These organizations are accused of crimes such as homicides, extortion and drug traffic. Among the operations centers it is found Puerto Ayala jail, located in Barcelona, capital of the state.

Impact of irregular groups and illicit economies

The influence and social dominion of armed groups participating in illicit economies in Anzoátegui state is perceived as high, especially its alleged relation with military and police officers, as well as with political leaders of the entity.

The coastal location of the state and the quantity of economic resources that move in it are considered the main attractive for the occurrence of illicit activities. Likewise, sources consulted assure that other incentive is the elevated impunity registered on the entity.

These activities impact negatively the population. Armed groups exercise great control over citizens that fear to rise their voice to claim for their rights. The violence facts reply constantly giving place to a spiral affecting mainly the poorest areas.

Participation of State representatives in illicit activities, ends up for weakening institutions and increases rejection of population when the have to appeal to them to proceed with any denounce.

Highlighted cases:

Alleged drug traffic network operating from Anzoátegui was dismantled

In April 2018, the designated prosecutor by

the Constituent, Tarek William Saab, informed the dismantling of an alleged international drug traffic network operating from Anzoátegui state and the Caribbean Islands as destination. Saab highlighted that the band leaders were arrested and identified as Carlos Javier Vásquez and William Agüero, together with Jonathan Aldana, Giovanni Rodríguez, Alexis Quintero and Aurelio Hernández. On the investigation were seized 230 kilos of marihuana, 455 kilos of cocaine, two war rifles, 989 cartridges of different calibers, 19 grenades, five vehicles, three sports boats and a mansion⁷.

Gold traffic network pretended to land in Anzoátegui

In June 2019, the National Direction of Drugs Control of Dominican (DNCD) seized USD 1.378.178 in cash in an airplane that intended to get out of La Romana airport with destination to Barcelona, capital of Anzoátegui state in Venezuela. Two months later, prosecutor Tarek William Saab assured that the case was related to a network of gold traffic from Venezuela⁸.

Anzoátegui majors arrested for gasoline traffic

During the first two months of 2022 the Venezuelan Public Ministry announced the arrest of two majors of Anzoátegui state that allegedly integrated a network of gasoline smuggling. On January 19th was arrested the major of Independencia municipality, frontier with Bolívar state, Carlos Rafael Vidal Bolívar, together with his stepson, Carlos Manuel González. On February 03rd it was informed the arrest of former major of Freites municipality, Anzoátegui state, Daniel Haro Méndez⁹.

6 Molina, T. El Estímulo. (2015). "Ocho bandas delictivas controlan los estados Sucre y Anzoátegui". May 05th. Available in: <https://elestimulo.com/ocho-bandas-delictivas-controlan-los-estados-sucre-y-anzoategui/>

7 Tal Cual. (2018). "Desmantelan red de narcotráfico desde Anzoátegui hacia islas del Caribe". April 06th. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/desmantelan-red-de-narcotrafico-desde-anzoategui-hacia-islas-del-caribe/>

8 Transparencia Venezuela. (2022). "Red de tráfico de oro venezolano: negligencia en Dominicana ¿Y en Venezuela?". February 22nd. <https://supremainjusticia.org/red-trafico-oro-venezolano-negligencia-dominicana-venezuela/>

9 Camacho, J. Crónica Uno. (2022). "Autoridades desmantelan red que involucra a alcaldes oficialistas dedicadas al tráfico de drogas y combustible". January 29th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/detienen-a-alcaldes-del-psuv-por-trafico-de-drogas-y-combustible/>

El Nacional. (2022). "Detuvieron al alcalde chavista Daniel Haro Méndez por contrabando de gasolina". February 03rd. Available in: <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/detuvieron-al-alcalde-chavista-daniel-haro-mendez-por-contrabando-de-gasolina/>



Apure

Apure state is located in southeast Venezuela, in the plains region.

Surface**76.500 Km²****Municipalities 7 Parishes 26****Irregular groups present****MEGA BANDS****COLLECTIVES GUERRILLA****CARTELS OTHER****Types of illicit and actors**

Illicit economies that are most reported on the entity are drugs traffic, gas and scrap smuggling, according to sources consulted. There also denounces of cattle, food and medicines smuggling.

Illicit businesses are registered in Apure since several decades and among the main perpetrators are National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla men and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidences, formed by individuals who rejected the Peace Agreements subscribed with the government of Colombia in 2016.

According to sources consulted, ELN has presence in Puerto Páez, La Capilla, Tres Esquinas and El Ripial, among other Apure localities. They control illicit businesses made on the frontier, occupy farms, extortion and kidnap. In order to do so, they recruit Venezuelan youngsters to whom they offer possibilities to obtain money quickly, in a context of economic crisis.

On the entity there are also at least two groups of FARC dissidents, on one side, the denominated Front 10, led by Botache Santillana, alias "Gentil Duarte"; and on the other, Second Marquetalia FARC-EP, headed by Luciano Marín Arango, alias "Iván Márquez". These two factions have been confronting with each other in a hard fight for control over illicit businesses. In the confrontations have also participated FANB and ELN.

According to journal El Tiempo, in the first months of 2022, emissaries of powerful cartels from Mexico such as Jalisco Nueva Generación and Sinaloa landed in Venezuela to mediate between the crude dispute between FARC dissidences and ELN in Apure and avoid drug traffic operations being affected by it¹⁰.

Among irregular groups with influence in Apure there are also collectives Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar and Zamora, the denominated Cartel de Los Soles and the Train of Aragua.

10 El Tiempo. (2022). "Capos mexicanos llegan a Caracas a buscar tregua entre Eln y disidencias". March 23rd. Available in: https://www.eltiempo.com/unidad-investigativa/capos-mexicanos-buscan-tregua-entre-disidencias-de-las-farc-y-eln-660288?utm_content=Contenido_ET&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1648044746-1



Regarding scrap smuggling, the same state entities have reported this kind of events in Apure. In September 2021, the State channel Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) informed that the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) retained 3.500 kilos of strategic scrap material, that was in hands of an organized criminal group dedicated to illicit commercialization of strategic materials¹¹.

In all non-state armed groups operating in Apure there is participation of women. Sources consulted affirm that criminal bands operate in the entity with approval and participation of police and military officers, as well as local, regional and national government officials.

Impact of irregular groups and illicit economies

The impact of all irregular groups present in Apure over citizenship is high. Besides all damage caused by illicit economies itself, other crimes committed by bands and guerrilla men have modified the population's life style.

In March 2021, in the midst of the war between FARC dissidences and Apure military, citizens of diverse La Victoria villages were directly affected. Around 4.000 local residents had to move towards Arauquita municipality, on the Colombian side, to escape violence.

There are reports of agricultural producers that have been displaced from their farms by guerrilla groups. They are forced to pay vacunas in exchange of an alleged protection, who deny to do so are submitted to punishments. Even in the

capital city, San Fernando de Apure, merchants are extorted by non-state armed groups. Some choose for closing their businesses and till they leave the country. Mistrust on institutions leads many to keep quiet before authorities and do not talk about irregularities by fear to retaliations.

Highlighted cases:

A load of drugs was seized in Apure

The violent escalate among non-state armed groups in control of drug traffic and other illicit activities in Apure state did not stop in the first months of 2022. On February 11th, after days of informative opacity and without concrete official reports, the minister of Defense, General in Chief Vladimir Padrino López presented a balance about FANB actions to "safeguard sovereignty" in that entity. He assured that so far that year 56 individuals were already captured, 16 improvised camps were dismantled and 2.000 kilos of drugs were seized¹².

Apure drivers were arrested due to gas smuggling

In January 2022, the Public Ministry confirmed the arrest of two drivers from the company Empresa Nacional de Transporte, due to deviation of 37.000 liters of gas in Apure state¹³. They were accused of three crimes: fraudulent own embezzlement, aggravated fuel smuggling and criminal association. The drivers were identified as Rey Sánchez and Rodolfo Paredes.

11 VTV. (2021). Retienen 3.500 kilogramos de material estratégico tipo chatarra en Apure. September 13th. Available in: <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/material-estrategico-chatarra-apure-detenido/>

12 Martínez, D. (2022). "Diecisiete muertes, 2.000 kilos de drogas incautados y 16 campamentos destruidos en Apure, reporta Padrino López". February 11th. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/diecisiete-muertes-droga-16-campamentos-apure-padrino-lopez/>

13 Antillano, F. (2022). "Asestan fuerte golpe a mafias que trafican gasolina en Táchira y Apure". January 20th. Available in: <http://ciudadccs.info/2022/01/20/asestan-fuerte-golpe-a-mafias-que-trafican-gasolina-en-tachira-y-apure/>



Barinas

Barinas state is located in southeast Venezuela.

Surface

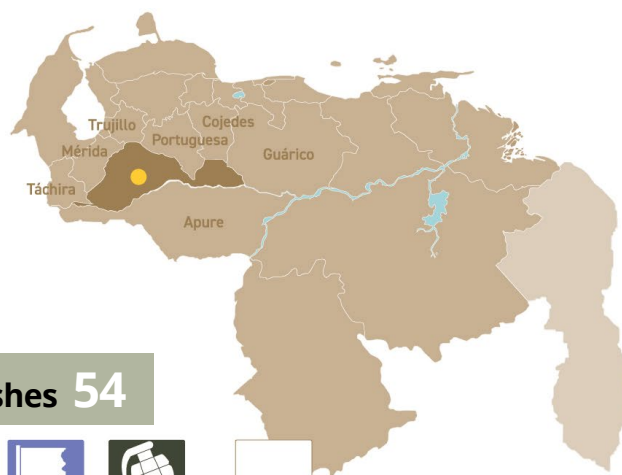
35.200 Km²

Municipalities 12 **Parishes 54**

Irregular groups present



COLLECTIVES GUERRILLA CARTELS PARAMILITARY OTHER



Types of illicit and actors

Regarding illicit economies, in this entity prevails drug traffic, gasoline smuggling, as well as gasoline black market and illegal sale of scrap. Besides, wood is illegally exploited and commercialized, allegedly by organized crime.

Activities related to drug traffic in Barinas date from many years ago, but since 2018 evidences have increased. Only in June 2019, were known two cases of aircrafts used to transport drugs that rushed to earth in farms located on the way to Barinas – San Silvestre edge, where Apure, Anaro and Orinoco rivers converge, a place with no control from authorities. There are also reports of drug panels seizures in vehicles belonging to the National Bolivarian Armed Force.

Among the actors behind these activities, stand out Diego Pérez Henao, leader of armed group Lor Rastrojos and one of the most wanted drug dealers of the world. He was founder of the Cartel del Norte del Valle, and he used as refuge a land located in Mijagual, Rojas municipality,

in Barinas state. After his arrest in 2012, an investigation showed that there were links between the criminal leader and relatives of the late president Hugo Chávez Frías¹⁴.

Diosmen de Jesús Montoya is another actor that has committed crimes inside Barinas state. He was arrested in May 2020 by the Force of Special Actions (FAES) while he was moving through the sector of La Caramuca, Barinas state, with eight panels of marihuana. In 2017, this man was accused of trafficking 800 kilos of cocaine in Curaçao¹⁵.

In this entity of Venezuelan plains there is also a history of gasoline smuggling cases. A source from Barinas state consulted for this report assured that groups belonging to the Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL), known as “Boliches” and “Pata’e goma” are in charge of smuggling on the Andean edge, formed by Pedraza, Sucre, Zamora and Andrés Eloy Blanco municipalities. “When gas crisis was acute, it was much easier to load gas in Anaro than in Barinas (the capital city has the same name of the state)”.

14 Armando.info. (2017). “Diego Rastrojo, el último narco a caballo”. August 20th. Available in: <https://armando.info/diego-rastrojo-el-ultimo-narco-a-caballo/>

15 Rojas E. (2020). “Detuvieron en Barinas a tres narcotraficantes”. May 11th. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/detuvieron-en-barinas-a-tres-narcotraficantes/>



The smuggling business in Zamora municipality has been split among irregular groups and organized crime, who allegedly count on permissiveness of military officers and officials from the local government.

Another illicit registered in Barinas is the irregular sale of scrap, defined by the State as strategic material. Only in the first two months of 2022, it was published the arrest of at least two groups of individuals who sold ferrous material from State installations. One of these facts was registered on February 25th, 2022, when officials from ZODI detained four individuals transporting four tons of ferrous material extracted from the Boyacá Division of Pdvsa Barinas¹⁶.

Barinas residents have also alerted about the presence of irregulars who would be behind illegal exploitation of gold. A producer consulted for this report affirmed that these individuals have tried to uncover alleged mines in Sucre municipality. "Pranes and FBL members took our maternal farm for some time believing there was gold in it", he added. On the other hand, a producer and lawyer mentioned the payment of gold grams from farmers of Altamira, Bolívar municipality and Socopó, Sucre municipality.

Besides, denounces have increased recently regarding the alleged illegal extraction and sale of wood, with participation of public officials, military officers and irregular groups.

Caparo reservoir, located in Zamora municipality, counts on an extension close to 175.000 hectares. Before arrival of Hugo Chávez to power, wood extraction in that place was done in a planned way. However, a source linked to sawmills and carpenters declared

that control of wood is held by irregular groups through FBL. This person highlights the participation of an alleged guerrilla commander that extracts the wood without a guide and transports it to Puerto Cabello.

Another source pointed that the group with most power in Barinas is FBL, because they allegedly count on the support from military officers and police. Among their activities also stand out extortion. Their main leader is known as alias "Ruperto", who lives in high Apure. Alias "Román" is also known, who operates in Santa Bárbara de Barinas. According to the information compiled, coexist with and subjugate the livestock sector, but that they control trails where the illegal merchandise coming from Arauca, Colombia, is transported.

Apart from FBL, other groups operating in Barinas are: Front Francisco de Miranda, FARC dissidences, ELN, Cartel de los Soles, Los Rastrojos, Tupamaros, National Agricultural Coordinator Ezequiel Zamora (Canez) and the Revolutionary Current Bolívar and Zamora (CRBZ). Guerrilla and cartels are the groups with biggest influence on the entity.

"ELN has its operations center in Mirí, beyond Socopó, in Chameta", says a producer to which a member of this irregular group prevented him to get his wood out from his production unit in 2019.

16 Rivas, B. (2022). "Militares retienen cuatro toneladas de material ferroso de Pdvsa Boyacá". February 25th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/barinas-militares-retienen-cuatro-toneladas-de-material-ferroso-de-pdvsa-boyaca/>



Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

Incidence of irregular groups in Barinas affects mainly farmers and cattle producers, who are extorted or used for illicit businesses, in exchange of letting them develop their activities.

The impact of black economy is perceived in the existence of powerful groups living out law, the scarcity of legal work, growth of poor populations, prostitution, drugs consumption, loss of ethics and increasement of mistrust regarding authorities and institutions.

Officials pointed as the most corrupted by sources interviewed in the state are the FANB, local policemen, GNB, Cicpc, majorities and governorships, and the National Institute of Integral Agricultural Health (Insai).

Highlighted cases

Los Rastrojos band leader arrested in Barinas

In June 03rd, 2012, the then president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, announced the capture of one of the most wanted drug dealers, Diego Pérez Henao, chief of the irregular group Los Rastrojos, for whom offered a reward of USD 5 million. After an operation between Colombian police and the National Anti-drugs Office of Venezuela, they located Pérez Henao in Rojas municipality, Barinas. Residents of the building where the individual was captured showed their surprise before this fact, which implied his extradition to United States. Two years later, Pérez Henao was condemned to 30 years of prison for illicit association to produce and distribute tons of cocaine.

Barinas band of scrap dealers was dismantled

On January 30th, 2022, ZODI dismantled a network dedicated to sale of ferrous material in Barinas municipality. In the event were arrested 11 people and seized 270 tons of scrap. According to La Noticia de Barinas¹⁷, this group kept relation with the socialist Company Pedro Camejo, which renders services of agricultural mechanization and transport to small and medium producers.

17 Obregón, W. (2022). "Desarticulan banda que se dedicaba a desmantelar maquinarias del sector público en Barinas". January 30th. Available in: <https://www.eluniversal.com/sucesos/117376/desarticulan-banda-que-se-dedicaba-a-desmantelar-maquinaras-del-sector-publico-en-barinas>



Carabobo

Carabobo state is located in the central north of Venezuela, next to the coastal mountain range.

Surface

4.650 Km²

During decades it held one of the most important industrial zones of the country, but currently those areas seem to be ghost towns.

Municipalities 14 **Parishes 38**

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



PRANES



CARTELS



MINING LABOR UNIONS



Types of illicit and actors

Drug traffic and sale of gasoline in black market are the illicit activities predominating in the entity; however, illegal traffic of gold and scrap smuggling have become “new businesses”. To these types of illicit economy are summed up extortion and kidnapping.

Those crimes are associated to organized criminal groups or irregulars because they are committed at great scale and under the leadership of punctual actors, which implies a complex level of organization, different from ordinary crime.

In Carabobo, there are several actors dedicated to black economy, among them: the Train of Aragua, the mega-band of alias “Richardi”, construction labor unions, the denominated Cartel de los Soles and Cartel de Paraguaná¹⁸. According to interviews held for this analysis, State security corps officers, police and military, are the most implied in the execution of black economy acts. It is pointed that these effectives have alliances with irregular groups, that move also throughout the coast up to Falcón state.

One of the most feared bands is the Train of Aragua, considered as the most powerful non-state armed organization of Venezuela. This group is led by Héctor Rutherford Guerrero Flores alias “Niño Guerrero”, the pran of Penitentiary Center of Aragua, known as Tocarón, described in chapter three of this report.

Even though the band originated in Aragua state, it has extended up to at least 13 states of Venezuela and more than seven countries in the region.

Another among the most powerful groups is the mega-band of alias “Richardi”, led by Néstor Richardi Sequera Campos, maximum leader of Tocuyito jail. This criminal organization has an alliance with the band of “El Koki”, present in Caracas and together participate in illegal exploitation of gold, and irregular sale of scrap. Besides, these bands are pointed for participating in other illicit activities such as drug traffic, extortion, robbery of vehicles, traffic of weapons and kidnapping.

18 Insight Crime. (2022). "El cartel de Paraguaná: narcotráfico y poder político en Venezuela". May 02nd. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/cartel-paraguana-narcotrafico-poder-politico-venezuela/>



In June 2020, four criminals were murdered, who also controlled illicit economies in Carabobo¹⁹. In an alleged confrontation with a mixed commission, police and military in Guacara turned out dead Guiosmar Antonio Heredia Colina, alias “el Bebé” and three of his closest men, two of them known with the nicknames of “El Dieguito” and “Luis El Feo”. This group dedicated to distribute drugs, extortion, kidnapping, among other crimes.

More recently, these organizations have been interested in activities associated to illegal traffic of gold and scrap smuggling. They have maintained in the coastal corridor from Puerto Cabello to Paraguaná, impacting the whole Oriental Coast of Falcón. Likewise, there is influence of the Train of Aragua in populations of Mariara, Güigüe, San Joaquín and Guacara. It is known that illegal mining is permeating up to Cojedes, south frontier with Carabobo.

Regarding cartels, there are reports that the Cartel de Paraguaná, led by Emilio Martínez (alias el “Chiche Smith”), has made drug traffic operations in Puerto Cabello and in April 2020, different properties linked to him were seized in states Falcón and Carabobo²⁰.

Sources consulted for this report relate drug traffic, gas smuggling, illegal traffic of gold, scrap smuggling, corruption on ports and airports with officials from Carabobo state governorship and entities ascribed.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

According to specialized sources, black market crimes affect more women and children

because they include practices of modern slavery, specifically sexual exploitation. Besides, women assume the responsibilities of their family, in case their partners are detained, hurt or murdered.

Institutional weaknesses and complicity of some authorities, convert the recent findings of gold in the country's occident in bad news for environmental impact and for insecurity generated by the presence of irregular groups. Furthermore, the precarious situation of port and airport structures, as well as dismantling of the industrial zone make the scrap business appetizing.

Even though consultations made reveal that Carabobo governorship has a high perception of corruption, it is also truth that governor Rafael Lacava and his team have the best acceptance among politicians of the region. The Operative Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI), the Puerto Cabello majority and Seniat are other institutions pointed with mistrust.

In the economic aspect, it is evidenced a displacement of traditional businessmen for new economic groups that do not promote local production. It attracts attention an apparent economic recovery due to investments made by some businessmen linked to political power.

About the political and institutional impact, it has generated a weakening of democratic dissidence by purchase of consciences and has increased the lack of honesty of new actors in the exercise of politics.

19 Ramírez, L. El Universal. (2020). “Cae en operativo uno de los sujetos más buscados en Carabobo”. June 16th. <https://www.eluniversal.com/sucesos/73326/cae-en-operativo-uno-de-los-sujetos-mas-buscados-en-carabobo>

20 Insight Crime. (2022). “El cartel de Paraguaná: narcotráfico y poder político en Venezuela”. May 02nd. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/investigaciones/cartel-paraguana-narcotrafico-poder-politico-venezuela/>



Highlighted cases

A police chief was arrested due to links with drug traffic in Carabobo

The National Anti-drug Command of GNB arrested three men allegedly linked to drugs traffic on April 15th, 2020: Raúl Roberto Del Gallego Salas, Orlando José Silva Moreno and Jesús Antonio Blanco Goitia. On the procedure were seized two Glock pistols, caliber 9mm. One of them was stamped with the logo of Carabobo Judicial Police Technical Corp, predecessor of Cicpc. That same day, the then minister of Interior and Justice, Néstor Reverol²¹, announced the arrest of the Cicpc chief, José Domínguez, who is related to Del Gallego Salas and Silva Moreno.

A ton of drugs were seized inside a truck in Carabobo

In December 2021, the National Anti-drugs Superintendent, mayor general Richard López Vargas, informed the seizure of one ton of drugs, in cocaine and marihuana panels, that were transported inside a truck in Carabobo state. Through the use of X rays, the authorities detected inside a truck two secret chambers containing 2.058 panels of marihuana and 100 panels of cocaine²². According to the superintendent, the truck driver was placed in the custody of the Public Ministry.

21 Boccanegra, S. (2020). "El país merece explicaciones sobre fotos de funcionarios con supuestos narcos". April 22nd. Available in: <https://talcuadigital.com/el-pais-merece-explicaciones-sobre-fotos-de-funcionarios-con-supuestos-narcos/>

22 Ferrer, M. (2021). "Más de una tonelada de drogas fue incautada dentro de una gandola en el estado Carabobo". December 04th. Available in: <https://www.sunad.gob.ve/mas-de-una-tonelada-de-drogas-fue-incautada-dentro-de-una-gandola-en-el-estado-carabobo/>



Delta Amacuro

Delta Amacuro state, in the delta of Orinoco River, is located at east Venezuela.

Surface
40.200 Km²

Municipalities 4 **Parishes 21**

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



GUERRILLA



MINING LABOR UNIONS



Types of illicit and actors

Difficulties to reach Delta Amacuro, the scarce population, mainly indigenous and low presence of communications media on the entity prevent the many crimes registered there to be known at national level.

Sources interviewed refer to several illicit economies occurring in Delta Amacuro, the most relevant is gasoline smuggling, illegal traffic of gold and drug traffic, which takes advantage of its direct access to the Atlantic Sea, having in front Trinidad & Tobago.

Since middle 2019, there has been reconfiguration of non-state armed groups in control of illicit economies in the zone. The most highlighted is the Barrancas Labor Union, the groups controlling agricultural activities and criminal organizations self-defined as guerrilla.

An individual with much power on the entity was Evander Miguel Barradas, who led the mega-band of Evander or Frente de Liberación Deltano (FLD). He had control of Orinoco River from Delta Amacuro and there he dedicated to gas

smuggling, drug traffic, extortion, human traffic and other illicit activities. He was murdered in April 2019 in an alleged confrontation against a mixed commission of the Army and Cicpc in Tucupita. That same day other six members of the band died.

After the death of Evander and several of his lieutenants, some members of the band moved to Trinidad & Tobago to continue their illicit activities. One part of the band would have stayed in Delta Amacuro to operate on their own and the other part decided to join the Barrancas Labor Union or *The System*.

Barrancas Labor Union is a criminal organization born in Monagas, as a movement for defense of workers' rights, but it got armed and expanded till becoming one of the most known criminal groups of Venezuela. After "Evander's" death, they kept control on Orinoco River and Delta Amacuro and also move through Monagas state. The Barrancas Labor Union is dedicated to gas smuggling, illegal gold traffic, drug traffic, extortion, women traffic and even wildlife traffic.



Other irregular actors with presence in Delta Amacuro are the denominated River Pirates, that frequently stalk indigenous families and persons moving to Tucupita, the capital, affirmed a communicator from the entity.

Fluvial channels on Delta, surrounded by forest, have enabled transport of drugs, arms and gasoline, irregular groups operating on the entity have incorporated Warao indigenous to their crimes, because they know well the existing labyrinths²³.

Regarding scrap smuggling, concretely in Caño Tucupita, there have been denounces of scrap dealers' presence, participating on this illegal business²⁴.

Military officers and Delta Amacuro police are blamed for allegedly being the most linked actors to illicit activities on the entity, according to interviews made. Sources assure that these people propitiate illegal activities because they keep part of final profits.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

The rise of illicit economies in Delta Amacuro and violence escalate from non-state armed groups have had a great impact on population, specifically in indigenous Warao communities. The constant outrages to which they are submitted from criminal groups and security corps, summed to the effects of the complex humanitarian emergency have pushed many of them to run away from the state and even the country.

Criminal bands have displaced some Warao communities from their ancestral territories towards Brazil, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. Displacement has disrupted their ancestral life traditions and has exposed them to human traffic networks. Other indigenous have been attracted to do illegal activities.

Agricultural products from the entity and merchants have also suffered the raise of illicit and armed groups. Besides, it has increased mistrust in security corps and State institutions.

Highlighted cases:

Senior prosecutor of Delta Amacuro was arrested by alleged deviation of gasoline

In January 2022, the senior prosecutor of Delta Amacuro, Jorge Peña, was arrested for his participation in a network of gas smugglers, connecting Anzoátegui, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro states²⁵.

Delta Amacuro prosecutor arrested for drug traffic

Guerlys Hernández Urrieta, Public Ministry prosecutor in Delta Amacuro and her husband, Jorge Luis Hernández, were apprehended in December 2020, for their alleged link to the seizing of 204 envelopes containing 2.012 pills of synthesized drugs, known as ectasis²⁶.

23 Perdomo, A. Armando.info (2016). "La telaraña del narcotráfico atrapa a los waraos". February 25th. Available in: <https://armando.info/la-telarana-del-narcotrafico-atrapa-a-los-waraos/>

24 Medina, A. Radio Fe y Alegría. (2021). "En Tucupita buscan chatarra entre aguas contaminadas para subsistir". December 07th. Available in: <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoticias.com/en-tucupita-buscan-chatarra-entre-aguas-contaminadas-para-subsistir/>

25 El Pitazo. (2022). "Autoridades detienen a fiscal superior de Delta Amacuro por presunto desvío de gasolina". January 31st. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/autoridades-detienen-a-fiscal-superior-de-delta-amacuro-por-presunto-desvio-de-gasolina/>

26 Ávila, M. El Pitazo. (2020). "Tribunal priva de libertad a fiscal de Delta Amacuro por delito de drogas". December 01st. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/guayana/tribunal-privado-de-libertad-a-fiscal-de-delta-amacuro-por-delito-de-drogas/>



Lara

Lara state is located in central occident Venezuela.

Surface

19.800 Km²

Municipalities 9

Parishes 58

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



BANDS



COLLECTIVES

**Types of illicit and actors**

In this entity, the most registered illicit economic activities are black market gasoline deviation and scrap smuggling, being the first the most known. There are also reports of drug traffic and there are indications of illicit extraction of non-metallic materials, such as limestone or sand and metals such as cobalt.

The authorities of Public Ministry have identified Lara state a one of the entities with most denounces for extraction and illegal sale of gasoline²⁷. This is an illicit activity which people from Lara has to deal with every day in gas and diesel stations, particularly on the subsidized, and in the communications ways and control points. These cases are denounced publicly and in most of it, reported through chats of service users.

In regards to scrap smuggling, sources consulted agree that in the last years illegal extraction of ferrous material has increased, taken from public institutions, but the information about it is scarce. In

march 2021, deputy Guillermo Palacios, presented a denounce before the 22 prosecutor of Lara state, about liquidation as scrap goods from Company Yacambú-Quíbor Hydraulic System.

Regarding drug traffic in Lara state, there are information spots. However, several seizures of drugs made public in recent years confirm the use of this entity as a passage to traffic drugs. Only in 2021, security corps seized 770 kilos of drugs, according to press registers²⁸.

Even in previous years was reported the use of Barquisimeto airport for illicit activities. Sources consulted do not discard planning drug traffic operations from Fénix Penitentiary Center, in Barquisimeto, where is allegedly incarcerated the leader of La Guajira cartel, Hermágoras González Polanco alias "Gordito González". Other sources consulted doubt he is in Lara.

Collectives emerged as social, communitarian or student organizations, but with years some deviated. In Lara state operate Cuadrillas de Paz

27 Figueroa, Y. (2022). "Lara se encuentra entre las regiones con mayores casos de tráfico de gasolina". January 25th. Available in: <https://cronica.uno/lara-se-encuentra-entre-las-regiones-con-mayores-casos-de-trafico-de-gasolina/>

28 La Prensa de Lara. (2021). "El estado Lara, una de las rutas preferidas por el narcotráfico". December 24th. Available in: <https://www.laprensalarara.com.ve/nota/41078/2021/12/el-estado-lara-una-de-las-rutas-preferidas-por-el-narcotrafico>



(Cupaz), the Red Elco and Fuerzas Especiales Cívico Militares Patria Nueva (Fecmpn) collectives. These groups are mainly linked to the black market of gasoline in complicity with public officials, police and military officers.

Among bands that have operated in the entity between 2021 and the first trimester of 2022, there is "Santanita" band, led by Josué Ángel Santana. According to journalistic sources consulted, he represents the Tren de Aragua in Lara at least since 2020.

Other bands present in Lara are: "Robin Hood de La Recta", their most frequent crimes are highway piracy; Boca Negra, Correcaminos and Piratas, who commit robberies and falsify documents of purchase and sale of vehicles to rob it; the "Bambalina" band, dedicated to drug traffic; "Pocholo" band, also dedicated to drug traffic and the "Horca Horca".

According to sources consulted, the "Horca Horca" operate in municipalities Andrés Eloy Blanco, Morán, Jiménez and Iribarren and have more than 300 members. They are pointed for torturing and mutilating their victims, which has contributed that many people keep silence about them.

In regards to links with armed groups and public officials, the most known are the ones allegedly existing between collectives and officials from different entities of Lara governorship.

These groups would participate with support from GNB and Army officers who control service stations. One source affirms that the head of illicit activities in that area is on the Integral Defense Zone No. 13, ZODI Lara. Several sources indicate that these are also linked to illegal extraction of non-metallic materials, such as sand and limestone.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

The appreciation of interviewed is that ZODI, GNB, Army, majorities and legislative council are the most corrupted public institutions in Lara state. Representatives of these entities render support to non-state armed groups controlling illicit economies.

It is considered that activities of these groups affect more women and girls from popular sectors, as well as patients that require regular treatments, such as persons with kidney issues, due to lack of mobility to go to schools, search for food, obtain water or natural gas, or get to hospitals.

Corruption is cited as the main responsible of illicit activities; institutional weakness of State organs; weaknesses on denounce systems and protection to complainants; excess of controls; and disparity of gas prices.

In regards to impacts caused by illicit analyzed are: difficulties to access health services by impacts on the access and life of persons, significative diminishing of public transport units; loss on companies, delays in production and distribution of food; loss of confidence in public institutions, impunity of who commit crimes, helplessness of citizens, loss of independence among powers and corrupted institutions.



Highlighted cases:

Cicpc officer arrested for drug traffic.

In August 2021, National Guard officers in Lara state seized 773 panels of marijuana, weighting around 472 kilos, that were hidden in a Toyota Hilux truck abandoned in the town of Quebrada Arriba, Torres municipality. Short after was detained Ezequiel Medina Uzcátegui, Cicpc active officer, ascribed to the National Division of Investigation Against Kidnapping in Zulia edge and who was related to the mentioned load. The Public Ministry accused²⁹ Uzcátegui for illicit traffic of narcotics and psychotropic substances in modality of association for distribution and transport.

From airport Jacinto Lara came out drugs towards Dominican Republic

In March 2016, Dominican Republic authorities seized a load of 359 kilos of pure cocaine, distributed in 349 packs inside three bags and two packages that were inside an airplane.

That would have departed from International Airport Jacinto Lara³⁰. Days later were arrested five sergeants of the National Bolivarian Guard and several civilians for their alleged link to the case.

29 El Pitazo. (2021). "GN en Lara incautó 773 panelas de marihuana a un funcionario del Cicpc". August 19th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/gran-caracas/gn-en-lara-incauto-773-panelas-de-marihuana-a-un-funcionario-del-cicpc/>

30 Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia. (2016). "Este caso no lo pueden haber manejado unos sargentos". April 05th. Available in: <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/este-caso-no-lo-pueden-haber-manejado-unos-sargentos/>



Mérida

Mérida state is located in the Andean Cordillera, it is located at west Venezuela, at less than 200 km from the Colombian frontier.

Surface

11.300 Km²

Municipalities 23 **Parishes 82**

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



BANDS



COLLECTIVES



CARTELS



GUERRILLA



PRANES



PARAMILITARY



Types of illicit and actors

In this entity, drug trafficking, the black market for fuel and scrap smuggling are the known illegal activities. Also, there is illegal commercialization of wood and smuggling of vegetables and agricultural supplies from Colombia.

According to reports, in the development of these illicit activities participate mega-bands, the ELN, FARC dissidences, Venezuelan and foreign cartels, farmers self-defenses, Los Rastrojos, collectives, as well as military officers, and corrupt policemen.

In most consulted sources, there is the agreement that drug traffic is the most important illicit on the state, due to the magnitude of resources, impact on other crimes and time of exercise of the activity. Security corp officers consulted sustain that there are drug production centers in Santos Marquina municipality and there have been found crops of marihuana in Antonio Pinto Salinas municipality.

Drug cartels doing businesses in Mérida are not local, but they have found small groups to perform their activities of distribution and transport, affirmed several sources interviewed with knowledge about these businesses. They agree that Mérida is a bridge, that does not count on an important production of drugs, but it is used to transport it. It was known that some leaders are in San Cristóbal, Táchira, and that cartels are Colombian.

A Cicpc officer who did not want to be mentioned, assured that power of groups involved with drug traffic has penetrated all security corps, the prosecutor and tribunals. This person explained that when a drugs seizure is produced is because a bigger load is in transit - and that is called distraction fly - or because these are denounced between cartels.

Regarding gasoline, more than smuggling or irregular trans-frontier mobilization, what exists is a black market of gasoline, stimulated by a price differential and intermittent supply towards



the occident of the country. This kind of black economy works since 2014 approximately, date in which there were already scarcity problems in municipality Alberto Adriani, that is why it was imposed the use of a chip to control gas supply.

The gas black market occurs in subsidized and dollarized gas stations of the city and in municipalities of the high and low zones. Sources point that there is a leak of gasoline from Mérida to Táchira and that, besides, part of the gas assigned to Mérida state is deviated to Táchira.

Sources interviewed affirm that most authorities designated to control gas distribution are involved in illicit. On service stations there are members of PSUV militia, Bolívar Chávez units, youngsters from Chamba Juvenil or motorized collectives adept to officialism, denominated Tupamaros.

Two members of security corps consulted for this report, highlighted the participation of collectives in drug traffic, gasoline traffic and other crimes.

In this illicit also participate farmers self-defenses, which operate mountain areas of Merida and also dedicate to extortion.

In regards to scrap smuggling, three sources indicated that it comes from abandoned car deposits in El Salado (Campo Elías municipality), robbed electrical wire, optic fiber and robbed phone cable, signs, statues and bridges in public spaces and pool lids. Who are in charge of trafficking this material are leaders settled in Alberto Adriani municipality (El Vigía); small groups steal or compile scrap in Libertador, Campo Elías, Sucre and take it there. From there distribution is made to Colombia. Another source pointed that mega-bands have incorporated to copper robbery and scrap smuggling since the economic crisis deepened.

One point to highlight is the illegal traffic of wood. Allegedly, the route passes by the South towns

with exit to Barinas. According to sources, wood comes from rural villages of Chiguará (Sucre municipality), Santa Cruz de Mora (Antonio Pinto Salinas municipality) and forests close to the frontier with Barinas (Santa Elena de Arenales).

A person consulted affirmed that who directs wood smuggling is ELN guerrilla, while a source from a security corp affirmed that those are irregular groups that could hardly be precisely identified. Another source agreed that ELN operates in Mérida, as well as FARC and an irregular group denominated Gente del Monte. To make this affirmation, this person bases on testimonials of other persons that have directed to the zone of Caparo and have been detained by irregular armed groups – already identified – who verify where people are head to. This source added that a commission is charged for cubic meter and that the business of wood smuggling exists since long time ago, because the economic incentive is high: in Mérida a cubic meter of wood – extracted from one or two trees – is sold at a price that oscillates between USD 800 and USD 1.000, for which it is estimated that half wood sold on the entity is extracted illegally.

The Caparo Experimental Station is surveilled by turns of 15 days by GNB and the Army; however, the threat of invasion and deforestation persists in a protected area that holds a rich biodiversity.

One of the sources assured that State protection organisms fear to those armed groups, so they are forced to emit transporting guides, even when the activity is illegal. In occasions, a distribution guide is used several times, and, therefore, circulation of wood obtained happens in sight of everyone. Irregulars also control alcabalas and charge bribes to admit any illicit traffic.

According to a source of Pan-American zone and sources of security corps, Colombian irregular groups in connection with farmer fronts



represent a constant threat for producers of the zone, due to extortions to which they are submitted. Local bands also dedicate to black economy. At least three of them have been identified: the band of alias “Loco Jonathan”, identified as Jonathan Borjas Landines or Jonathan Alexander Borjas Forero, dedicated to drug traffic; the band of alias “el Chama”, led by René Trompa, which participates in extortion crimes and killings; and the scrap smuggling band of El Vigía, that are receptors of several groups’ activities in Libertador, Campo Elías, Sucre and the own Alberto Adriani municipality.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

In Merida state, the illicit network of gasoline smuggling has been strongly linked to military, policemen, collectives, chamba juvenil (juvenile work) and owners of service stations. While scrap traffic has compromised rendition of electricity, telephone, internet and roadway services.

Diverse reasons explain the alleged official support to illicit: politization of the justice system’s institutions and security corps; de-professionalization of the human resource in institutions of justice, security and defense systems; intentional creation of confrontation forces to face demonstrations; and sympathy of authorities of the national and regional executive with Colombian irregular groups and with illicit activities (gas traffic, drugs).

Other causes of illicit are absence of internal controls and effective counterweights, which favors impunity in front of corruption, as well as weakness on denounce systems and protection to the complainants. Victims do not denounce for threats, fears to retaliation, knowing that

officials must protect them but also participate in abuses and by high impunity usually present in these facts. The growing precarity of salaries and declination of economy has incentivized participation of small informal merchants, youngsters and public employees in illicit economic activities.

Highlighted cases

Seven members of Los Rastrojos arrested in Mérida for gasoline smuggling

The Special Actions Forces (FAES) arrested seven members of the band Los Rastrojos for alleged smuggling of 110.000 liters of gasoil. The fact happened on November 07th, 2019 in Guaraní sector, El Vigía. The subjects were identified as Wilmer Plata, Julio César García, Yoendris Peña, Ronny Sulvarán, Mario Morales, Luis Eduardo Ortega and Alejandro Enrique Montiel. During the presentation audience, the Seventh Prosecutor of Mérida accused them of three crimes: aggravated smuggling of gasoline, resistance to authority and association to commit a crime³¹.

GNB seizes 191 panels of drugs hidden inside a bus in Mérida

National Bolivarian Guard officers found 191 panels of cocaine in a secret chamber inside a public transport unit. The National Anti-Drugs Superintendent (SNA), mayor general Richard López Vargas, highlighted that 216.700 kilos of cocaine were seized.

Mérida is the fifth state with more seizures of drugs in the country: 337.949 kilos distributed in different kinds of drugs³².

31 La Nación (2019). “Siete “rastros” imputados por contrabando de 110 mil litros de gasoil en Mérida”. November 15th. Available in: <https://lanacionweb.com/nacional/7-rastrojos-imputados-por-contrabando-de-110-mil-litros-de-gasoil-en-merida/>

32 Superintendencia Nacional Antidrogas (2021). “Incautadas 191 panelas de cocaína ocultas en un autobús en el estado Mérida”. March 24th. Available in: <http://www.fona.gob.ve/index.php/2021/03/24/incautadas-191-panelas-de-cocaína-ocultas-en-un-autobus-en-el-estado-merida/>



Nueva Esparta

Nueva Esparta is the only insular state of Venezuela, located at northeast of the country and surrounded by the Caribbean Sea. It is formed by Margarita, Coche and Cubagua islands.



Municipalities 11 **Parishes 19**

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



COLLECTIVES



CARTELS

Types of illicit and actors

The illicit economies most reported in this entity are drug traffic, corruption in management of ports and airports, gasoline smuggling, deviation of gas to national black market, as well as irregular sale of scrap. The most substantial ones are the first two, according to interviews made.

One of the most known bands is the one of alias "el Justin". This criminal organization works in Nueva Esparta since 2010 approximately and it is composed by around 50 members dedicated to drug traffic, extortion, robbery, kidnapping and contract killings. According to testimonials gathered, this band has nexus with the denominated Cartel de los Soles.

Drug cartels have great influence in strategic places of Nueva Esparta, such as customs and airports, from where they send shipments of great quantities of drugs from Colombia and the inner country, with destination to other islands of the Caribbean, United States and Europe.

In 2019, authorities of Colombia and USA dismantled an organization led by Colombian Henry Carrillo-Ramírez, alias "Barriga", who produced cocaine in the region of Catatumbo, to transport it through the frontier with Venezuela and take it to Margarita Island, where it was taken to other countries³³.

It has transcended that some organizations dedicated to drug traffic in Nueva Esparta operate also in Sucre state, due to the facility of transport in speed boats among both entities.

33 Insight Crime. (2019). "Narcotráfico usa la isla de Margarita en Venezuela como puerta a Europa". December 04th. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/narcotrafico-usa-la-isla-de-margarita-en-venezuela-como-puerta-a-europa/>



In regards to illegal exports of scrap, in Nueva Esparta there have been some important seizures from authorities in recent years. In September 2021, Cicpc disarticulated the band of alias “el Tarzán”, dedicated to robbery of strategic material and its sale in international black markets. This group was captured “infraganti”, subtracting material from the electric plant Luisa Cáceres de Arismendi³⁴.

In the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, between mid-2020 and end of 2021, when scarcity of gas deepened in Nueva Esparta, there was also an upturn of fuels black market. Despite gas stations are custodied by GNB and PNB officers, it was made public that gas was deviated from formal sale points and sold up to USD 3 per liter. The main affected were users, public transport drivers and particular vehicle owners who could not access the service. It was also known that an alleged smuggling of Venezuelan gas in a vessel with Guyana flag³⁵.

According to sources consulted, independent investigations and reports from State security corps, behind crimes of illicit economy there is corruption, because the “modus operandi” used by the great majority of these groups need participation and complicity of public officials.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

Incidence of non-state armed groups in illicit economies in Nueva Esparta is perceived as high. The geographic location of the entity constitutes a great attractive for these organizations to be used as a bridge for drug traffic to other Caribbean islands and European countries.

Inhabitants of Nueva Esparta interviewed for this report assure that these bands operate quietly thanks to their alleged alliances with corrupted security corp officers, being the most pointed the National Bolivarian Guard and the National Bolivarian Police.

This kind of illicit activities and alleged links with public officials have impacted negatively at social, economic and political level. Illegal activities have been normalized, contributing to a moral degradation in society; it has generated an enormous inequality among great businessmen linked to illicit activities and small and medium merchants; corruption has expanded trough diverse institutional sectors, among others.

Highlighted cases

Italian Capo was captured in Nueva Esparta

In march 2021, Interpol officers captured the Italian citizen Flavio Febi, who was wanted for the alleged commission of international drugs traffic crimes. The detention occurred in sector Playa el Agua of Margarita Island, in Nueva Esparta, according to information from Cicpc director, Douglas Rico³⁶.

Gasoline smuggling

In April 2020, short after the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in Venezuela, and in the midst of a chronic scarcity of gasoline, officers from the National Command Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping (CONAS) in Nueva Esparta arrested two citizens for their alleged links to gas smuggling, informed a Supreme Court of Justice press note. The citizens were surprised loading approximately 1.000 liters of gas with drums and containers³⁷.

34 Correo del Orinoco. (2021). “Cicpc desarticula grupo delictivo que sustraía material del Sistema Eléctrico Nacional en Nueva Esparta”. September 30th. Available in: <https://diariovea.com.ve/capturan-a-delincuentes-dedicados-al-robo-de-material-estrategico-de-planta-electrica-en-nueva-esparta/>

35 El Pitazo. (2019). “Interceptan buque con bandera guyanesa en Nueva Esparta usado para el contrabando de combustible”. September 06th. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/economia/interceptan-buque-con-bandera-guyanesa-en-nueva-esparta-usado-para-el-contrabando-de-combustible/>

36 Radio Mundial. (2020). “Privan de libertad a dos hombres por contrabando de combustible”. April 27th. Available in: <http://radiomundial.com.ve/privan-de-libertad-dos-hombres-por-contrabando-de-combustible/>

37 Instagram douglasricovzla. Douglas Rico account, Cicpc director. March 05th, 2021. Available in: https://www.instagram.com/p/CMB88zbhkxd/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=37d9a6a9-7336-485c-847c-0991e705f075



Táchira

Táchira has the most active frontier between Colombia and Venezuela. It is located in occidental Venezuela.

Surface

11.100 Km²

Municipalities 29

Parishes 54

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



BANDS



COLLECTIVES



GUERRILLA



PARAMILITARY



Types of illicit and actors

Gas smuggling, illegal commerce of gas inside the state; drug traffic and scrap smuggling are the most committed illicit in the entity in the last two years, executed by groups of organized crime with different structure: megabands, collectives, paramilitary, guerrilla and other irregular groups. They pursue mainly control of trails, those clandestine roads between Venezuela and Colombia that are key for criminal activities

The entity has become in a settlement for armed organizations from Colombia and Aragua state.

One of the most heard on the entity is the Train of Aragua, already referred in chapter three of this report. In Táchira, those groups have dedicated to scrap smuggling towards Colombia, among other criminal activities. The group is integrated by approximately 100 men and the role of women is normally to attract other women and participate in human traffic.

Other band with presence in Táchira is La Línea, with activity since 2019, even though it

is not clear who is their maximum leader. It is integrated by 60 people that are currently focused on extortion. Between 2019 and 2020, the criminal group also dedicated to smuggling of gas from Venezuela to Colombia, but this activity lost interest with increasement of prices in 2021. The band operates in municipalities of the Panamerican edge: Lobatera, Ayacucho, and Panamericano.

Collectives with power in Táchira state are involved in illegal commerce of gas and drugs micro-traffic. Some of them, such as the Collective of Frontier Security was absorbed by the National Liberation Army (ELN), according to sources consulted.

Among the military groups present on the entity stand out Los Pelusos (at least since 2018) and Los Rastrojos³⁸ (since 2019). Both organizations do drug traffic and extortion activities. In the case of Los Pelusos, there is information about their structure being formed with participation of women who work as informants and exercise medium positions.

38 Insight Crime. (2020). "Los Rastrojos enfrentan dos poderosos enemigos en frontera colombo-venezolana". March 31st. Available in: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/los-rastrojos-enfrentan-dos-poderosos-enemigos-en-frontera-colombo-venezolana/>



Economías ilícitas por región

Sources consulted reveal that organizations such as Los Pelusos and Los Rastrojos have been displaced by the Tren de Aragua and in some point by La Línea and other group named Los de La Frontera. With displacement of Los Rastrojos forces, Los Urabeños have returned to Táchira and participate in different black economies.

In the Andean state has also been reported the presence of ELN³⁹ and dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Several persons consulted for this report assure these groups operate mainly in South Táchira state. It is required a deeper study for a better characterization of these organizations.

About ELN, sources assure that in Táchira operated the Urban Front Carlos Germán Velasco Villamizar, known for their acting in Cúcuta. Its head was Miguel Ángel González Gómez, who allegedly was found dead between Ureña and San Antonio del Táchira on February 14th, 2022⁴⁰. Operations on this front would have intensified since 2017, through drug traffic and extortion.

The influence of FARC dissidences in Táchira state is minor. These groups use the Andean entity to move the product of their illicit economies, but do not have camps.

Sources interviewed also sustain that in Venezuelan territory operates what the Colombian Prosecutor would call “support networks” of guerrilla groups, which is no more than persons who assure the supply of different articles for guerrilla structures as ELN.

The support networks of guerrilla groups in Táchira would help illicit activities in diverse zones of the state, specially in farms or other properties to assure smuggling of diverse articles, from meat or cattle to gold or diesel.

One of the chiefs of these support networks identified as Edwin Alexander Alquichire Chía, alias “Lenteja”, was captured on March 19th, 2022⁴¹. His organization operates since 2021 and around 30 people participate in it. They make activities of meat, diesel, food and milk smuggling.

Another group is known as Los Plataneros. It is not known who is the head, but there are reports of their acting since at least 2017. They execute gas and scrap smuggling activities, as well as payment of bribery. Some of their members were apprehended in March 17th, 2022 by officers of the National Bolivarian Guard (GNB) in the city of Ureña⁴².

The advance and consolidation of diverse non-state armed groups has been possible even with presence of Army and National Guard members in the region.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

Illicit economies developed in Tachira and struggles between the different criminal groups to take control of illegal businesses have affected deeply quality of life in this entity, specially the ones who live near the border with Colombia.

39 Runrunes. (2021). “#MonitorDeVíctimas | La estela sangrienta del ELN en Táchira: 20 homicidios en 7 meses”. November 05th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/monitor-de-victimas/459120/monitordevictimas-la-estela-sangrienta-del-eln-en-tachira-20-homicidios-en-7-meses/>

40 Runrunes. (2022). “#MonitorDeVíctimasTáchira | Un ingeniero y un presunto guerrillero muertos en confuso accidente de tránsito”. February 15th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/monitor-de-victimas/466891/monitordevictimastachira-un-ingeniero-y-un-presunto-guerrillero-muertos-en-confuso-accidente-de-transito/>

41 Fiscalía General de Colombia. (2022). Fiscalía impacta el corazón financiero del ELN en zona de frontera con Venezuela”. March 19th. Available in: <https://www.fiscalia.gov.co/colombia/noticias/fiscalia-impacta-el-corazon-financiero-del-eln-en-zona-de-frontera-con-venezuela/>

42 Maldonado, J. La Nación (2022). “Desmantelan en Ureña a ‘Los Plataneros’: grupo dedicado al tráfico de material estratégico”. March 17th. Available in: <https://lanacionweb.com/sucesos/desmantelan-en-urena-a-los-plataneros-grupo-dedicado-al-trafico-de-material-estrategico/>



Misguided political decisions taken by the national government for frontier zones have accelerated the criminal dynamics in the area and have exposed even more Tachira people. Prolonged closure of frontiers intensified the use of trails that serve for passage of people, merchandise, food, strategic materials and gas. In these spaces there is a huge control of irregular groups that are being displaced one for another, but with alleged tolerance of Venezuelan corrupted military officers. There is also arbitrariness of frontier military authorities that could be favoring corruption.

Tachira frontier is seriously disadvantaged, economically speaking, by not having formality in commercial exchange with Colombia. Besides, from the political institutional point of view, illicit businesses conduct to discredit of public entities present in the area, by being produced despite their presence and actions.

Highlighted cases

Five persons detained for alleged smuggling of scrap in Táchira

In January 21st, 2022, security officers of Táchira state arrested five citizens who pretended to pass to Colombia at least twenty tons of ferrous material extracted illegally. According to press reports, initial investigations showed that the arrested were part of a structured band of organized crime⁴³.

Two Táchira deputies among the arrested for drug traffic

As part of the operation Hands of Iron, impulsed by the government of Nicolás Maduro, at beginnings of 2022, were arrested two parliamentary of Táchira state that allegedly participated in drug traffic activities. In January 07th, was captured deputy Luis Vilorio, of party Primero Venezuela, who had been already detained in November 08th, 2021, next to other six citizens in Vargas state with 336 panels of cocaine transported hidden in three vehicles from Táchira. The other parliamentary is Jean Carlos Silva, from the Legislative Council of Táchira, of Podemos party⁴⁴.

43 Hernández, A. La Nación. (2022). "Interceptan 20 toneladas de material estratégico en vía a San Pedro del Río". January 24th. Available in: <https://lanacionweb.com/sucesos/interceptan-20-toneladas-de-material-estrategico-en-via-a-san-pedro-del-rio/>

44 Carrillo, J. Tal Cual. (2022). "Mano de hierro» de Maduro busca mejorar imagen del PSUV, pero hace falta ir a fondo". March 23rd. Available in: <https://talcualdigital.com/mano-de-hierro-de-maduro-busca-mejorar-imagen-del-psuv-pero-hace-falta-ir-a-fondo/>



Yaracuy

Yaracuy state is located in center-occident of Venezuela.

Surface

7.100 Km²

Municipalities 14 Parishes 12

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



BANDS



COLLECTIVES



CARTELS



PRANES



CONSTRUCTION LABOR UNION



Types of illicit and actors

In entity are reported different illicit economies such as sale of gas in black market (specially gasoil) illegal traffic of gold, drug traffic and scrap smuggling. Besides, there are multiple denounces of extortion to merchants and agricultural producers.

The main responsible of these crimes are allied of mega bands, local criminal bands, pranes, cartels, the so-called collectives and mining labor unions. These organizations are considered powerful and dangerous due to their relation with other criminal groups and the alleged protection of members of State security forces.

One of the bands in Yaracuy that has established alliances with mega bands to enlarge their illicit activities is the one of alias "Wilmer Bachiller". This organization is allegedly allied with Josué Ángel Santana Peña alias "Santanita", a criminal leader of Lara that operates together with the Tren de Aragua.

The band of "Wilmer Bachiller" allegedly exists since 2017 and participates in activities related to drug traffic, theft, kidnapping, fraud, extortion, cattle rustling, charge of vacunas and robbery.

Yaracuy, was where the so-called Cuadrillas de Paz (Cupaz) were born, a collective created by orders of the executive power. It has participation in mobilization of officialism voters, takes care of repression in anti-government protests and exercise social control through distribution of subsidized foods with the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP). These are directed by Edgar Zavarce, official of San Felipe majority.

According to sources consulted, in Yaracuy, collectives and San Felipe jail pranes have allied in armed bands that control activities of illegal exploitation of gold. There are indications of participation of women at different levels, as providers of goods, cooks or dedicated to prostitution.



Mining labor unions keep control over gold extraction zones in Yumare, Nirgua and Veroes. There is no leader known, but they do operations of illegal extraction and commercialization of gold at least since 2020.

On the entity have also been reports of presence of the so-called Cartel de la Sabana members, operating in Colombia, but with “dry ports” in Venezuela. According to people consulted, this group appeared in Yaracuy in 2020 and is in process of territorial positioning.

They would be in zones of Veroes and Manuel Monge municipalities, areas geographically close to Falcón state. They perform drug traffic activities.

In Yaracuy also operate other territorial bands that participate in activities of micro-traffic of drugs, theft, robbery, kidnapping and extortion. Among those groups there are: Los Caraqueños de Agua Negra, in Veroes municipality, which initiated activities in 2000 and occasionally ally with other criminal groups; the Market Place, in Urachiche, Yaritagua and Nirgua municipalities; Los Parceleros, who also act in Urachiche, by orders of their head César Conde, alias “el Cesita” and Los Botello, located in Nirgua and led by Edwin Botello.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

Illicit economies developed in Yaracuy and control of armed groups in the entity have caused a high impact in communities, specifically in women and girls that, in occasions, are forced to join bands without their approval, using fear as element of dissuasion.

Among the factors enabling the existence of black economic activities in the state it is corruption, which has penetrated state security bodies

and public institutions, impunity for crimes and society sectors that do not dare to denounce by fear to retaliations. The ferreous regulations and maintenance of subsidies by government entities in economic activities such as distribution and sale of gas and scrap commercialization, generated incentives to corruption and appearance of mafias that, in parallel, started to exercise control: military, labor unions and collectives.

Furthermore, it is necessary that from instances such as the Ministry of Penitentiary Services and the National Bolivarian Guard there is application of necessary measures to avoid that, in places such as the jail of San Felipe, denominated La Cuarta, a series of illicit businesses are transacted by pranes, such as robberies, kidnappings and extortions.

The state governorship, the state police, PNB, GNB and ZODI groups are the public institutions identified as the most corrupted of the entity.

Highlighted cases

Six men arrested for extracting gold illegally in Yaracuy

Six men were arrested in February 05th, 2020, for their alleged responsibility in illegal extraction of gold in a protected area of Sierra de Aroa, specifically in Las Lajas sector, Manuel Monge municipality of Yaracuy state. Two weeks before, officers of the Police Service of Environmental and Mining Safeguard in patrol activities found individuals doing suspicious activities inside a river, and when getting closer they observed that they were extracting gold from the area⁴⁵.

45 Correo del Orinoco. (2020). “Privados de libertad seis hombres por extraer oro de la Sierra de Aroa en Yaracuy”. February 05th. Available in: <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/privados-de-libertad-seis-hombres-por-extraer-oro-de-la-sierra-de-aroa-en-yaracuy/>



Public official led alleged band of illegal sale of gasoline

Yaracuy governor, Julio León Heredia, announced on April 14th, 2020 the alleged dismantling of a band dedicated to illegal sale of gasoline. The regional mandatory detailed that three individuals turned out arrested after an operative made in two houses located in sector Luisa Cáceres de Arismendi, Independencia municipality, and in neighborhood La Pradera, Cocorote, where together located 400 liters of gasoline. León Heredia affirmed that the head of the band was a public official, which was allegedly arrested in the following days⁴⁶.

46 Vielma, C. Últimas Noticias. (2020). "Desmantelan en Yaracuy banda dedicada a la venta de combustible". April 14th. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/general/desmantelan-en-yaracuy-banda-dedicada-a-la-venta-de-combustible/>



Zulia

Zulia state is the most populated of Venezuela and the most extended frontier with Colombia, it is located at the north-occidental extreme of the country, from where it surrounds the Lake of Maracaibo, the largest water reservoir of Latin America.



Surface

63.100 Km²

Municipalities 21 Parishes 110

Irregular groups present



MEGA BANDS



COLLECTIVES



CARTELS



PRANES



GUERRILLA



PARAMILITARY

Types of illicit and actors

Gasoline smuggling, drug traffic, corruption in management of ports and customs, as well as irregular commerce of scrap are black economy activities existing in Zulia. Drug traffic and gasoline smuggling are the most relevant, according to interviews made.

In the case of scrap smuggling and other "strategic materials", there are corroborated facts of irregular and clandestine uninstalling of infrastructures property of the State, whose destination is linked to extraction of components and metals.

In Zulia case, particularly, experts consulted tend to believe that the most known mega bands have transformed due to disaggregation, confrontations between bands or division.

Among the bands that have operated in the entity are "La Zona", also called "Los Chacones" or "Los Mercenarios". This organization is partially inactive by the atomization of the original band due to successive confrontations with

the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Body of Scientific and Criminalistic Investigations (Cicpc) and the elite group of Special actions of National Bolivarian Police (FAES). It initiated its criminal activities in 2017 and was formed by two dozens of members. One of its leaders, alias "Cheo el Guajiro", turned out deeply injured in a confrontation with FAES, while Néstor Castillo Castillo, alias "Carne Molida" (band's operations head) was arrested in Maicao on December 31st, 2018, he came out of jail with a substitutional measure in 2020 and it is not known if he reunited with the band leader, Douglas Chacón, alias "Douglita".

Journalists settled in Maicao sustain those members of the band keep committing crimes of drug traffic, gas smuggling, arms traffic and contract killings in the frontier with Colombia, but they are not operative anymore on trails nor in populations of the Venezuelan Guajira, such as Guarero and Paraguaipoa. They have established alliances with the band "Los Morrocoys".



Another organization that has been present in Zulia is the band “Los Palmar” or clan “El Moushana”. In 2021 the band was already diminished and some of their members had been arrested or murdered in confrontations with “La Zona”, Colombian security corps or paramilitary groups.

One of the most outstanding names on the entity is the band or family clan “Los Meleán”. After the detention of Tirso Meleán in Texas (USA), the band has concentrated in Miranda and Santa Rita municipalities of the oriental coast of Maracaibo Lake. Its head is Jefferson José Nava Jiménez, alias “Jet Nava” and it initiated activities around 1990. It is formed by several dozens of individuals dedicated to drug traffic, arms traffic, extortion, “vacunas” and kidnappings.

“Los Meleán” band has been in constant confrontation with the band “Los Leal”. This last organization has been strongly linked to Zulia state governorship between 2017 and 2021. There are suspicions that the band operates currently disaggregated in several groups to execute crimes of extortion, mainly in municipalities La Cañada de Urdaneta, Jesús Enrique Lossada and Maracaibo.

Till 2021, “Los Leal” had alliance with the Armed group Yeico Masacre, led by Erick Alberto Parra Mendoza, alias “Yeico Masacre”. This band is integrated by more than 100 individuals dedicated to drug traffic, arms traffic, extortions, “vacunas” and kidnapping. According to some sources consulted, they have also had alliances with the Tren del Norte (Colombia) and the band of alias “Niño Briceño”.

Another band operating in Zulia is the one called “Los Gavilanes”. After their confrontations with “La Zona” for control of Guarero area and trails “La 80” and “La Cortica”, this group was left diminished and minimized their activities. Their head is alias “el Gavilán” Fernández and

initiated operations in the decade of 2000’s. They dedicate mainly to drug traffic and gas smuggling. After the appearance of “La Zona”, they have had alliances with “Los Palmar”.

On the state there are reports of “El Cagón”, “Los Cascas” and “Los Chómpiras” bands operations, mainly operating in Baralt and Valmore Rodríguez municipalities in frontier with Trujillo state, in the Oriental Coast of Maracaibo Lake. They dedicate to extort cattle producers and fishermen, among other crimes.

In regards to guerrilla groups operating in Zulia state, there have been reports of ELN presence in southwest Guajira and Mara municipalities, the frontier side of municipalities Jesús Enrique Lossada – especially in the area of El Diluvio, despite to the proximity to a fort of Venezuelan Army- Rosario and Machiques de Perijà and in Jesús María Semprún and Catatumbo municipalities.

Among ELN leaders that have operated in Sierra de Perijà area (Rosario and Machiques municipalities) there are alias “Nicolás” and alias “Emiliano”, while in south Maracaibolake have been alias “Moisés Bautista”, alias “Antonio García”, alias “El Tuerto Machena”, alias “Guillermo”, alias “Wilkin” and alias “Mosquerita”. Some experts indicate that there are at least a hundred members of this guerrilla in Zulia, aided by double number of collaborators. Individuals interviewed agree that crimes committed by guerrilla are drug and weapons traffic, extortion, charge of “vacunas”, kidnappings, invasion to farms, cattle rustling, forced recruitment and confrontation with other criminal groups. They keep an alliance with Cartel Timberland and count on women in their lines.



The dissidences of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), specifically Front 10 and South Oriental Front, are also active in municipalities Guajira, Mara, Jesús Enrique Lossada, Machiques de Perijá, Jesús María Semprún and Catatumbo of Zulia state. In Carrasquero, Mara municipality, where they acted openly few years ago, even intervening in public safety issues and resolution of civil conflicts, their presence has decreased, at the point that merchants of the area do not believe they have enough operative capacity to keep controlling the territory. It is directed by Javier Alonso Velosa García, alias “John Mechas” and it is dedicated to drug traffic, arms traffic, extortion, “vacunas” and confrontations with other criminal groups.

Besides mega bands and guerrilla groups, in Zulia state there are reports of presence and influence of at least four cartels. One of them is Cartel de la Guajira. Some experts consider that since the detention of their leader, Hermágoras González Polanco, in 2008, the group has progressively broken up, others state their operativity was assimilated by the Cartel de los Soles.

About Cartel de los Soles, sources consulted assure that it keeps completely active, but it is unknown who leads in Zulia. They are dedicated to drug traffic and allegedly have an alliance with Cartel de la Guajira.

The Cartel Timberland is from Ocaña and Tibú areas (both located in North Santander, Colombia), but acts in Zulia state in an area controlled by Cartel de los Soles. It started their activities at middle 2010. Their fundamental activity is drug traffic and have alliances with ELN. They have feminine presence among their members.

Other armed actors that have operated in Zulia are Los Rastrojos (Block José Gregorio Hernández). Its leaders and operative heads have been arrested or fallen in clashes with the National Colombian Police, for which it is considered that from the strong presence they

had in municipalities Jesús María Semprún and Catatumbo only remain partially active, still in territorial confrontation with ELN. Its leader was Carlos Andrés Rangel Rojas, alias “Comandante Camaleón”, allegedly substituted by alias “El Becerro”. It is estimated that in 2020 they had 50 members, but the disarticulation of leadership could have reduced their presence to twenty paramilitaries. These are dedicated to drugs and arms trafficking, extortion, ‘vacunas’, kidnappings, invasion of farms, cattle rustling, forced recruitment and clashes with other criminal groups.

From the investigation made for this report surges a fairly clear scenery: the recomposing of forces and modalities of criminal actors as consequence of internal fight among groups of power.

In the case of bands and groups mentioned previously, there is no indication of extension to other states of the country. Only in the case of local organizations operating in La Guajira there is a mobility determined by conditions on that sub-region frontier, historically transitable from one country to the other by the Wayúu community.

Even though “La Zona” or “Los Chacones” is not a totally ethnic band, since it is integrated also by criminals of other zuliano cultural origins, police persecution and confrontations with ELN in the own Venezuelan territory forced it to search for occasional refuge in Maicao and its surroundings. In Colombia was precisely where one of their most dangerous members and leaders, alias “Carne Molida”, was arrested and judged.

On the entity there have been reports of Tren de Aragua presence, the largest criminal band of Venezuela. Some of their members would be in municipalities near the Oriental Coast of the Lake, due to the severe impunity found in that region. An important member of that mega band was arrested in October 2021 in Baralt.



From the study of illicit economies developed in Zulia state are evidenced cases of corruption in which there would be involved both public officials as well as members of security corps.

According to reports, some managers and workers of Pdvsa, branches and mixed companies have participated in smuggling of metal pieces extracted from barges, perforation towers and pumping stations of oil industry. It is estimated that large format pieces come out through Maracaibo port and small parts by land towards the frontier with Colombia.

On the other side, personnel from Occident Pdvsa (Marketing and Distribution Managements) and Marine PDV allegedly participate in illicit activities related to the illegal sale of gasoline. Their crimes are mainly removal, vandalization and illegal trade of publicly owned components and materials, illicit on the trade of gasoline, natural gas for vehicles and gas smuggling. Police and military officers are pointed as accomplices.

Impact of irregular groups and submerged economy

Sources interviewed in Zulia state point that influence, control and interaction of criminal groups with communities in localities where they operate is high, with no doubt affecting more women and girls, most of the population in poverty situation and marginalization derived from corruption, lack of investment, and stimulation to an irregular economic model in which men have a higher grade of participation compared to women. These forms of exchange and traffic have a sensible impact that is more pronounced in the feminine gender, which also complicate with social and institutional helplessness and inexistence of mechanisms and guarantees of protection.

Causes are attributed to a breach of the rule of law, the loss of controls among public powers and partisan coopting in government entities, parliament, justice and citizen powers have created a general scenery of impunity that

breaks through all kinds of illegal activities.

In the exercise of public power, many times associated to external criminal factors with which are formed local, regional, national and international criminal organization networks. To this institutional cause there would be need to add the frontier territorial factor, which increases potentialities of black economy.

In relation to the institutions considered the most corrupted are, in first place, FANB. These are followed by national organisms decentralized from Executive power, as well as state companies (Pdvsa, Carbozulia, Carbones del Guasare) and The Development Corporation (Corpozulia). The state governorship and majorities occupy an important spot, likewise criminal and mercantile tribunals. Entities of public services, specially Corpoelec, are also perceived as corrupted

The humanitarian emergency in Zulia owes much to the economic artificiality of ruling illegal businesses. The commission of Human Rights of Zulia state (Codhez) has proved since 2018 that alimentary security in most urban and rural areas of the region suffer a constant alarm. Impunity of organized crime and erosion of the economic formal tissue by illegitimate business models, contribute greatly to privation of protection guarantees to social rights.

Traditional sectors of regional economy have been suffering a depression for several years, crowned by a period of disinvestment, stagnation and loss of market. In that regional context, gasoline smuggling now from Colombia to Venezuela through frontier trails of Guajira municipality has become one of the seams in illegal economy.

Drug traffic originated in Colombia found a much more permissive environment in Venezuela since the second decade of 21st century, with Zulia state as strategic scenery for a triple way out: by lake and sea, by land and by air towards the Caribbean.



The fall of Pdvsa and oil industry, including operations of mixed companies Petrozamora, Petroquiriquire, Petrowayyu, Lagopetrol and other 11 companies, as well as the operational expiration of in-the-lake installations and in land also converted large exploitation zones into great inventories of scrap. This became an attractive business due to abundance of disused and abandoned material, complicity of security organisms and the opportunity value of tons of metal at international prices.

All this scenery of illegal economy has posed the creation of an artificial bubble of income for the region, stimulating money laundering in businesses with formal façade in areas of internal commerce and real estate dynamics.

Highlighted cases

Zulia mayoress arrested for drug traffic

The mayoress of Jesús María Semprún municipality, Zulia state, Keyrineth Fernández, was one of the first detained in “Hands of Iron” operation, announced by the government of Nicolás Maduro at beginnings of 2022. According to reports of the National Anti-drugs Superintendent, mayor general Richard López Vargas, the arrest of Fernández and deputies Taína González y Luis Viloria Chirinos meant a hard “blow to a drug traffic network” in Zulia y Falcón⁴⁷. However, sources consulted for this report assure that behind those detentions there was no real intention of contrasting illicit economies but to displace some criminal groups to give power to others.

Alias Jesús Santrich died in Zulia state, according to FARC

Guerrilla man Seuxis Paucias Hernández Solarte, alias “Jesús Santrich”, allegedly died on May 17th, during a confrontation in Rosario de Perijá municipality, Zulia state, according to a communication emitted by FARC dissidences. “It happened in the Perijá Sierra, a binational frontier zone, between El Chalet and Los Laureles footpath, inside Venezuelan territory”, affirms the text⁴⁸. The Colombian government has denounced in different occasions that guerrilla men are installed in Venezuelan territory because they allegedly count on the support from Nicolás Maduro government.

47 Ocando, G. Voz de América. (2022). “Detienen por narcotráfico a una alcaldesa del partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela”. January 28th. Available in: <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/venezuela-detenido-alcaldesa/6417810.html>

48 El Pitazo. (2021). “Zulia | En este punto de la sierra de Perijá mataron a Santrich, aseguran las FARC”. May 19. Available in: <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/zulia-en-este-punto-de-la-sierra-de-perija-mataron-a-santrich-aseguran-las-farc/>

CHAPTER 5



MISINFORMATION AT THE SERVICE OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES



The table is served in Venezuela for misinformation to be promoted from high spheres of power so it permeates audiences. Communicational hegemony kept by Nicolás Maduro government and opacity with which it is handled in subjects of national interest, has allowed it to be an inexhaustible source of manipulated or false versions with the aim to look good in front of their public and foist the responsibilities on other actors that are uncomfortable to them.

Fight against corruption is regularly mentioned on the official narrative, for example, but very few or nothing is said when prosecutors from other countries denounce high rank government officials' participation in defalcation to public patrimony cases, or when some journalistic investigation reveals compromising nexus of those officials.

The extent of this practice or State politics goes beyond communicational field itself, it can come to compromise territorial security and its citizens, to the point of even put at risk their lives, in major cases or situations in which public powers do not act.

As part of the strategies employed, the government intends to dominate all information spaces (traditional and non-traditional) and chooses to emit mainly unidirectional messages. Confrontation is frequently non admitted, so reactions do not find an immediate official response.

Besides, lack of transparency from State entities facilitate the appearance of false or manipulated information, among which are the half-truths, present on speeches in which topics approached could turn into uncomfortable results, that, when it is decided to be mentioned.

Government approach to subjects related to illicit economies in Venezuela has followed the same path.

When reviewing communicational acting of national authorities in gas, drugs or gold smuggling cases, or corruption cases on Venezuelan ports, clear patterns of misinformation are identified.

Emission of official messages in regards to these subjects has one single format and it normally remains in the mouth of a select group of officials, integrated by the same national leader, Nicolás Maduro; the Vice-president of the republic and Minister of Economy, Finances and Foreign Exchange, Delcy Rodríguez; vice-Minister of Economic Area and Minister of Oil, Tareck El Aissami; the General Prosecutor designated by the Constituent, Tarek William Saab; the President of National Assembly, Jorge Rodríguez and the deputy and vice-president of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Diosdado Cabello.

There is an almost **complete silence** in regards to the activities developed in the Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO), the same situation occurs with themes related to irregularities on Venezuelan ports. There is **manipulation on declarations** about drug traffic, the problem focus is usually deviated and transferred to third parties. There is abundance of **half-truths and propaganda**, by making public only part of the story in gas smuggling cases, in order to make them look as justice paladins.



5.1. Illicit activities on the Mining Arc, between negation of denounces and deviation from the issue

Concentration of illicit economies and violations to human rights on the denominated Orinoco Mining Arc, created by Nicolás Maduro in 2016, has been denounced in several occasions by national and international organisms, but on the national official narrative these subjects are practically inexistent. Same occurs with alerts about sale of international gold reserves that the Central Bank of Venezuela has been doing in the midst of an absolute opacity.

About Mining Arc, the government limits to ensure that it is a project to “put an order on mining activity and minimize illegal exploitation” and, when it goes beyond, it is only to reject criticism and deny denounces.

A sample of this is what happened on July 15th, 2020, after the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report about Venezuela, in which details how criminal groups on the Orinoco Mining Arc keep their presence and illegal activities on mines through a corruption system and bribery, which includes to pay military commanders¹. According to Michelle Bachelet, security forces were involved in incidents such as sexual, children and labor exploitation, environmental damage and presence of criminal groups who control mines.

That same day, Nicolás Maduro government emitted a statement through social media belonging to the then chancellor Jorge Arreaza, in which he rejected the content, conclusions and recommendations of such report. He assured the document was “tendentious”, representing a “tangible sample of double standard, manipulation and shameful political use of international mechanisms”².

1 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report. “Independencia del sistema judicial y acceso a la justicia en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, también respecto de las violaciones de los derechos económicos y sociales, y situación de los derechos humanos en la región del Arco Minero del Orinoco”. July 2020. Available in: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_44_54_UnofficialSpanishTranslation.pdf

2 Twitter @jaarreaza. Twitter account of the former minister of Foreign Exchange of Venezuela, Jorge Arreaza. July 15th, 2020. Available in: <https://twitter.com/jaarreaza/status/1283567110787076096>



The government usually mentions gold only to refer to the 31 tons belonging to international reserves of Venezuela, deposited in the Bank of England and that are in the midst of a judicial process³.

Maduro's administration has been requesting repatriation of those tons for more than three years, but the financial entity has denied that mainly because the United Kingdom government does not recognize legitimacy of Maduro and recognizes Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela.

Regarding this subject, official spokespersons of Maduro's administration point that Venezuela is a victim of an opposition plan to steal the deposited gold in the Bank of England.

"Juan Guaidó pretends to steal the Venezuelan gold deposited in the Bank of England. They thought doing the same here than in Libya, if the incursion of May 3rd had been successful", said the vice-president of the Republic, Delcy Rodríguez on May 26th, 2020, on the Venezuelan State channel, Venezolana de Televisión⁴.

Also, the government has tried to victimize about the subject and tried to sell the idea to common Venezuelan citizen that the negative from the Bank of England to deliver those reserves of gold prevents the needs of the country to be attended, specifically at beginnings of 2021, when it was assured that non availability of reserves made impossible to purchase vaccines against Covid-19.

"¡CRIMINALS! Another proof of Guaidó and his band's cruelty. Since the legal recognition of United Kingdom of a fake and inexistent government, they prevent the Bank of England

to release Venezuelan State gold blocked, so we can purchase #Covid_19 vaccines", pointed Jorge Arreaza on January 20th, 2021 on Twitter⁵.

5.2. Evasion of responsibilities in drug traffic

Not only with the subject of gold Nicolás Maduro government intends to take profit. They also do it through denounces about drug traffic. **Official spokesmen tend to give responsibilities of all illicit drug business to the Colombian government and out themselves as victims of international destabilizing plans.**

The relation kept by the country with DEA (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency), ended up in 2005 by decision of the then President Hugo Chávez, which meant the entrance of the business on a greater scale.

Since then, drug traffic has gained territorial spaces in Venezuela. United States accused Venezuela in September 2021 of non-accomplishing fight against drug traffic and several of their leaders are accused of links with drug traffic, who allegedly take part of Cartel de los Soles.

In March 2020, when the US attorney general, William Barr, made public the formal accusation against Venezuelan high rank officials, rewards were offered for their capture, the then chancellor Jorge Arreaza read on the State channel, Venezolana de Televisión, an statement⁶ to reject it.

"To offer rewards, in the best western stile of racist cowboys from the wild west, shows the desperation of the supremacist elite in Washington and its obsession against Venezuela to get electoral profits in Florida State", read Arreaza. In November of that year, the USA went to presidential elections.

3 Suprema Injusticia. (2021). "Londres se alinea con Guaidó en la batalla judicial por el oro venezolano depositado en el Banco de Inglaterra". July 22th. Available in: <https://supremainjusticia.org/londres-se-alinea-con-guaido-en-la-batalla-judicial-por-el-oro-venezolano-depositado-en-el-banco-de-ingles-terra/>

4 Sputnik news. (2020). "Delcy Rodríguez: Guaidó quiere robar las reservas de oro que Venezuela tiene en el Reino Unido". May 26th. Available in: <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/20200526/delcy-rodriguez-guaido-quiere-robar-reservas-de-oro-que-venezuela-tiene-en-ingles-terra-1091544460.html>

5 Twitter @jaarreaza. Twitter account of the former Foreign minister of Venezuela, Jorge Arreaza. January 21st, 2021. Available in: <https://twitter.com/jaarreaza/status/1352080503571165314>

6 Efecto Cocuyo. (2020). "Gobierno de Maduro tacha de «infundada» acusación de Estados Unidos". March 26th. Available in: <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/gobierno-de-maduro-tacha-de-infundada-acusacion-de-estados-unidos/>



Two days later, Diosdado Cabello dedicated part of his Wednesdays TV show, *Con el Mazo Dando*, broadcasted in VTV, to this subject. “We are accused of being linked to drug traffic, when the main producer of drugs in the world is Colombia. When, not long ago, there was a recent scandal with the Colombian ambassador in Uruguay, which a laboratory and crops of coca plant were found in his farm, and nothing has happened in Colombia, that is normal there. That is the order of the day in Colombia”⁷.



This way, and ventilating the case of chavista dissident Clíver Alcalá Cordones, listed by the USA as one of the drug traffic capos and who on march 28th, 2020 turned himself to the USA from Colombia, Cabello deviated the attention on accusations made by the then president Donald Trump about drug traffic to high rank government officials and former collaborators.

“They accuse us. I wish Colombia, the biggest producer of drugs worldwide, could exhibit to the world numbers similar to the ones obtained by us in anti-drug traffic between 2015 and 2020. We managed to seize 212 ton of drugs in Venezuela, different kinds, 35 tons monthly in average (...) Venezuela does this every year. Since when? Since we divorced from DEA, which is the biggest drug cartel of the world”, Cabello said in a clear political propaganda, that seeks to leave well standing Maduro’s government in regards of the fight against drug traffic.

Cabello uses the tag “Colombia campeón mundial” in all his shows, to openly attack the neighbor country and directly accuse it of drug traffic in Venezuela. With this performing, the chavismo intends to put the blame on others than the ones from the Venezuelan government and deviate the focus before public opinion.



⁷ Youtube. *Con el Mazo Dando* channel, Diosdado Cabello TV show, transmitted by VTV . Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5z9h82wkb4&ab_channel=Transmisi%C3%B3n%20en%20vivo

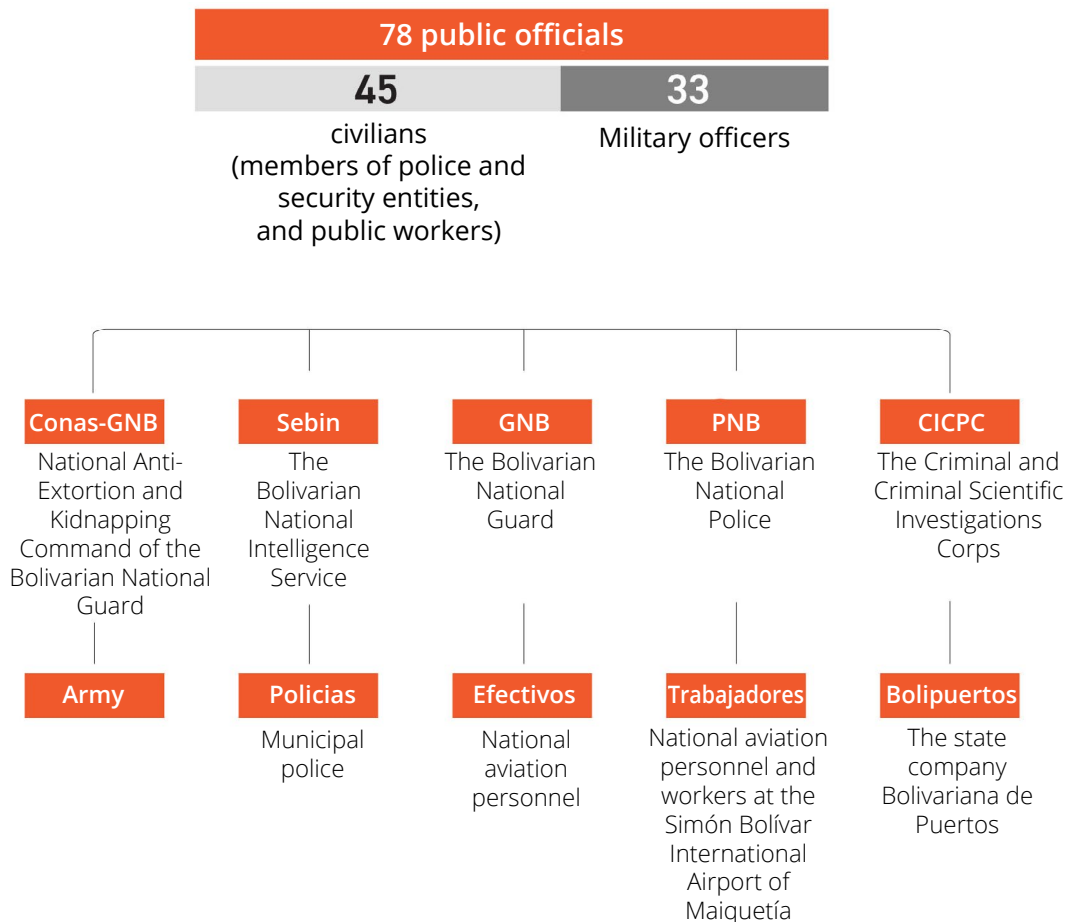


Since September 2021 a new figure emerged on chavismo's argot to denominate drug traffic: Tancol, an acronym used to name Terroristas Armados Narcotraficantes de Colombia (Armed Drug traffickers and Terrorists of Colombia) and with which the government links the "Colombian Oligarchy (government)", who, according to his speech, sends these groups to Venezuela to destabilize⁸.

When it is admitted the participation of State officials in drug traffic cases, it is regularly pointed on persons of low or medium rank. The spokesperson designated to announce criminal investigations of drug traffic is General prosecutor designated by the National Constituent, Tarek William Saab, who offers weekly declarations to inform about alleged advances of his management.

A register of Transparencia Venezuela⁹ from what was said by Saab between 2017 and 2021 and press releases published in the Public Ministry portal, indicates that 23 cases of drugs were denounced, in which 78 public officials were involved: 45 civilians (members of police and security entities, and public workers) and 33 military officers, most with sergeant rank.

Among the publicly pointed during this lapse are National Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Command of the Bolivarian National Guard (Conas-GNB), the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin), the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), the Bolivarian National Police (PNB), the Criminal and Criminal Scientific Investigations Corps (CICPC), the Army, municipal police, national aviation personnel and workers at the Simón Bolívar International Airport of Maiquetía



8 Telesur. (2021). "Pdte. Maduro denuncia infiltración de grupos terroristas colombianos conocidos como Tancol". September 30th. Available in: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/venezuela-maduro-infiltracion-grupos-terroristas-colombianos-tancol-20210930-0030.html>

9 Transparencia Venezuela. (2022). "¿Cómo ha procesado Tarek William Saab a funcionarios acusados por drogas?". February 01st. Available in: <https://supremainjusticia.org/como-ha-procesado-tarek-william-saab-funcionarios-acusados-drogas/>



and the state company Bolivariana de Puertos (Bolipuertos).

However, the Public Ministry does not publicly inform about follow up on these cases and neither accomplishes renditions of accounts stipulated on Venezuelan laws.

5.3. Half-truths on ports corruption cases

Corruption tentacles took port facilities on the country through the figure of Bolipuertos, also took ownership of operations management, led by military, according to denounces presented in national and international media.

Nonetheless, regarding these subjects the government just turns its gaze and does not respond for irregularities committed on maritime terminals.

Seniat only reports about taxes collection and reminders for the payment of tributes and it does it through press notes published in its twitter account or on José David Cabello account, the organism superintendent. Bolipuertos presents press newsletters in its portal, all related to arrival of loads, expansion of facilities and activities related to the sector. But there is no mention of corruption cases. Its president, Irwin Ascanio Escalona, a military officer who participated on the coup of February 04th, 1992, points on his social media routinary activities on Bolipuerto or the revolutionary government.

To cover or evade responsibilities, the government appeals to half-truths.

The general prosecutor Tarek William Saab, informed on May 14th, 2021 detention of Luis Augusto Piligra, president of public company Lácteos Los Andes, a role performed since august 30th, 2019¹⁰, “due to existing leads of illicit enrichment, because this citizen started purchasing goods vertiginously, valued in large amounts of money (...) and sported a scandalous life by exhibiting yachts, aircrafts, high range vehicles, luxurious apartments, ranches on different places of the country”.

The information was not presented completely. Saab omitted to say that colonel Piligra was president of Bolipuertos between 2017 and 2018 and when he left the position directed a company that had subscribed an alliance with the same Bolipuertos during his management¹¹.

5.4. Distort reality about gas smuggling

Gas smuggling is old dated, however, failures in refineries of the country due to lack of maintenance and investment led oil production to minimum levels, causing a strong scarcity since 2019 that reached the untouchable Caracas and forced the implementation in 2020 of a severe rationing program first to then adjust tariffs under two modalities, keeping restrictions for access of subsidized gasoline.

“We have advanced actions during 2021 and 2020, when this phenomenon started appearing progressively to attack popular economy, as gas smuggling is, from mafias entrenched even many times with support from State security agents, who must be pointed, identified and detained”, said prosec¹².

He exposed the Apure case, where two drivers of

10 Youtube. (2021). “Tarek William Saab anuncia detención de presidente de Lácteos Los Andes por hechos de corrupción”. May 14th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0PPspXqoTE&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

11 Crespo, C. Armando.Info. (2021). “Con un par de cabellos amarró el Ejército sus negocios en Bolipuertos”. September 12th. Available in: <https://armando.info/con-un-par-de-cabellos-amarro-el-ejercito-sus-negocios-en-bolipuertos/>

12 Youtube. (2022). “Declaraciones del FGR sobre la lucha contra las mafias de la gasolina y los funcionarios corruptos”. January 20th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC_E63BSs2E&t=7s&ab_channel=MPvenezolano



the company Empresa Nacional de Transporte were arrested for deviating 37.000 liters of gas. The load was delivered to a criminal group and was waited in several units modified for storage and transport of gas, according to Saab.

"It was obviously going to be later extracted from the national territory, look at how serious it is, to be surely sent to Colombia, that has been progressive and natural complicit and tributary of those crimes attempting against the Venezuelan economy and public stability".

Without proof and with presumption only, the general prosecutor points once more towards Colombia to deviate attention from the real problem. Besides, he manipulates reality by saying that gas smuggling started progressively in 2020.

5.5. What the president's order brought

Since 2021 and with more emphasis on the first trimester of 2022 a bigger media deployment has been observed from authorities, with the aim to pretend being acting in the right direction to attack illicit economies. However, once made the announcement there is no information about what happens next.

During presentation of Reports and Accounts corresponding to 2021, on January 15th, 2022, Nicolás Maduro requested¹³ Tarek El Aissami, sector vice-president of Economy and Ministry of Oil "to disarticulate mafias on gas stations. Governors know what I am talking about (...) How many terrorists we have captured, with plans, bombs, drones to blow up our refineries".

The chief of State indicated that he had invited managers of the working class to the act, whom complimented his work and asked them to

combat the illegal activities. "The most difficult was done, to recover our refineries, to recover the improver complex Petrocedeño, to produce derivates from oil necessary for life in the country. They made the most difficult. But then comes Pdvsa and sends the gasoline, diesel, gasoil needed by the gas stations to function normally (...) and now proliferate mafias with different costumes, with different attires to control gas stations, to control diesel



12 Youtube. (2022). "Declaraciones del FGR sobre la lucha contra las mafias de la gasolina y los funcionarios corruptos". January 20th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FC_E63BSs2E&t=7s&ab_channel=MPvenezolano

13 Youtube. (2022). "Maduro exige acabar con mafias de la gasolina en estaciones de servicio". January 15th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjheKFdp7SI&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela



distribution for farmers who produce food, it is embarrassing and has to end, Minister Tareck, the gangster handling of gas sale in the country (...) is it impossible to manage a regular and decent sale of gas? I am asking, is it impossible? Or is it that the mafias will have more power than a State, than a whole country, than a whole town (...) if they dress rojo, rojito on the inside they are rotten, they are not rojos, rojitos and we have to unmask them, take the costume off. Enough is enough, I want results now. On this first trimester, definitive results. Exemplary results, I ask for support from the prosecutor, justice, justice”.

The president misinformed by saying that refineries had been recovered. It was not true. While in mafias around gas stations participate military officers, who have control of gas distribution since scarcity got worse.

Since the message to the Nation and on the frame of Operation Hands of Iron there have been different cases of corruption published, which have led to detentions. The most emblematic is the one of the mayoress of Zulia municipality Jesús María Semprún, Keyrineth Fernández and two deputies from the so-called “scorpions”, opposition members who allegedly negotiated with officialism to vote against reelection of Juan Guaidó as President of the National Assembly. These people were apprehended in Falcón state with seven kilos of cocaine on January 28th.

One month later, on February 24th, prosecutor Tarek William Saab referred to the subject and assured that as the mayoress and the deputies belonged to a network led by a man called Richard, of whom the last name was not given, allegedly protected in Colombia. “ I think Venezuela is one of the few countries in the world that hits drug traffic this severe way, despite we are not coca producers. They use us as transit way, trying to “Colombianize” Venezuelan politics.

In a narrative that deviates attention and identifies alleged perpetrators, Saab stated: “ it is pretended to accuse Venezuela of drug traffic, but the real failed narco-state is Colombia, first producer of cocaine in the world and which money has splatted politicians and businessmen of that country since decades”¹⁴.

Existence of strategic material smuggling on the Corporación Eléctrica Nacional (Corpoelec), the Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (Cantv) and Pdvsa, was also recognized by the general prosecutor at the same press conference¹⁵.

“It is not the driver used by the mafia boss with a chimba (fake) guide (for mobilization) to transport strategic material. That is a victim, used. Then, the truck driver is going to pay for the damage? No. The official behind this has to pay, whoever he/she is. The businessman, between quotation marks, who uses a briefcase company to offend (...) there is complicity of some Pdvsa managers and we are calling them to interview them, because, someone has to explain to me where tons and tons of tubes come from. Attention! It is in good state, is not scrap. Regarding dismantling observed in the industry. We are observing this with lots of concern in Anzoátegui and Monagas”, said¹⁶.

14 Youtube. (2022). “Tarek William Saab, rueda de prensa sobre robo de material estratégico de Corpoelec y Pdvsa”. February 24th. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3U7fVO43bs&ab_channel=LuiginoBracciRoadesdeVenezuela

15 Ídem

16 Ídem



“We have detected there is a whole industry of looting and robbery of these materials that afterwards are being transported out of the country. Particularly, the main actor on those robberies, as always, is Colombia”, insisted Saab.

On the balance made, it was pointed that since august 2017 till February 2022 have been detained 12.485 people for strategic materials smuggling, of which 5.564 were accused.

Follow up made by authorities to illicit activities allows the prosecutor to affirm that “the strategic material and gas traffic have the same modality and damage than drug traffic. And we even have discovered that some called scrap dealers, inside those scraps, they carry drugs”.



CHAPTER 6



“LICIT” BUT IRREGULAR SOURCES TO OBTAINING FUNDS



In the context of economic asphyxiation, propelled by downfall of national oil industry and the uprise of international financial sanctions, the government of Nicolás Maduro has opted to generate new rents through activities that, even though are legal, are developed in an irregular way, with high levels of opacity that shoot corruption risks.

6.1 State Assets handover in 2021

The default in which the Venezuelan State incurred with its bondholders in 2017, as well as sanctions applied by the United States since that same year have isolated Venezuela from the traditional financial system. Without this access, there are a series of very significant consequences for the country, among which stand out the impossibility to acquire new credits to finance and enormous limitations to commercialize their licit products.

State credits constitute a tool of great importance to regulate cash flows of countries and usually help financing public expense. Before the absence of this fundamental tool, countries tend to finance their own expense with ordinary income; in the case of Venezuela, isolation from financial system occurred simultaneously with the downfall of its larger income source: oil industry.

The mixture of the unprecedented decadence of an exemplary oil industry in Latin America with the separation of Venezuela from the international financial system pushed Maduro to the search of alternatives of income and one of them has been to deplete the same State.

Nicolás Maduro government has reduced its size by diminishing functions offered and public assets provided, also by selling or transferring part of its assets to finance their most basic needs.

Even though the State assets sale process is not illegal per se, there are many suspicions about its proceeding under the chavista administration. Till now, these negotiations have not followed the regular procedures described in the Venezuelan legal frame and the fact that there are two National Assemblies, each one with a claim about legitimacy, makes its legality questionable.

The handover or sale of State property, especially State companies, is a phenomenon that has exacerbated since the approval of the so-called "Anti-block law", published in the Official Gazette No. 6,583 of October 12, 2021 and endorsed by agreement of the ruling National Assembly on May 13, 2021.

A recent study made by Transparencia Venezuela¹, starting with the monitoring to official declarations, revision of investigations by recognized communication media, consultation to data bases about contractors of the State and interviews to experts and union representatives of different economic sectors, allowed to precise that at least since 2015 the government is arranging the administration of some state companies under private actors' responsibility. The systemization of those data gathered shows that since that date and until ends of 2021, **at least 33 companies property of the Venezuelan State passed to be administrated by the private sector.** These have been companies from agro-alimentary sector mainly, followed by the tourism and manufacturing sectors.

Authorities such as the former minister of National Production, José Gregorio Biomorgi², deny these processes are privatizations. He also mentions that in the frame of the "Anti-block law" it is allowed to do secret alliances with the private sector, which do not compromise the property of the asset, it means, according to his

1 Transparencia Venezuela. (2021). "Aliados privados en control de empresas estatales". Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Aliados-privados-en-control-de-empresas-estatales-1.pdf>

2 Banca y Negocios. (2022). "Ministro de Industrias descarta política de privatizaciones: alianzas antibloqueo no comprometen propiedad de activos". January 31st. Available in: <https://www.bancaynegocios.com/ministro-de-industrias-descarta-politica-de-privatizaciones-alianzas-antibloqueo-no-comprometen-propiedad-de-activos/>



declaration, these processes would not imply a sale procedure.

Additionally, by reviewing small letters of many of those transactions and trying to precise who are the involved, it is possible to identify persons close to high government figures, such as brothers Jorge Rodríguez and Delcy Rodríguez.

At effects of quantifying the magnitude of handovers and strategic alliances, the most representative cases of this type were selected, which negotiation was made in 2021. Only were chosen those whose estimations of assets sold or yearly lost incomes go over USD 1 million. During 2021, four great handovers of State assets stand out, with the mentioned conditions, which include diverse opening mechanisms. There should be noted the existence of a fifth case that involves Industria Venezolana Maicera Pronutricos C.A., however, according to the published by Reuters, Maduro' administration signed a strategic alliance to pass operations of the company to Alimentos El Maizal in a rent agreement valued in USD 16.000 monthly during 5 years. Even though there is another handover, its limited scale excludes it from being studied deeply.

The most emblematic negotiations chosen for this analysis involve PDV Caribe (a branch of Pdvsa in Dominican Republic), the different Pdvsa gas stations, Alba Caracas Hotel and the Central Azucarero Sucre.

Due to lack of information regarding amounts associated to transactions, we have done some estimations of how much the State did not receive due to the irregular and not registered handover of these companies, and it is equivalent to USD 148,2 million.

6.1.1 Central Azucarero Sucre C.A.



Sucre state governorship established a strategic alliance with the company Corporación Tecnoagro. This would allow privates to have certain control over the sugar operation since ends of 2020 and beginning of 2021. According to reports of Armando Info, the Central owns a sugar milling capacity of 300.000 tons per year. Assuming the Central can operate at full capacity, these milling levels represent around USD 24 million of income yearly at international sugar prices, taking as reference an international price of USD 743 per ton.



CENTRAL AZUCARERO SUCRE. ULTIMAS NOTICIAS.



It means, the Venezuelan State would not be perceiving around USD 24 million every year during the strategic alliance. Sources from the sector present similar estimations, Oscar Contreras, the president of the Society of Cane Growers of Portuguesa (Socaportuguesa), doing reference to the loss of milling capacity in Portuguesa, calculates that 350.000 milling tons lost represent around USD 28 million per year.

It is important to highlight that sugar centrals handled by the State, as most state companies, are in deplorable conditions, according to their own workers and since several years they operate under its installed capacity.

6.1.2 Gas service stations transferred to others



Increase in internal gas prices as a consequence of Covid-19 pandemic and structural changes suffered by the oil industry, forced the State to modify its handling and control over gas stations (E/S) at national level. According to Transparencia Venezuela reports, Pdvsas has decided to unilaterally take back concessions to a group of gas station operators at national level to make space for new private actors. Of the 400 concessions already planned, 50 new ones have been given.

It is estimated that internal gasoline consumption in Venezuela is around 90.000 barrels per day and Reuters reports establish that around 1.680 gas stations work in the country. Therefore, it can be assumed that, in average, every gas station consumes 53,5 barrels daily. Every barrel represents 159 liters of gas. When the daily consumption and the estimated USD 0,50 per liter price of sale is annualized, the result obtained is that the 50 concessions executed generate an income of USD 77,7 million per year.

It is worth mentioning that these are not new concessions from the State, therefore it would not generate an additional rent loss to it. Nonetheless, the change of some private actors for others, executed opaquely and unilaterally by the government, raises suspicions about the re-direction of this rent.

6.1.3 Venetur Alba Caracas Hotel





The Venetur Alba Caracas Hotel is one of those emblematic hotels in the center of the Venezuelan capital, which in the past received hundreds of international tourists. It was private, but it passed to State hands under Hugo Chavez administration. It caused its fast deterioration. In an effort for recovering its operativity, the Venezuelan government has used it for different activities, from political acts to Covid-19 vaccination campaigns, among others.

According to declarations from the minister of Tourism, Alí Padrón³, Nicolás Maduro' management plans to perform a commercial alliance for administration and commercialization of Alba Caracas Hotel operations with a non-identified Turkish company, expert in hotels administration. The opacity on the agreement, as well as actors involved, makes difficult to understand deeply the dimension and consequences of the government's plan. However, using similar hotel references we may suppose the scale of this agreement.

Another historic hotel in downtown capital city is the Gran Meliá Caracas Hotel. The last financial results presentation from Grupo Meliá Hotels International highlights that average occupation during 2021 was 14,3%. Assuming both Gran Meliá and Alba Hotel are similar due to their location, historic importance, price per night and category of service we can suppose that Alba Caracas levels of occupation could rank similarly, despite its deterioration during the last years. Alba Caracas hotel structure has 780 rooms, for which with an average price of USD 90 per night and using occupation levels of Meliá, the Venezuelan State could not be perceiving around USD 3,6 million per year, without discounting costs implied on the hotel's operation.

6.1.4. Refinería Dominicana de Petróleo (Refidomsa)



In order to pay Pdvsa debts with the Dominican Republic, the Venezuelan State sold its possession of 49% share of Dominican refining company Refidomsa for USD 88,1 million. Venezuela had acquired these shares in 2010 when the country paid USD 131 million to the Dominican government, for which the loss of value as consequence of this transaction goes around USD 42,9 million in nominal terms, despite there is no information if the refinery assets have been renewed or rather how much it has depreciated since then.

6.1.5 Estimations of some assets transferred in 2021

As mentioned before, due to lack of information regarding the amounts associated to transactions made in 2021, some estimations have been made about how much income did not receive or could lose the State by the irregular and not registered handover of these companies, obtaining an estimated of USD 148,2 million.

3 Rojas, E. (2021). "Alí Padrón: El Alba Caracas será entregado en alianza a una empresa turca". Últimas Noticias. Available in: <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/politica/ali-padron-el-alba-caracas-sera-entregado-en-alianza-a-una-empresa-turca/>



"LICIT" BUT IRREGULAR SOURCES TO OBTAINING FUNDS

Assets transferred in 2021				
Company	Sector	Current Situation	Opening Process	Estimations of income generated per year / Impairment loss on sale of assets
Central Azucarero Sucre C.A.	Agrifood	Sucre state governorship, through the Sucre state Socialist Corporation of Development, Corposucre, established an alliance with the company Corporación Tecnoagro for the management of this central	Strategic Alliance	24*
Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. Pdvs	Hydrocarbons	By mid-2020, when Venezuela was in radical quarantine due to Covid-19, Oils of Venezuela decided unilaterally to withdraw concessions to a group of gas service station operators at national level to make way to new private actors. According to data gathered, the state company has given around 50 of 400 new concessions that are already planned.	License / Mixed Companies / Agreements of Productive Services / Service Contracts	77.7*
Desarrollos Gran Caracas, C.A. (Venetur Alba Caracas Hotel)	Tourism	El ministro de Turismo, Alí Padrón, anunció que este hotel será operado por una empresa de Turquía, gracias a una alianza comercial.	Commercial Alliance	3.6*
PDV Caribe C.A. 2021 Hydrocarbons	Oil	The state company PDV Caribe was owner of 49% share of the Dominican refining company Refidomsa since 2010. In August 2021, the Dominican Republic government acquired that portion handled by PDV Caribe, paying with Pdvs debt instruments.	Sale	42.9**
Source: Transparencia and Ecoanalítica *Annual income, there is no transfer of asset ownership **Impairment loss on sale at discount made by the Venezuelan state in conditions of complete discretionally			Total	148.2



6.2 New exports: scrap as an escape valve

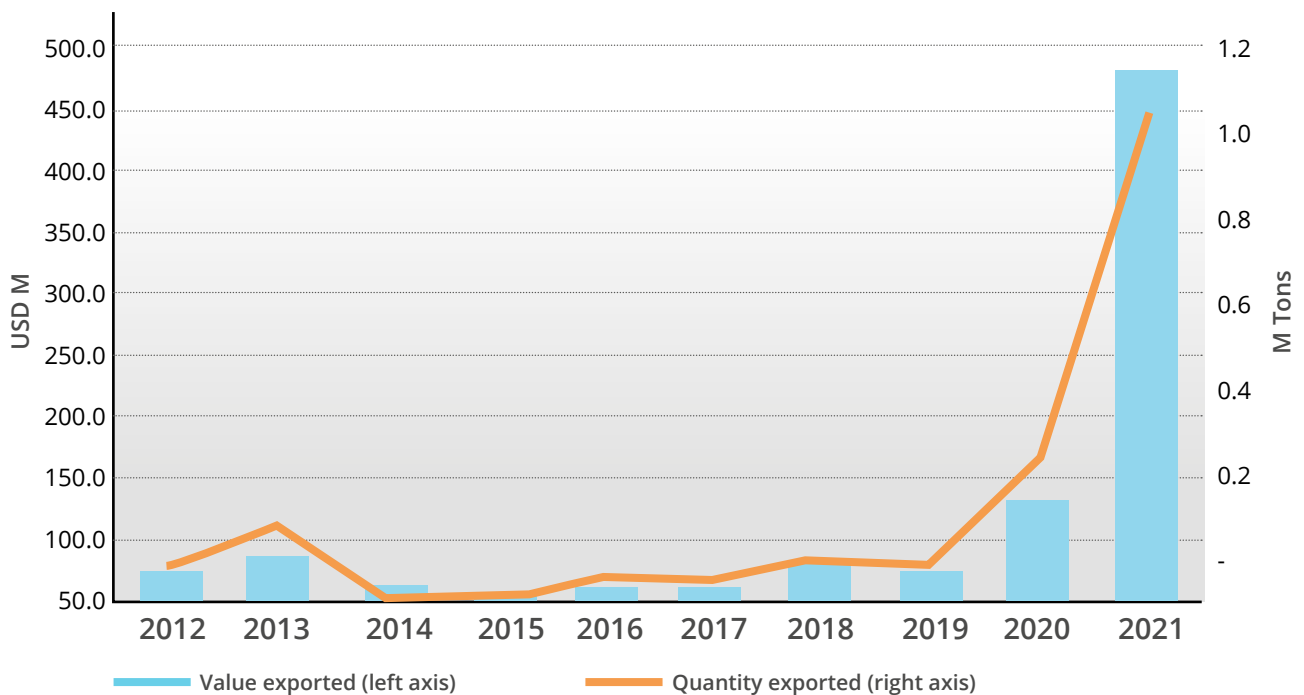
An unusual flow of income found by the government few years ago is the sale and commercialization of the country's ferrous scrap inventory. The activity consists in collecting iron residuals by ton to export them to commercial partners, who then process and recycle it to use as raw material.

A great source of scrap in Venezuela are the iron structures previously used by the State for their economic activities, for example, the Pdvsa pipes used to connect La Guaira with Caracas, transporting gas or oil derivatives. Since few years ago, alternate ways are used, therefore those pipes are not in use and private entities (many times contracted by state companies) are in charge of cutting and transporting these tons.

Despite being structures that are not in use it is still a State asset and irregular processes on its sale and exportation are another clear example of how is the State depleting in search of income.

Scrap collection has drawn the attention of low-skilled workers, who find in it a way to generate earnings. However, this work implies a hard physical activity that requires hours of work in non-favorable conditions. Likewise, workers who have no access to the biggest scrap stock from State structures are forced to deplete and collect, without regulation, other sources of scrap to manage to reunite tons needed to receive their payments.

Scrap exports per year



Source: Tradmap



To contextualize rents generated by this unorthodox economic activity it is necessary to observe volumes exported in 2021. During that year, 1.013.990 tons of scrap were exported according to TradeMap figures. This represents an income of USD 454 million per year.

Turkey was the country with more volume of scrap importation (with 92,32% of total); the second place was occupied by Thailand (4,78%) and third Portugal (1,34%). In spite of the great income generated, there is no clear documentation about which companies are contracted to perform these activities, who are the persons working on it, which are their labor conditions and where all this scrap inventory comes from.

6.3 Dark schemes of oil commercialization

Although the oil industry collapse is real, as well as sanctions imposed by the United States to Venezuela, it forced Maduro's government to search for alternatives to its financing. It is also truth that, in parallel, authorities procured a partial recovery of oil production through diverse mechanisms.

After producing around 400.000 barrels of oil per day during a good part of 2020, Oils of Venezuela was capable of producing a maximum of 871.000 barrels per day in December 2021, according to official figures. In 2021, monthly production was 635.000 barrels per day, an important recovery respect to the previous period.

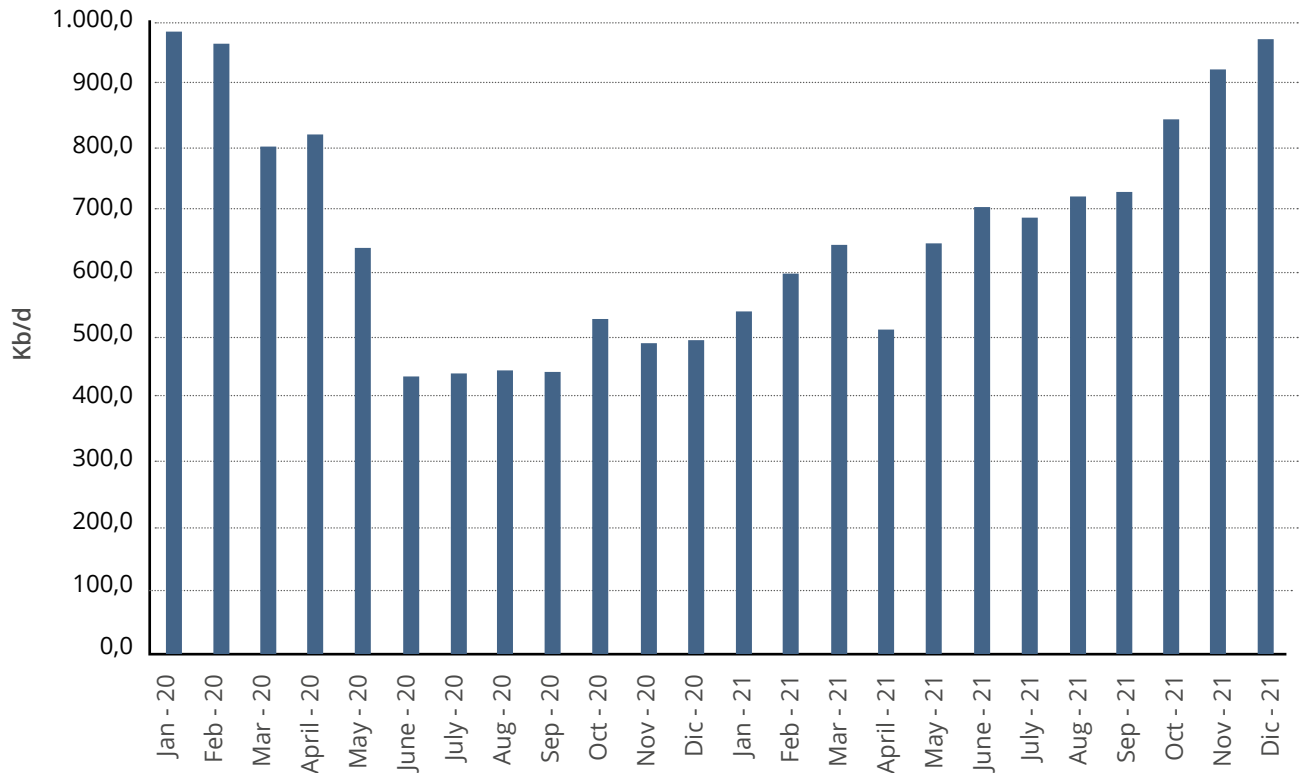
A fundamental factor on this "recovery" is Iran. Throughout 2021, Pdvsa received approximately 2.1 million barrels of diluents daily from the Iranian Republic, with the aim to impulse production. Besides, Iran has contributed with the repair and replacement of equipment in several deteriorated production plants.

China has also influenced Pdvsa "recovery", with managements made through the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC). The company has sent personnel to Venezuela and investigated local companies to do maintenance. This is a show of the Chinese interest in getting closer to the Venezuelan oil, in search for an assured payment in species for the pending debt between the two countries, and also trying to keep the benefit of purchase of Venezuelan oil with 30% discount, compared with international prices. These discounts, in a context of high oil prices since 2020, improved the risk-reward relationship for other actors to commerce with a Venezuela sanctioned through opaque channels, according to a work recently published by economists Luisa Palacios and Francisco Monaldi⁴. Nonetheless, continuity of those levels of production will keep depending on the plant's maintenance, because the help received from Iran is not enough for all units to operate simultaneously and in full capacity. Besides, as said before, the mechanisms which the government had to appeal to, imply that the buyer assumes the risk of doing transactions with a sanctioned State company; this has led to deactivation of satellite signals of Pdvsa vessels, transferences vessel to vessel, creation of ghost companies and mixture of chemical additives to be sold with another denomination.

4 Palacios, L. y Monaldi, F. (2022). "Venezuela Oil Sanctions: Not an Easy Fix". Center on Global Energy Policy. Available in: <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/commentary/venezuela-oil-sanctions-not-easy-fix>.



Venezuelan Oil Production



Source: OPEC and Ecoanalítica

Despite the improvement in Venezuelan oil production and the stable flow of diluents from Iran, exports represent an important challenge for the government. Apart from having to sell with discount, given that Venezuelan raw oil is low quality (in great part Merey crude, heavier, less demanded) it is more difficult to sell it completely. Exports for December 2021 located in 416.000 barrels per day, a considerable difference compared to the 526.000 barrels per day exported from November and 700.000 in October.

6.3.1 Who are they negotiating with?

The main commercial partner of Venezuela in oil matter is China, even though there is no register of direct shipments in the last years. However, Chinese imports from Malaysia and Oman have increased. This is due to the fact that both countries have served as strategic stops to

manage the arrival of Venezuelan crude oil to the Asian country.

According to Bloomberg, importations of Venezuelan crude oil and Iranian crude made by China grew 53% in 2021. Following importation data from Malaysia, the country has increased its importation of Venezuelan crude since 2018 and kept these commercial relations during all 2020 and the first three months of 2021. Chinese oil importations from Malaysia showed its highest peak in 2020, without Malaysia increasing its production capacity. At the same time, there are registers of shipments to European countries such as Spain, Greece, and Italy. Despite the difficulties to commercialize, for January 2022, according to Reuters, Pdvsa increased crude exports to Cuba, reaching 80.000 barrels a day.



"LICIT" BUT IRREGULAR SOURCES TO OBTAINING FUNDS

On the other hand, according to official sources to which Ecoanalítica had access, near 50% of Venezuelan crude oil exported passes through the Russian financial system, which is in charge of delivering cash dollars to Pdvsa. For this reason, before the war in Ukraine and sanctions to Russia, certain complications are expected to access cash in dollars in a short time for the government.

Beyond this, what is clear is that Pdvsa continues to use opaque mechanisms to transport oil to its destinations and it seems like, while it is sold with great discounts which allow customers to obtain significant earnings despite being sanctioned, they will always have a market to turn to.

Main destinations of oil exports





6.3.2 Between sanctions and discounts

According to Ecoanalítica estimations, during 2022 oil production of Venezuela is going to average 803.000 barrels a day, and the increasement will be impulsed by the collaboration of government allies, but stopped by the obsolete conditions of national oil industry. This number would represent a growth of 26,4% in comparison with 2021. Likewise, monthly oil exports in average could be located in 650.000 barrels per day, if the methods that have been used are kept, but it will depend on the quality of oil produced.



In March 2022, after the Russian invasion to Ukraine and subsequent sanctions to Putin's government, the United States sent a delegation to Caracas with the aim to discuss the possibility to relieve sanctions and reinstate oil transactions with Venezuela. This would help the North American government to substitute part of the 670.000 barrels a day imported from Russia and position Venezuela again in the global market. Companies as Chevron showed interest in reactivating and enlarging the exploitation license, on the expectation to return to operations at larger scale in the country.

However, according to Palacios and Monaldi⁵, sanctions to Russia could also affect Venezuela negatively: great quantities of Russian oil

are now going to be transacted through the same opaque channels used by Pdvsa. The competition of Russian oil at a discount on the market, especially Chinese, and the lower quality of Venezuelan oil in comparison with the Russian, put Maduro's government in a complicated situation. Besides, there are reports stating that great part of Pdvsa reserves in dollars have been transferred to Russian banks, so it may be frozen due to the sanctions on the financial system. If to all this is added that according to Bloomberg, Russia is responsible for 15% of Venezuelan oil production, through Petromonagas, sanctions imposed increase uncertainty in the context of Venezuelan oil.

The visit of North American delegates had a wide rejection bipartisan and it seems like it will not advance much longer, after the liberation of two American prisoners. However, of ending up being a reality, many of obstacles faced by the government in the last years could be a matter of the past. In that sense, export licenses of certain companies such as Chevron, Eni and Repsol, could be enlarged, which would facilitate the recovery on the productive capacity and would redirect Venezuelan exports to United States. Of course, with important limitations due to the current state of oil industry, and the imminent need to invest. This, added to the apparent recovery on production, could lead Venezuela to levels of at least 1 million barrels a day.

The reality, at the moment, seems to indicate that Venezuela will continue to back up on allies like Iran, China and Russia, and using mechanisms to evade sanctions. After three years of limited oil incomes, the government has managed to catch a breath in production reactivation and it looks set to continue increasing, even though delimited to volumes barely near to one million barrels. Despite all this, there are still important challenges related to conditions of the national oil industry and the quality of oil produced.

5 Palacios, L. y Monaldi, F. (2022). "Venezuela Oil Sanctions: Not an Easy Fix". Center on Global Energy Policy. Available in: <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/research/commentary/venezuela-oil-sanctions-not-easy-fix>



"LICIT" BUT IRREGULAR SOURCES TO OBTAINING FUNDS



The previous, together with the still existing sanctions, force to keep selling at discounts close to 30% (in the case of Merely; respect to DCO oil, which contains great quantity of water and sediments, the discount is even bigger) and cause a big gap between production and exportation. It is possible to have a clearer sample of this when evaluating the average monthly export during 2021, which located in 580.000 barrels a day.

Understanding that Merely is the main export product and its average price for this period was USD 55.1, Pdvsa could have obtained earnings close to USD 10.890 million. However, considering the discounts to which it has appealed, the net oil income in 2021 is around USD 6.700 million. The sales made due to sanctions and difficulties to export by product quality, make the government, in a medium term, to receive the necessary oil income, but not the desired.

CHAPTER 7



ILLICIT ECONOMIES AND ITS CONNECTION TO TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL NETWORKS



Markets and illicit economies analyzed in his document form wide systems and criminal networks that act through multiple countries, in a symbiotic relation with the institutional mechanisms of the State; a symbiosis reflected on the co-opting and reconfiguration of institutions, that have managed to control important groups of political and economic power in Venezuela.

Even though the concept of criminal organization is commonly used to refer to phenomena such as the ones **analyzed here, the empiric evidence sustains the need to interpret these criminal structures as networks and systems**

whose current operation is not external to the State institutions, and it is not limited to domestic or national jurisdictions In this sense, to interpret these criminal phenomena as networks is an epistemological condition necessary to understand its complexity and jurisdictional implications around the world. When these criminal phenomena are interpreted as systems, its complexity and unprecedented resilience reached in Venezuela are recognized, and also the juridic and institutional obstacles to face them are also recognized.



Traditionally, the concept of “criminal organization” has been employed in the academic context and in the one of public politics to analyze criminal groups, with which characteristics such as division and rigid specialization of functions are assumed, also concentration of decision capacity in the leader of the criminal organization and the presence of rigid commanding hierarchies; however, in diverse countries it has been observed that **organizations, activities and illicit markets analyzed are more characterized by its high capacity of adaptation in function of surrounding changes than for being rigid structures**¹.

In Venezuela, this adaptation capacity has achieved a stability successful enough to coopt, reconfigure and permanently use administrative, legal, judicial, statutory and even coercive instruments proper of state institutions.

This adaptation capacity, of a stable criminal network, is clearly seen on the illicit studied in this report. As example, the adaptation of agents, the mechanisms and fuel markets before the increasement of prices seem to eliminate or at least reduce the attractive price differential for smuggling, no matter how much the conditions change, the criminal network was reconfigured to keep generating illicit economic benefits. The other clear example we can observe is on the changes of the Orinoco Mining Arc and the illegal exploitation of gold. The change of actors, the increased presence of the State and the bigger restrictions of markets due to sanctions has not limited the obtention of benefits for the criminal network.

By the previous, it can be concluded that in Venezuela the networks that currently sustain criminal markets analyzed are characterized by:



Being formed by agents that are not strictly criminal but “grey” or undefined;² it means, agents who pursue and favor criminal objectives, but acting from legal organizations and, therefore, being formally protected by co-opted institutions and even by partialized laws. Due to its variety, these grey agents can also exploit, trade and usufruct several licit and illicit resources.

It is usually assumed that criminal groups are formed by agents who act from organizations outside the State; it means, usually it is assumed that the “criminal organizations” are external entities and opposed to the State. Nonetheless, as exposed in previous chapters, **the successful operation of criminal networks in Venezuela depends on the intervention of agents who pursue and promote criminal objectives but that act from legal organizations, public and private; this, because such agents count on privileged access to informational, economic and logistic resources necessary for any criminal operation.** In this sense, it is possible that agents participating in criminal networks analyzed are legitimized or even protected by the game rules – including laws- that have been formulated and reconfigured to favor partial interests. This because, *ceteris paribus*, at higher level of institutional co-opting by criminal networks that infiltrate, reconfigure, manipulate and use such institutions, bigger capacity to legitimate and protect legally agents who take part of such networks.

1 Garay-Salamanca, L. J., & Salcedo-Albaran, E. (2015). Drug Trafficking, Corruption and States: How Illicit Networks Shaped Institutions in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. Bloomington: Vortex Foundation.

2 Garay-Salamanca et al (2010). Illicit Networks Reconfiguring States: social network analysis of colombian and mexican cases. Fundación Método, Bogotá.



The agents acting from formally legal organizations but enabling the realization of criminal objectives, have been denominated *grey* or *undefined* because in them there is no coincidence between the institutional and the organizational role,³ and these agents can operate in all levels of public administration and in all sectors of economy. It means, examples of grey or undefined agents are policemen who at a local level receive bribery to allow the transit of illegal mining resources, officials who from their high rank positions at the Executive and Legislative promote public politics and laws to legitimize discretionally or to favor specific agents, or businessmen who participate in schemes of money laundering. Precisely for this reason,

corruption constitutes as a unique articulation and convergence point between private and public agents, legal and illegal, whose criminal objectives align around exploitation, exchange and traffic of resources, licit or illicit.

Now, these grey agents – who cannot be defined as strictly legal nor strictly criminal – also count on different institutional capacities that are transacted in the context of criminal markets analyzed. This market of institutional capabilities,⁴ is characteristic of situations in which legal and illegal agents are articulated, public and private, from diverse economic sectors, as a result of an intense criminal activity and the correspondent accumulation of criminal technical knowledge.

From public officials who provide information, licenses or permissions, to private agents who provide mechanisms to transport illicit resources or to launder assets, the illicit markets are sustained in networks formed by grey agents with different institutional capacities resulting in ever-increasing levels of criminal resilience.



High levels of criminal resilience that increase progressively thanks to the perverse casual circle between systemic corruption, institutional co-opting, criminal activities and bigger economic revenues that stimulate more corruption.

The diversity of institutional capacities of intervenient grey agents strengthens and makes criminal networks even more resilient, due to, at least two motivations: first, because it increases exponentially the repertoire of shapes to transit, exchange, and transfer licit and illicit resources through the network; secondly, because agents with criminal interests can act from the justice system,

in a way that the same judicial operators – who count on legal institutional capacities – can favor criminal interests, weakening institutions that safeguard the democratic functioning of the State.

This is reflected in high levels of impunity and partiality that currently characterizes a judicial system like the Venezuelan: when justice operators, and most of all, when justice procurement institutions are co-opted by a criminal network it increases drastically the level of resilience of such network by counting on the State coercive capacity, which is actually protected by partialized laws and regulations. As a result, the largest extension and diversity of intervenient agents and their ways of interaction,

3 Garay-Salamanca, L. J., Salcedo-Albarán, E., & Macías, G. (2018a). Macro-estructuras de corrupción: el caso lava jato. *Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla criminalità organizzata*, 4(1), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13130/cross-10250>.

4 Garay Salamanca, L. J., & Salcedo-Albarán, E. (2012). *Narcotráfico, Corrupción y Estados: Cómo las redes ilícitas han reconfigurado las instituciones de Colombia, Guatemala y México*. Ciudad de México: Random House Mondadori.



results permanently in a source of resilience for these illicit networks⁵.

That said, the variety of intervenient agents – with different technical institutional capacities – implies that illicit flows do not originate only in acts committed by strictly criminal actors. It means, as a result of the high diversity of agents and resources transacted, illicit flows can be originated in acts formally legal when, for example, the exploitation of a gold mine is legally supported by a concession or when a company is legally constituted but in practice both are a mechanism to launder, legitimize illicit activities or maintain systems of modern slavery.

This phenomenon implies the need to identify and analyze illicit acts with appearance of legality that facilitate exploitation, transit, exchange and usufruct of resources forming criminal markets.

For this reason, it is essential to understand the context of action of a determined actor or a determined act, to understand how State institutions have reconfigured to serve partial and criminal interests in a stable way.



By forming extensive and varied criminal networks, illicit markets extend through local, regional and national jurisdictions, incorporating every time more innovative operating procedures. This makes it open systems with capacity to co-opt every time more grey

agents, break into new illegal markets and adopt diverse procedures of money laundering at international scale.

The criminal activities analyzed, as well as those licit but illegitimate – protected with regulations adjusted to the interests of the power sphere-, sustain on flows of resources exploited, transacted, trafficked and utilized through municipalities, states and countries. In that sense, even though the usual analysis of a criminal phenomenon is limited to a geographic and administrative space, in practice, criminal networks act through these jurisdictions, in a way to extend their illicit flows to local, regional, national and mostly international scales.

It is essential to maintain perspective of these scales because that allows to understand the weaknesses and obstacles affronted by the society to control criminal networks as complex as the analyzed here. At a domestic level, one of the main obstacles affronted by the Venezuelan society is the lack of independent and impartial justice procurement institutions, in the sense that those have been co-opted and incorporated to the flow of resources of the same criminal networks.

While large sectors of the justice system are a co-opted resource for criminal networks, the Venezuelan society will lack of instruments to prevent and control domestic criminal markets.

On the other hand, at international scale, the institutional instruments to share information and coordinate investigations against illicit networks are scarce; in fact, these instruments usually limit international conventions that are not reflected in domestic legislations, cooperation agreements between public ministries or petitions of information whose non-compliance

5 Salcedo-Albarán, E., & Garay-Salamanca, L. (2016). Macro-Criminalidad: Complejidad y Resiliencia de las Redes Criminales. Bloomington: iUniverse, Vortex Foundation, Small Wars Journal.



lacks of consequences. Before the lack of binding legal instruments, the possibility of advancing on coordinated and efficient investigations at international scale depend on the will of attorneys and specific judicial operators; a will missing on the Venezuelan judicial system.

In general, as it occurs in Venezuela, corruption sustains and facilitates a permanent institutional co-opting, which turns into cause and consequence of more criminal markets: *ceteris paribus*, bigger corruption facilitates commission of criminal activities, with which there are more economic revenues that stimulate bigger corruption levels. This way, there is a *perverse circularity* established that permanently weakens democratic institutions, and, most of all, conducts, most society -that lacks privileged political or economic power- to a situation of victimization and helplessness before the permanent destruction of justice procurement institutions.

CHAPTER 8



ILLICIT ECONOMIES & CITIZENS HELPLESSNESS



As a result of the perverse causal circle between systemic corruption and complex and resilient criminal networks, during two decades Venezuela has been scenery of a permanent institutional destruction. This deterioration is reflected mainly in the justice system, which by omission does not guarantee the rule of law, does not carry out impartial and transparent processes and leaves citizenship at the mercy of abuses, affectations or damages from internal and external actors in the State, without possibility to protect and retribute their basic rights; while by action, it presents partialized institutions that obey to economic and politic powers, which prevents most part of citizens to access basic resources to exercise their food, living, health, education and social security rights. In some cases, actors from the justice system have managed to turn it into repression instruments and accomplices of illicit groups and corrupted networks.

The confluency of actors participating in changing alliances, with mortal rivalries and criminal companies at great scale work as a starting point for gold smuggling, money laundering and other financial crimes, as well as human trafficking, with the purpose of sexual and labor exploitation, child labor exploitation, forced labor, environmental crimes and¹ drug traffic.

In this context, the most part of Venezuelan society has left held to a double massive victimization process: first, by the systematic violation of their basic rights – economic, social, cultural and environmental –, and second by the existence of a justice system which is absent in practice, unpunished, partial, and discretionary. The most vulnerable sectors economically have been the first affected.

In the areas where illicit economies have the most presence and force, the citizenship affronts simultaneous regulations from the State, regulations from irregular groups, abuses from corruption networks, absence of an official justice

system and the need to survive. This complex reality transforms in incredulity and cynicism in front of official promises, while pragmatism demanded by survival leads people to create loyalty links and even admiral towards illicit groups such as pranes, who have regular activity an exercise immediate authority over security and defense corps or representatives of local governments. For that reason, it is not strange to hear some workers and neighbors of the Orinoco Mining Arc identify themselves with criminal bands operating there and say: *“I am from the system”*.

Helplessness in which citizens find themselves is reflected in the reality affronted by many small miners in the Orinoco Mining Arc and small scrap collectors that operate both in Bolivar state and the rest of the country. Even though their situation requires a deeper study, some of their characteristics indicate they could be becoming victims of a modern slavery, if they are not already.

Both groups do activities “supposedly” illicit but the product of their effort is purchased by companies where the State is a majority partner (at least formally).

In a good extent, the Strategic Alliances require exploitation of miners and collection of small scrap dealers to obtain the denominated strategic materials for its functioning.

In the last two decades, the Venezuelan government has enlarged the list of strategic materials, those reserved to the State monopoly such as gasoline, diesel, natural gas, and other hydrocarbon derivates. With the Organic Law that Reserves to the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold and other Strategic Minerals, of 2015 and the Creation of the “Orinoco Mining Arc”², 1n 2016, the

1 OECD. (2021). “Gold flows from Venezuela: Supporting due diligence on the production and trade of gold in Venezuela”. Available in: <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Gold-flows-from-Venezuela-supporting-due-diligence-on-the-production-and-trade-of-gold.pdf>

2 Decree No. 2.248 of Creation of the Zone for Strategic National Development of “Orinoco Mining Arc”, published in Official Gazette No. 40.855 of February 24th, 2016.



State reserved all the relative to gold, diamond, copper, silver, coltan, mercury³, etc. The same happened with the recycling susceptible material. By presidential decree⁴, in February 2021, it was declared strategic for development of the national economy any metallic, ferrous, aluminum, copper, iron, bronze, steel, nickel material or other kinds of metal, naval, aeronautical, electrical and electronic scrap, in any condition, as well as non-metallic solid waste, fiber optics and secondary fiber, product of the recycling of paper and cardboard, in any condition.

From these regulations, it is considered illegal anyone who practices auriferous or scrap commercialization activities, without State participation or approval. Nonetheless, institutions of the same State feed with gold

production and scrap collection, which is not subscribed to the law dispositions.

Modern slavery in gold exploitation

For small miners to operate legally, these must be inscribed in the Single Mining Register established on the Decree with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that reserves to the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold⁵. Even though this register was created in an attempt from the government to regularize and protect small miners, investigations made leave in evidence that most miners are not inscribed on the RUM, nor integrate payrolls of any company, do not accomplish with personal security or environmental standards and come to extract gold in non-authorized areas for such



IN BOLÍVAR STATE, MINERS WORK UP TO 72 CONTINUOUS HOURS, WITH NO PERSONAL NOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MEASURES. EL CALLAO. BOLÍVAR. PHOTO TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA.

3 Decree No. 2.781, through which diamond is declared as strategic element for its exploration and exploitation; Decree No. 2.782 (copper); Decree No. 2.783 (silver). published in Official Gazette No. 41.122, of March 27th, 2017.

4 Decree No. 4.445 of February 24th, 2021, published in Official Gazette No. 6.617 Extraordinary on that same date.

5 Decree No. 8.413 Decree with Rank, Value and Force of Organic Law that reserves to the State the Activities of Exploration and Exploitation of Gold. Official Gazette No. 39.759 of September 16th, 2011.



end. Nonetheless, they represent a key piece in the first stages of mining production and feed the whole process, of which the State benefits. This evidences that, despite the formal intend to protect this activity, the state regulations are unaccomplished and small mining is still promoted under conditions that can be considered modern slavery, specifically forced labor.

In the Orinoco Mining Arc, small miners extract gold in inhuman and dangerous conditions that put their lives at risk, exposing them to mercury pollution and other diseases⁶. While the government profits from illegal and disordered exploitation of gold, which has turned into a new form of rent capture.

To be able to extract gold, small miners are forced to give up percentages of the mineral to different actors participating in the activity. Also, to criminal organizations controlling mines they must leave around 10% of production, while to mill owners where the material is processed, they

give up from 10% to 30% more. In the end they are left with only few grams of gold every month, having to appeal to do additional activities to survive.

Some miners and other persons take the gold grams left after paying the mill or the system to Ciudad Guayana, or what is left as earning after selling products or services, because all is negotiated in cash or gold grams. These persons are frequently requisitioned in dozens of control points of regional and local police, the Bolivarian National Guard or Cicpc or Dgcim patrol points. In those places there is the tendency to take off part of what they carry and being punished in different ways.

According to testimonials gathered in South Bolivar state, on the control points, miners have even been requested for **mobilization guides** to be able to transport minimal portions of material. These figures were created by the government in 2008 in the midst of a ferreous control of prices, to decide about distribution of food,

medicines, cleaning and personal care products made by public and private companies⁷. Through technologic platform (SICA) the government had control of inventory, knew to whom they had been dispatched to, how much and which date it was delivered.

These guides lost their reason for being with the disapplication of prices control (even though the law is still valid) and appearance of national and imported product of all kinds in the country's markets. But those are used as an excuse to abuse and violate rights from some members of



STATE COMPANIES PURCHASE AURIFEROUS MATERIAL EXTRACTED BY SMALL MINERS, WHO ARE EXPLOITED. EL CALLAO. PHOTO TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA

- 6 Freedom Collaborative. (2021). "Why modern slavery, forced child labour and sexual exploitation in Venezuela's mining areas have grave consequences for the international community". Available in: <https://freedomcollaborative.org/newsletter-archive/why-modern-slavery-forced-child-labour-and-sexual-exploitation-in-venezuelas-mining-areas-have-grave-consequences-for-the-international-community>
- 7 Runrunes. (2015). "Gobierno impuso férreo control a la distribución de alimentos con las guías de movilización". January 20th. Available in: <https://runrun.es/nacional/182582/gobierno-impuso-ferreo-control-la-distribucion-de-alimentos-con-las-guias-de-movilizacion/>



State security organs, present in urban, rural and mining zones of Bolívar state, who discretionally and with impunity interpret at their convenience what is a strategic material, what is the sanction applied for transporting it and who must apply it. This is how there are denounces of forced disappearances, corporal punishments, robbery or toll collection from agents for such regular things as to carry a guide to transport cassava bread bags or wood for cooking.

From the description of small miners activity, it can be observed that there is a job or service, first element to identify if there is or not forced labor; it is also detected that there is a threat of a regular penalty if they do not submit to the conditions imposed and give away a percentage of the material extracted, second element. In those cases, it cannot be said that there is absence of agreement, which is another element, but to accept labor in unsafe conditions, polluting and exposed to violation of basic rights is the consequence of an extreme need. This also supposes a violation of a fundamental right to a dignified work and human dignity⁸, becoming also a situation similar to slavery.

One of the worst consequences of this production structure of modern slavery is helplessness, since, being promoted by the State, victims do not have where to denounce, because if they dare to do it, they will find a corrupt and weakened justice system which does not have capacity or protection against organized crime that seems to operate with government support. Besides, they do not dare to denounce, demand respect and justice, because the activity made is "illegal". They are victims of exploitation and do not have options. With time there is an acceptance of this type of life.

Human right defender organizations of Bolívar state receive denounces where corruption of some security corp officials reach levels of humiliation, sexual violence and family destruction.

Modern slavery and scrap smuggling

A similar situation to the one described previously occurs in the scrap case. There is a legal prohibition of scrap commercialization, which is monopoly of the State. Many scrap dealers pick up and deliver the scrap in reception places of State allied companies, but if they are detained by the State security corps they are criminalized and accused of illicit traffic of strategic material, a crime typified on the Organic Law against Organized Delinquency and Terrorism financing.

In Delta Amacuro state, the river channels of the delta surrounded by jungle have enabled drugs, arms and gasoline transport, irregular groups operating there have incorporated Warao indigenous to their crimes, because they know well the labyrinth of channels there. Regarding scrap smuggling, precisely in Caño Tucupita, there have been denounces of presence of scrap dealers participating in this illegal business.

In this illicit, scrap dealers sell the material to people and companies that dedicate to purchase this metal, take it to other states of Venezuela and resell it in iron mining companies, where they receive up to 40 dollars for a ton of iron⁹.

Due to the complex humanitarian emergency present in Venezuela, persons in Anzoátegui have dedicated to the business of scrap sale, even dismantling drills from oil industry to sell those pieces as scrap, an activity that is clearly a crime. However, these are purchased by the State.

8 OIT. (2021). "Prevención e identificación del trabajo forzoso. Guía de apoyo dirigida a organizaciones de trabajadores". Available in: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--americas/--ro-lima/--sro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_776613.pdf

9 Radio Fe y Alegría Noticias. (2022). "En Tucupita buscan chatarra entre aguas contaminadas para subsistir". Available in: <https://www.radiofeyalegrianoicias.com/en-tucupita-buscan-chatarra-entre-aguas-contaminadas-para-subsistir/>



FERROUS MATERIAL PURCHASING COMPANY IN MATANZAS, CIUDAD GUAYANA, BOLÍVAR STATE. PHOTO TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA

Scrap dealers represent the lowest and weakest link of that scrap illicit traffic chain. They are criminally sanctioned without being criminalized the action of collecting centers, the place where the material is separated for export, with the consent from the State and in a highly opaque way. There is no rendition of accounts regarding these activities.

There have been denounces about the presence of children in the business of scrap smuggling, which clearly causes a situation of modern slavery. In May 2021, it was published the case of a 12-year-old boy who died crushed while he was

picking up scrap for sale in Los Valles Del Tuy¹⁰, while in Ciudad Guayana there was the case of criminal bands who exploited children to work in the scrap business¹¹. Child labor is considered a type of modern slavery.

Childhood should be a moment to grow, learn, play and flourish safely. However, it is estimated that 10 million children around the world do not have that opportunity. On the contrary, they wake up every day trapped in modern slavery. Some have seen themselves forced to do exhausting works in mines, brick ovens, clandestine workshops and particular houses. Others see themselves forced to sexual exploitation, mendicity or drug sale¹².

10 El Carabobeño. (2021). "Niño muere aplastado mientras recogía chatarra para vender en Ocumare del Tuy". May 12th. Available in: <https://www.el-carabobeno.com/nino-muere-aplastado-mientras-recogia-chatarra-para-vender-en-ocumare-del-tuy/>

11 El diario de Guayana. (2021). "Rescatados niños que eran explotados por «Los Puri Puri» en Ciudad Bolívar". August 01st. Available in: <https://eldiariodeguayana.com.ve/rescatados-ninos-que-eran-explotados-por-los-puri-puri-en-ciudad-bolivar/>

12 Anti-Slavery. Child Slavery. Available in: <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/child-slavery/>



In the Venezuelan case, child exploitation is evident in the illicit business of scrap, of which the State has participation through their iron mining companies that purchase this product from modern slavery.



IN MAIN WAYS BETWEEN CIUDAD GUAYANA AND CIUDAD BOLÍVAR, FAMILIES GATHER TO PICK UP SCRAP. PHOTO TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA

ANNEXES

Methodological overview of extortion probability Model in land ways

In the first trimester of 2022, Ecoanalítica applied a study to 20 companies related to transport and distribution services in the country, with the aim to measure variables related to their experience with extortion in land ways control points in Venezuela. From the study, it was possible to raise effective data in 10 of these companies and the average of responses yielded a probability of 25% extortion.

Even though there are sampling limitations for this survey of information, due to scarcity of data registered or lack of follow up in extortion cases, as well as reluctance from companies to give more details by fear to retaliations, the study also allowed to identify the most involved security and defense corps, according to answers obtained.

Aware about these limitations, in this initial study it was possible to estimate the distributions of probability associated with extortion facts, which come defined as explained next.

General Probability of Extortion

Variable | **X:** An extortion event occurs in land was of the country.

Sampling Space | $\Omega = \{E, N E\}$

Where | **E:** An extortion event is given.
NE: An extortion event is not given.

Distribution of Probability

X It is distributed under a Bernoulli distribution, it means: $X \sim B(p)$

If the success in distribution is defined as the occurrence of sampling point **E** (Extortion), the parameter **p** corresponds to a probability that an extortion event is given in land ways of the country, it means, $P(X = 1)$ o $P(E)$.

Estimation

Parameter **p** estimated from survey results made was

$$\hat{p} = 0.25$$

This implies that if there is transit in 100 security control points in a determined moment, in 25 of these there will be an extortion fact¹.

¹ Taking as reference the results of study applied to companies

ANNEXES

Probability of extortion by Region

Variable | **Y:** Region in which an extortion event occurs.

Sampling Space | $\Omega = \{CEN, ORI, OCC, SUR\}$

Where | **CEN:** Central Region
ORI: Oriental Region
OCC: Occidental Region
SUR: South Region

Distribution of Probability

For this study, it is feasible to estimate the conditional probability of region given an extortion fact, it means $P(Y | X=1)$ or $P(Y | E)$. The conditional distribution of the region given an extortion fact comes defined as follows².

$$P(Y|E) = 0.051 I_{\{CEN\}}^{(y)} + 0.3166 I_{\{ORI\}}^{(y)} + 0.475 I_{\{OCC\}}^{(y)} + 0.1584 I_{\{SUR\}}^{(y)}$$

Where | $I_{\{A\}}^{(y)}$ is the indicator function, this is defined as:

$$I_{\{A\}}^{(y)} = \begin{cases} 1, & y \in A \\ 0, & y \notin A \end{cases}$$

Probability of Extortion by Security Corp

Variable | **Z:** Security Corp from which an extortion event generates.

Sampling Space | $\Omega = \{GNB, PNB, PM, PE\}$

Where | **GNB:** National Bolivarian Guard
PNB: National Bolivarian Police
PM: Municipal Police
PE: State Police

2 According to results of study applied to companies: Center of the country (5.0% probability). Orient (31.7%), Occident (47.5%) and South (15.8%).

ANNEXES

Distribution of Probability

For this study, it is feasible to estimate the conditional probability of security corp given an extortion fact, it means, $P(Z | X=1)$ or $P(Z | E)$. However, the independence between the event by region and the security corp is assumed, given the limitations on the applied study. The conditional distribution of the security corp given a fact of extortion, comes defined as follows³:

$$P(Z|E) = 0.3125I_{\{GNB,PNB\}}^{(z)} + 0.1875I_{\{PM,PE\}}^{(z)}$$

Where $I_{\{A\}}^{(y)}$ is the indicator function, it is defined as:

Probability by Security Control Point in a specific Corp and specific State

Variable | **W:** Control point in which an extortion event occurs.

Distribution of Probability

For this study, it is necessary to estimate the conditional probability of a specific control point, given a fact of extortion in a region and from a specific security corp, it means, $P(W | E, Y, Z)$. This probability is going to be estimated under a finite probability and equiprobable space in following way:

$$P(W = w) = \frac{1}{N}$$

Where N is the number of control points in such state and belonging to the same security corp where the extortion fact is given.

1. Results: Final Probability of Extortion

The probability of extortion in a specific control point, considering all information that can be extracted from the survey made, is formulated as:

$$P(E \cap Y \cap Z \cap W)$$

Considering the nomenclature of variables previously mentioned:

E: Occurrence of an extortion event.

Y: Region in which an extortion event is given.

Z: Security Corp from which an extortion event is given.

W: Control point in which an extortion event is given.

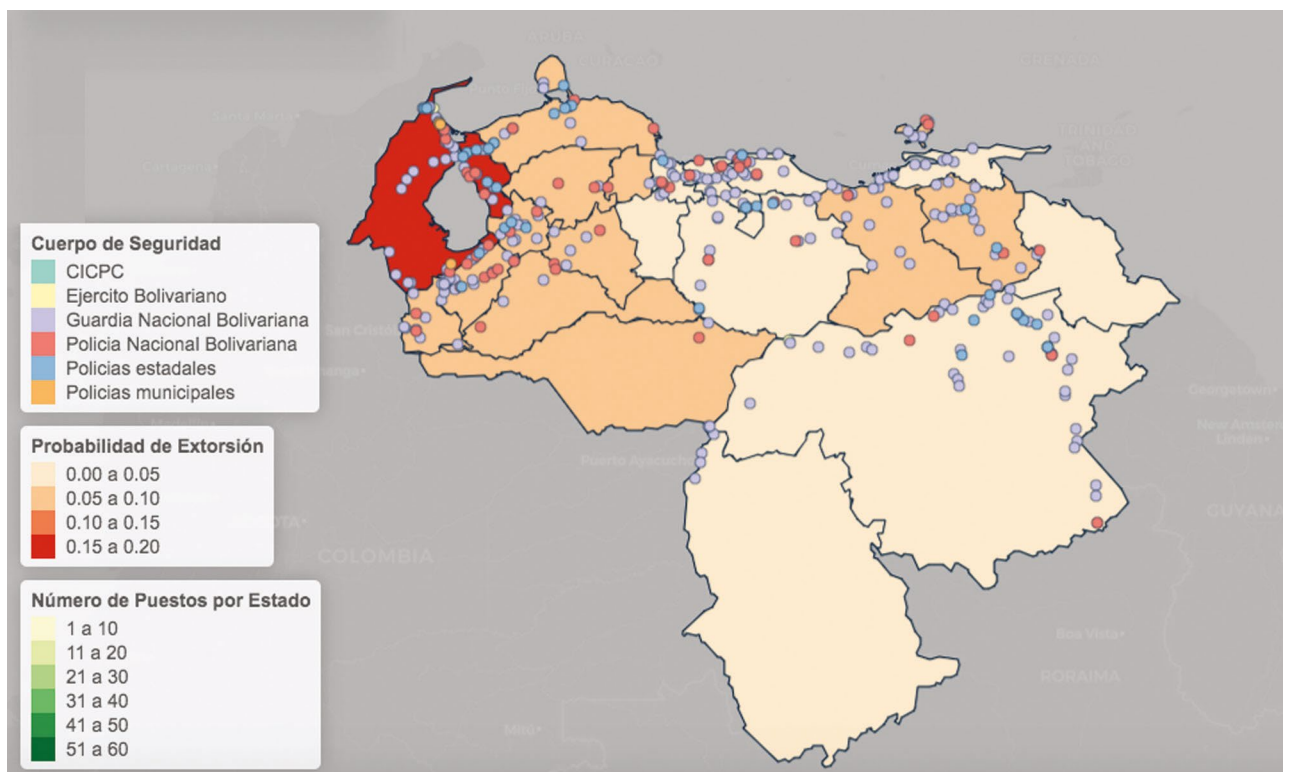
3 Information obtained from a study applied to 10 companies from Distribution and Transport sector with reach of more than 70.000 direct points at national level.

ANNEXES

By the rule of multiplication in probability theory, it is given that:

$$P(E \cap Y \cap Z \cap W) = P(E) \times P(Y|E) \times P(Z|E \cap Y) \times P(W|E \cap Y \cap Z)$$

This allows to estimate extortion and occurrence of events probabilities in each one of the 322 control points gathered, as it can be observed in the Model of Extortion Probability in Land Ways.



ANNEXES

COMPANIES, PLANTS AND COMPLEXES IDENTIFIED IN OMA

Names of companies	Description	Year of creation	RIF	Addresses	Directives
Corporación Venezolana de Minería (CVM)	State company in charge of performing primary gold exploration and exploitation activities and other strategic minerals. Represents the Venezuelan state in most strategic alliances.	2012	J402203969	The main address is in Caracas, but it has presence in different states of the country, especially in Bolívar state	Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano President
Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela C.A. (Minerven)	State company in charge of developing national mining industry, doing labors of exploration and exploitation, processing and industrialization of gold.	02/04/1970	J006985970	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	William Miguel Serantes Pinto President
Empresa Mixta Sociedad Anónima Minería Binacional Turquía Venezuela (Mibiturven)	Mixed company formed by Minerven, in representation of the Venezuelan State and the Turkish company Marilyns Proje Yatirim, S.A, linked to businessman Alex Saab, who is incarcerated in USA, accused of corruption.	08/31/2018	G200128925	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	David Alberto Pedreáñez Sánchez President
Complejo Industrial Domingo Sifontes	Complex integrated by six gold processing plants, located in El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	05/09/2018	/	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	Eduardo José Rivas President
Inversiones y Representaciones Glenduard C.A.	Private company in strategic alliance with Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Glenduard. It takes part of Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes.	02/28/2016	J407247182	The main address is Paseo Caroní, Edif. P.A Centro, floor 2, office 217, sector Unare II, Ciudad Guayana, Bolívar state. The lixiviation plant is in Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	Eduardo José Rivas Shareholder 90% Eukarys del Valle Lazar Bernay Shareholder 10%
Corporación Petroglobal, C.A.	Private company in strategic alliance with Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Petroglobal. It takes part of Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes. One of their shareholders, Mario Bonilla, is accused in a corruption case investigated by USA	Jan-16	J408575353	The main address is Av. Paseo Caroní. Centro comercial El Paseo, Local 2-16, Unare I, Puerto Ordaz, Bolívar state. The lixiviation plant is in Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	Mario Enrique Bonilla Vallera Shareholder Raúl Eduardo Saavedra Leterni Shareholder

Names of companies	Description	Year of creation	RIF	Addresses	Directives
Invertrade	Private company that is part of the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes. It is importer of Cyanide and mercury, according to investigations from Armando Info	Jan-16	J407381148	The main address is in Av. Guayana, torre Bell, floor 7, office 7H Puerto Ordaz, Caroní municipality, Bolívar state. It takes part of Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	Carlos Alberto Ávila Mendoza Shareholder Ricardo Alfonso Brito Arasme Shareholder
Mipre	Private company that is part of the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes	Jan-17	J409137554	The main address is Av. Paseo Caroní, Unare II, Galpon S/N, Caroní municipality, Ciudad Guayana, Bolívar state. It takes part of Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	David Isaac Rosales Padrón Shareholder Carlos José Flores Shareholder
Inversiones Oriente	Private company that is part of the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes	S/I	S/I	Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, Industrial zone Caratal. El Callao, El Callao municipality	S/I
Inversiones RPL	Private company that is part of the Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes	S/I	S/I	Industrial Complex Domingo Sifontes, Industrial zone Caratal. El Callao, El Callao municipality	S/I
Complejo Industrial Manuel Carlos Piar	Complex integrated by nine gold processing plants, located in Matanzas, Caroní municipality, Bolívar state	11/20/2019	/	Matanzas, Caroní municipality, Bolívar state	Eduardo José Rivas President
Corporación Guayanaoro, C.A.	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Guayana Oro. One of its shareholders, Leonardo Santilli, was accused of corruption in USA and murdered in Venezuela in 2020.	09/14/2016	J408491419	Av. Principal, local s/n, Araguaney village, Carrizalito farmer's settlement, Carrizal El Callao sector, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	Leonardo Santilli García Shareholder 50% Jean Carlos Ranauro Guzman Shareholder 50%
Servicios Mineros Grupo C6 C.A.	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Grupo C6	S/I	J408627264	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	Juan José Coraspe Jiménez Legal Representative
Inversiones La Lucha 2016, C.A.	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide La Lucha	S/I	J407675524	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	Eliros José Peraza Yory Legal Representative

Names of companies	Description	Year of creation	RIF	Addresses	Directives
Inversora Sarrapia, Técnicas y Procesos, C.A	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Sarrapia	10/05/2016	J408623161	National road to Guasipati, Km 01. Upata, Piar municipality, Bolívar state	Gerardo José Quiroz Valbuena Shareholder 48,5%
					Renny Ildemar Fernández Zapata Shareholder 19,5%
					Ramón Isidro Hennig Solano Shareholder 29%
					Evelio Ramón Vásquez Sánchez Accionista 3%
Inversiones El Guayare C. A.	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Guayare	2009	J298527013	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	Juan José Coraspe Jiménez President Rafael Antonio Coraspe Carvajal Cofounder Gustavo Andrés Ochoa Vice-president Francisco Suárez Gerente general
Refimina, C.A	Private company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of the Hydro metallurgic Plant for lixiviation with cyanide Refimina	08/22/2016	J408354233	Road 10, Km 0, national road to Tumeremo – El Dorado, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state	Gustavo Andrés Ochoa Shareholder 60% Florentino Maldonado Mendoza Shareholder 40%
Goldtex de Venezuela C.A	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc, among its directives there are Eduing Flores Zuloaga and Gran Ritchie Silva, accused in 2011 of crimes of agreement of public official with contractor, for allegedly having contracted with the company Orinoco Iron, obviating bidding processes and internal mechanisms. The case was dismissed.	05/17/1995	J302659892	Guasipati Km. 3, El Porvenir sector, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state.	Nellys Josefina Ramírez Shareholder 100% Gran Alexander Ritchie Silva Former Shareholder 70% Eduing Flores Zuloaga Former Shareholder 30%"
Inversiones Intac, C.A	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc, among its directives there are Yacsury Alexandra Silva Cardona and Misael Smith Silva Cardona, who also figure in directive board of several firms in Grupo JHS, a company conglomerate led by his brother Jorge Alfredo Silva Cardona, who has been linked with Diosdado Cabello	02/05/2015	J405372168	The main address is Av. Los Apamates, Qta. BP N°4-48, Urb. del Este, Barquisimeto, Lara state. It has a Branch in El Callao	Jackson Javier Soto Guardia Shareholder 100% Yacsury Alexandra Silva Cardona Former Shareholder 50% Misael Smith Silva Cardona Former Shareholder 50%
Corporación Berakah C.A.	Company in strategic alliance for installation of gold processing plant Berakah	02/07/2017	J409225496	Centro comercial La Pradera Nivel Piso 1 Local L-28 Calle Ricaurte Casco Central sector, Piar Upata municipality, Bolívar state	Julio Ernesto Mendoza Delgado Shareholder 90% Katerin Yuliet Ribeiro Quintero Shareholder 10%

Names of companies	Description	Year of creation	RIF	Addresses	Directives
Inversiones Agrominera El Llanero	Private company in strategic alliance for installation of plant Inversiones Agrominera El Llanero	09/22/2017	J410400102	The main address is Av. Urdaneta, Casa Nro S/N Centro Guasipati Sector, Bolívar state. The plant is in Mina Increíble 12, Las Vainitas sector, near Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state	Nidia Soraya Martínez Benavides Shareholder 50% Héctor Ferney Navarro Mojica Shareholder 50%
Servicios, Construcciones y Mantenimiento Rita, C.A.	Company in strategic alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company for installation of Planta Rita, C.A.	03/14/2003	J309760726	The main address is El Palomar sector, Avenida principal. Quinta Los Castillos. San José de Guanipa. El Tigrito. Anzoátegui state. It has a Branch in El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state	Ernesto Antonio Tamoy Hernández President Johanna Zoilimar Reyes Belo Vice-President Freddy Alberto Tamoy Shareholder 37,5% Eglys Yelina Mesa de Arismendi Shareholder 37,5% José Miguel Vivas Guanipa Shareholder 25%
Inversiones Canlara C.A.	Company linked to Planta Rita, C.A., the strategic alliance between the Venezuelan Mining Company and Servicios, Construcciones y Mantenimiento Rita, C.A	12/03/2004	J312455594	National road to Parare, casa s/n diagonal a la Urb Andrés Eloy Blanco Maturín - Monagas state	Julio César Brito Carvajal Shareholder 80% José Gregorio Brito Salazar Shareholder 20%
Dempica	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Inversiones LT Import	Central of mining supplies, in alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company	S/I	J412472321	Upata, Piar municipality, Bolívar state	Ricardo Martin Lisi Salazar Legal Representative
Corporación La Pedrosa C.A.	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	J404512586	It is present in km 82 of Road 10. Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state	Roberto Luis Bustamante Legal Representative
JC Eminca	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
La Increíble	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Agrominera Corminca	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc. It exhibits the logos of Venezuelan Mining Company and the Ministry for Penitentiary Services	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Aurumin	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Corporación Nara	Central of mining supplies, in alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company	S/I	S/I	Las Claritas, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Corporación Estrellas del Oro	Central of mining supplies, in alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I

Names of companies	Description	Year of creation	RIF	Addresses	Directives
Complejo de producción de Arenas Santa Bárbara	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Almaz Group	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	Nacupay Sector. El Callao, El Callao municipality	S/I
GoldCorp C.A.	Central of mining supplies, in alliance with the Venezuelan Mining Company	S/I	S/I	Las Claritas, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Global Minería 1515, C.A	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
Asociación Civil Micro empresa "DH"	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	J405908254	El Callao, El Callao Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I
LC Metal Group	Company present in the Orinoco Mining Arc	S/I	S/I	Tumeremo, Sifontes Municipality, Bolívar state	S/I

Source: Ministry of Ecologic Mining, National Register of Contractors, Official Gazettes, Runrunes and Armando.info

ANNEXES

LIST OF PERSONS IN CHARGE OF ENTITIES WITH COMPETENCE IN MINING SINCE 2016 TILL 2022

Entity involved	Position	Name	Period	O.G.
Sectorial Vice-Presidency of Economy and Finances	Vice-president	Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah	06/14/2018- Current	O.G. 41.419
Sectorial Vice-Presidency of Economy and Finances	Vice-president in charge	Wilmar Castro Soteldo	26/10/2017 - 06/14/2018	O.G. 41.265
Sectorial Vice-Presidency of Economy and Finances	Vice-president	Ramón Augusto Lobo Moreno	01/04/2017 - 10/26/2017	O.G. 41.067
Sectorial Vice-Presidency of Economy and Finances	Vice-president	Carlos Rafael Faría Tortosa	08/05/2016 - 01/04/2017	O.G. E 6.249
Sectorial Vice-Presidency of Economy and Finances	Vice-president	Miguel Ángel Pérez Abad	02/15/2016 - 08/05/2016	O.G. 40.848
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	William Miguel Serantes Pinto	19/08/2021 - Current	O.G. E 6.638
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	Magaly Henríquez González	09/03/2020 - 08/19/2021	O.G. 41.957
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	Gilberto Amilcar Pinto Blanco	08/12/2019 - 09/03/2020	O.G. 41.692
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	Víctor Hugo Cano Pacheco	08/02/2017 - 08/12/2019	O.G. 41.205
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	Jorge Alberto Montserrat Arreaza	02/19/2017 - 08/02/2017	O.G. E 6.286
Ministry of Ecologic Mining Development (Mindeminec)	Minister	Roberto Ignacio Mirabal Acosta	06/09/2016 - 02/19/2017	O.G. 40.922
Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM)	President	Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano	06/21/2019- Current	O.G. 41.660
Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM)	President	Víctor Hugo Cano Pacheco	08/28/2017 - 06/21/2019	O.G. 41.223
Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM)	President	Jorge Alberto Montserrat Arreaza	03/15/2017 - 08/28/2017	O.G. 41.114
Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM)	President	José Salamat Khan Fernández	04/09/2015 - 03/15/2017	O.G. 40.636
General Mining Company (Minerven)	Presidente	William Miguel Serantes Pinto	10/07/2021 - Current	O.G. 42.229
General Mining Company (Minerven)	President	David Alberto Pedrañez Sánchez	07/22/2019 - 10/07/2021	O.G. 41.679
General Mining Company (Minerven)	President	Adrián Antonio Perdomo Mata	07/20/2018 - 07/22/2019	O.G. 41.444

Entity involved	Position	Name	Period	O.G.
General Mining Company (Minerven)	President	Nino Jesús Ángulo Vargas	10/09/2017 - 07/20/2018	O.G. 41.253
General Mining Company (Minerven)	President	Javier Alexis Sarmiento Márquez	05/08/2017 - 10/07/2017	O.G. 41.145
General Mining Company (Minerven)	President	Marco Antonio Castro Pacheco	03/31/2015 - 05/08/2017	O.G. 40.631
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Richard Alexis Sánchez Arias	06/10/2021 - Current	O.G. 42.146
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Alfonso Antonio de Caro Mele	05/04/2020 - 06/10/2021	O.G. 41.694
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Alfonso Antonio de Caro Mele	08/14/2019 - 05/04/2020	O.G. 41.694
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Andreína Marlene Oliveros Arciniegas	11/19/2018 - 08/14/2019	O.G. 41.527
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Higinio Alfredo Benítez Calzadilla	03/15/2017 - 11/19/2018	O.G. 41.114
National Service of Fiscalization and Mining Inspection (Senafim)	Manager	Avilio Antonio Lavarca Bracho	08/26/2016 - 03/15/2017	O.G. 40.975
National Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeomin)	President	César Alejandro Basanta	10/22/2020 - Current	O.G. 41.991
National Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeomin)	President	Alejandro Miguel Martínez Herrera	05/13/2020 - 10/22/2020	O.G. 41.878
National Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeomin)	President	Milagros del Rosario Domínguez Padilla	08/28/2017 - 05/13/2020	O.G. 41.223
National Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeomin)	President	Víctor Hugo Cano Pacheco	05/08/2017 - 08/28/2017	O.G. 41.145
Foundation Misión Piar	President	Reiber Alexander Mendoza Pérez	10/22/2020 - Current	O.G. 41.991
Foundation Misión Piar	President	Keyvins Eleazar Tablante Yáñez	09/22/2020 - 10/22/2020	O.G. 41.970
Foundation Misión Piar	President	José Francisco Ortiz de la Cruz	03/10/2017 - 09/22/2020	O.G. 41.111
Foundation Misión Piar	President	Jesús Antonio Mujica Pérez	11/10/2016 - 03/10/2017	O.G. 41.028
Central Bank of Venezuela	President	Calixto José Ortega Sánchez	06/19/2018 Current	O.G. 41.422
Central Bank of Venezuela	President	Ramón Augusto Lobo Moreno	10/26/2017 - 06/19/2018	O.G. 41.265
Central Bank of Venezuela	President	José Ricardo Sanguino Cárdenas	01/20/2017 - 10/26/2017	O.G. 41.080
Central Bank of Venezuela	President	Nelson José Merentes	01/21/2014 - 01/20/2017	O.G. 40.338

Source: Official Gazettes

ANNEXES

LIST OF GOVERNORS AND MAJORS OF BOLÍVAR STATE SINCE CREATION OF OMA TILL 2022

Entity involved	Position	Name	Period
Bolívar state governorship	Governor	Ángel Bautista Marcano Castillo	2021-2025
Bolívar state governorship	Governor	Justo José Noguera Pietri	2017 - 2021
Bolívar state governorship	Governor	Francisco José Rangel Gómez	2004 - 2017
Gran Sabana Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	José Manuel De Jesús Vallez	2021-2025
Gran Sabana Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Emilio González*	2017 - 2021
Gran Sabana Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	José Manuel De Jesús Vallez	2013 - 2017
Heres Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Sergio De Jesús Hernández	2021-2025
Heres Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Sergio De Jesús Hernández	2017 - 2021
Heres Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Sergio De Jesús Hernández	2013 - 2017
Caroní Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Tito Oviedo	2021-2025
Caroní Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Tito Oviedo	2017 - 2021
Caroní Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	José Ramón López	2013 - 2017
Padre Pedro Chien Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Benny Ramos	2021-2025
Padre Pedro Chien Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Sol Rubinetti	2017 - 2021
Padre Pedro Chien Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Sol Rubinetti	2013 - 2017
Roscio Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Wuihelm David Torrellas Martínez	2021-2025
Roscio Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	José Alejandro Martínez	2017 - 2021
Roscio Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	José Alejandro Martínez	2013 - 2017
Sifontes Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Juan Vicente Rojas Medina	2021-2025
Sifontes Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Juan Vicente Rojas Medina	2017 - 2021
Sifontes Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Carlos Chancellor	2013 - 2017
El Callao Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Jesús Coromoto Lugo Larrial	2021-2025
El Callao Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Albert Hurtado	2017 - 2021
El Callao Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Jesús Coromoto Lugo Larrial	2013 - 2017
Piar Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Yulibeth Josefina García González	2021-2025
Piar Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Yulibeth Josefina García González	2017 - 2021

Ente Involucrado	Cargo	Nombre	Período
Piar Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Gregorio Martínez	2013 - 2017
Cedeño Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Milthon José Tovar Guape	2021-2025
Cedeño Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Rafael Gutiérrez	2017 - 2021
Cedeño Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Igor Falcón	2013 - 2017
Angostura Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Yorgi Devis Arciniega	2021-2025
Angostura Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Jhean Pablo Lira	2017 - 2021
Angostura Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Yusleiby Ramírez	2013 - 2017
Sucre Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Luis Alberto Hernández Carpio	2021-2025
Sucre Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Soraida Valor	2017 - 2021
Sucre Mayor's Municipality	Mayor	Amelia Falcón	2013 - 2017

* Mayor Emilio González did not finish his period. He had to get out of the country after the attempted entry of humanitarian aid in February 2019 and later the Municipal Chamber declared his absolute absence

Source: National Electoral Council

ANNEXES

LIST OF DEFENSE CORPS LEADERS PRESENT IN OMA ZONE SINCE 2016 TILL 2022

Entity involved	Position	Name	Period	O.G.
Ministry of Defense	Minister	Vladimir Padrino López	10/24/2014 - Current	O.G. 40.526
Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) Guayana	Commander	Alfredo Parra Yarza	07/12/2021 - Current	S/I
Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) Guayana	Commander	William Miguel Serantes Pinto	07/15/2019 - 07/12/2021	S/I
Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) Guayana	Commander	Jesús Mantilla Oliveros	06/25/2017 - 07/15/2019	O.G. E 6.311
Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) Guayana	Commander	Carlos Augusto Leal Tellería	07/12/2016 - 06/25/2017	O.G. 40.942
Strategic Region of Integral Defense (REDI) Guayana	Commander	Antonio José Benavides Torres	01/12/2016 - 07/12/2016	O.G. 40.826
Operative Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI) Bolívar	Commander	Julmer Rafael Ochoa Romero	07/15/2021 - Current	S/I
Operative Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI) Bolívar	Commander	Humberto Enrique Núñez Hernández	07/16/2019 - 07/15/2021	O.G. 41.675
Operative Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI) Bolívar	Commander	Alberto Mirtiliano Bermúdez Valderrey	07/18/2017 - 07/16/2019	O.G. 41.195
Operative Zone of Integral Defense (ZODI) Bolívar	Commander	Jesús Mantilla Oliveros	06/02/2015 - 07/18/2017	O.G. 40.673

Sources: Official Gazettes and reports of communications media

ANNEXES

VIOLENT EVENTS REGISTERED IN THE MINING CONTEXT BETWEEN MARCH 2016 AND MARCH 2022

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
03/04/2016	An alleged execution by alias "el Topo" left at least 24 individuals disappeared. According to the Public Ministry, 17 corpses were found, most buried in common graves	17	Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
04/04/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left one person dead.	1	Surroundings to Road 10, section El Callao-Tumeremo, in front of Tomi mine, Bolívar state
04/06/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two persons hounded.	0	Finlandia sector, near Yin-Yang mine, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
04/07/2016	A 30 year old miner was allegedly murdered by criminal bands that control gold reservoirs in Las Claritas.	1	Relave Blanco mining area, Las Claritas, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
04/08/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left one person dead.	1	Guariche mine, Bolívar state
04/08/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left one person dead.	1	Talavera sector, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
04/16/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two individuals dead.	2	Toro Parao mine, El Manteco, Piar municipality, Bolívar state
05/07/2016	An alleged confrontation between police and members of criminal bands left a balance of three people dead.	3	Santa Rita mine, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
06/09/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two individuals dead.	2	Tomi mine, Road 10 to El Callao, Bolívar state
06/11/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left one person dead.	1	Las Piedritas sector, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
08/22/2016	A procedure of People's Liberation Operation (OLP) allegedly left three people dead.	3	La Leona mine, way that communicates with Supamo river
09/15/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two people dead.	3	Tasca La Cabaña, located in Santa Teresa street, El Manteco, Piar municipality, Bolívar state
10/03/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two people dead.	2	El Miamo mine, near San Francisco farm, Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state
10/05/2016	According to deputy to the National Assembly, Americo de Grazia, 11 individuals died by a People's Liberation Operation in one mine. The Public Ministry reported less victims.	Between 3 and 11	Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
12/04/2016	A People's Liberation Operation procedure allegedly left two people dead.	2	Tomi mine, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
12/19/2016	An alleged confrontation between bands left two individuals dead.	2	Bella Nueva mine, near Tomi mine, located in El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
01/31/2017	An alleged confrontation between members of the Venezuelan Army and criminal bands of El Callao left at least three persons dead.	3	El Perú mine, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
03/16/2017	The official version refers that during a patrol of one mixed commission in the main avenue of the sector they saw a group of individuals exchanging objects and weapons.	1	Kilometer 35, Road 10 to El Dorado, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
08/15/2017	An alleged operation with GNB, Army and Cicpc in El Callao left seven persons dead. According to the Operation Zone of Strategic Defense, the victims were next to "an irregular group" of approximately 20 people armed.	7	Las Lagunitas, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
09/09/2017	An alleged operation of Army and Cicpc left 10 people dead in El Manteco.	10	El Manteco, Piar municipality, Bolívar state
09/10/2017	An alleged incursion of the Army in El Triunfo sector, in Tumeremo left 11 persons dead.	11	El Triunfo, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
09/13/2017	An alleged confrontation between Bolívar state police officers and members of criminal bands left three individuals dead.	3	Las Malvinas sector, in Upata
09/13/2017	An alleged confrontation between Bolívar state police officers and members of criminal bands left two individuals dead.	2	Villa Canaima sector, Upata
11/15/2017	Alleged members of the criminal band of Alias "El Chingo" would have ambushed the Fourth Company of National Guard 624 Detachment in El Callao. In the confrontation died 9 civilians and an officer turned out injured.	9	Valle Verde, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
02/10/2018	An incursion of Brigade 51 of Army Infantry to the mine Cicpra in Guasipaty left 18 civilians dead. The center of Human Rights of Andrés Bello Catholic University assured that it was about an extrajudicial execution because some victims received bullet impacts on the head.	18	Cicpra, Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state
Jan-18	Alleged member of "el Negro Fabio" band hit, dismembered and disappeared Óscar Eliézer Meya Lambos, 36 years old, from Pemón, Taurepan and Arekuna indigenous community	1	El Dorado, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
03/28/2018	An alleged confrontation between bands left two persons dead.	2	Km 23 and 27 of Road 10 at the level of El Dorado, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
05/18/2018	An alleged confrontation between criminal bands which were fighting over territories would have left five individuals dead.	5	El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
06/05/2018	At least five indigenous from Pemón community were murdered in San Luis de Morichal, allegedly by armed groups.	5	San Luis de Morichal, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
08/23/2018	Alleged confrontation between criminal bands over mining territories. Two representatives of Jivi indigenous community were murdered together with other four men who were beheaded, belonging to "labor unions".	6	El Silencio, Maripa, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
08/31/2018	An alleged confrontation between the band of alias "El Coporo" and guerrilla groups left one individual dead.	1	Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
09/18/2018	Confrontation with Cicpc left one person dead.	1	Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
10/16/2018	Seven people died in alleged confrontations in Los Candados, Sifontes municipality. Witnesses assure that it was about one ambush of guerrilla groups, official versions point to confrontations between criminal groups.	7	Los Candados, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
10/27/2018	Alleged confrontation between the Army and GNB with the band of José Zurita Arévalo, alias El Coporo.	7	La Caratica, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
12/08/2018	Incursion of the General Direction of Counterintelligence left one Pemón dead and two hounded. According to the ex-mayor Emilio González, the attack had as aim to militarize La Gran Sabana and create distress among the indigenous population.	1	Canaima, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
01/13/2019	Criminal mutilated parts of the body of a young man in El Callao mine.	0	Yin Yang mine, El Callao municipality
01/14/2019	The Army executed eight individuals during an operation in Yin Yang mine of El Callao.	8	Yin Yang mine, El Callao municipality

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
02/22/2019	Repression from the Army to the Kumarakapay community, which supported the enter humanitarian help promoted by Juan Guaidó and international community.	7	Kumarakapay, Santa Elena de Uairén, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
03/01/2019	An alleged confrontation between the National Guard, the Army and an armed group left at least five individuals dead.	5	El Pariche, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
05/23/2019	Neighbors found the head of a man in Bolívar square of El Callao.	1	El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
08/26/2019	Hunter Aguinalde was murdered, he was 20 years old and worked as miner in Tumeremo. Relatives accused the chief of Tarabay fort, Army commander Ernesto Solís, of disappearance of 400 people since 2017.	1	Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality.
10/26/2019	The head of a man was found in a sack that was thrown to the central square of El Callao.	1	El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
11/18/2019	Cicpc killed a member of the band of alias Totó and alias Zacarías. He was identified as Gabriel José Vallén Rivas.	1	Caratal Sector, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
12/24/2019	The murder of two men in a El Callao mine. Their heads were found near a school in town.	2	El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
03/01/2019	Alleged confrontation between GNB and the Army with an armed group.	5	El Pariche, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
11/22/2019	Armed groups attacked individuals that were in front of a business in Ikabarú community. Among the deceased was a sergeant of National Guard and Pemón indigenous.	6	Ikabarú, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
12/22/2019	In El Callao, Rosalba "Mara" Valdez was murdered of several shots, she was ex-councilor and militant of Primero Justicia. Later the murderer was identified as member of the band of Alias El Totó and Zacarías	1	El Perú, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
01/16/2020	A young man was murdered in a mine of El Manteco, Piar municipality.	1	El Manteco sector, Piar municipality, Bolívar state
03/03/2020	An alleged confrontation between the Motorized Unit of Urban Security Detachment and members of the Band of alias Zacarías would have left one band member dead.	1	Barrio Brisas del Sur, San Félix, Ciudad Guayana, Bolívar state
04/06/2020	Lieutenant colonel Ernesto Solís, commander in Tarabay fort and sergeant Gustavo Flores were murdered allegedly by criminal organizations.	2	Las Tejas sector, in La Caratica street, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
04/18/2020	Miners found a person's trunk on the river.	1	Yuruari river of El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
04/21/2020	Four civilians hounded, among them two minors, was the balance of a shooting occurred in a discotheque in El Dorado mining town.	0	El Dorado, Sifontes municipality
05/08/2020	Carlos Clark, popular culturist, miner and 'calipsero', was murdered. Allegedly, he was executed by the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías, even though citizens from El Callao question this version.	1	Caratal sector, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
05/15/2020	Officers of the Scientific, Criminal and Criminalistic Investigations Corps murdered two individuals, accused of executing the murdering of military officers Ernesto Solís and Gustavo Flores	2	Campo Orinoco street of Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality.
05/26/2020	Alleged confrontation between Army officers and armed groups. In it died a military (lieutenant) and four criminals, members of the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías".	5	Las Anzas, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
05/27/2020	A confrontation between mixed commissions of security. In it died a Dgcim officer and four criminals, members of the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías".	5	Hong Kong, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
06/03/2020	Cicpc killed a member of the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías". He was identified as Eliécer de Jesús Vallenilla Rodríguez.	1	Barrio 25 de Marzo of San Félix
08/04/2020	Special Actions Forces murdered a man accused of participating in the killing of military officers Ernesto Solís and Gustavo Flores.	1	UD-338 Sector of Puerto Ordaz.
08/23/2020	Alleged confrontation between GNB, Dgcim and Cicpc and criminals of the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías". In it died five members of the band.	5	El Perú, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
08/30/2020	Alleged confrontation between GNB and the criminal group led by alias Totó and Zacarías. In it died a military officer (captain) and five members of the band.	6	El Perú, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
11/15/2020	Alleged confrontation between GNB and irregular groups with military suits left four people dead.	4	La Cochineria sector, Angostura municipality, Bolívar state
02/26/2021	Alleged confrontation between mixed commissions of GNB and the General Direction of Military Counterintelligence left one member of the band of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías" dead.	1	Bolívar Military assassinated a member of a mining armed band from El Callao
03/27/2021	Alleged members of a guerrilla group murdered a teacher and her husband in a mine of Caura sector of Sucre Municipality, Bolívar state.	2	El Kino mine, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
03/28/2021	Alleged members of an armed group in El Dorado murdered the cousin of an indigenous captain of Pemón community San Luis de Morichal.	1	San Luis de Morichal, located in Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
03/30/2021	A former policeman named Herney Alirio Ruiz, who was escort of ex-constituentist Wilhem Torrellas, was kidnapped and beheaded. Security organisms attributed this fact to the armed group of alias "Totó" and alias "Zacarías"	1	El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
04/10/2021	Alleged guerrilla groups murdered two members of Jiwi indigenous community.	2	Mines of National Park Cerro Yapacana in Amazonas state.
04/28/2021	Three indigenous from the Jivi community and a creole were murdered in El Silencio mine, Sucre Municipality, Bolívar state, in Wednesday, April 28th. Among the deceased was a general captain of Jivi area, Nelson Martín Pérez Rodríguez, 30 years old. The murdering occurred in Puerto Cabello del Caura town.	4	El Silencio mine, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
06/01/2021	Alleged members of the band El Perú murdered two women in mining sector La Iguana, in El Callao.	2	Mining Sector La Iguana, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
09/02/2021	An alleged confrontation between the Intelligence division of San Felix Regional Police and members of the band of alias "Totó" y alias "Zacarías" left one person dead.	1	Barrio Brisas of El Paraíso, Chirica parish
09/09-14/2021	Confrontation between bands R Organization and the Train of Guayana.	0	Tomi mine, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
09/16/2021	At least five military turned out injured after the explosion of a grenade during an alleged armed confrontation with the band of alias "Totó" y alias "Zacarías"	0	El Perú, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
09/23/2021	GNB rescued 680 small miners that allegedly would have been kidnapped by the mega band the Train of Aragua, in Bolívar state	0	Peramanal, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
09/29/2021	Two human heads were found in El Jobo square, El Callao. The state police affirmed that the person who left the heads was a miner.	2	El Jobo square, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
10/08/2021	Alleged members of the armed group El Perú, ambushed a vehicle of the General Direction of Military Counterintelligence, murdered an inspector and hurt three other officers.	1	Isidora mine, El Perú sector, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
11/22/2021	Authorities reported the confrontation in Agua Fria sector of Sifontes municipality, in which war material from alias "El Run" band was allegedly seized.	0	Agua Fría sector, Tumeremo, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
12/16/2021	A military officer was murdered minutes after he hurt a miner.	1	Mining sector El Tapón de Santa Rita, Guasipati, Roscio municipality, Bolívar state
12/30/2021	A human body was found inside a sack in mining sector El Caratal, El Callao	1	Mining sector El Caratal, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
01/13/2022	An alleged confrontation between members of the General Direction of Military Counterintelligence and the band Perú Revolutionary Front left six people dead.	6	La Iguana Sector, El Callao, El Callao municipality, Bolívar state
01/12-16/2022	Aggression of armed groups against indigenous communities. At least two hounded.	0	Road 10 at the level of Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state

Source: reports of civil society organizations and trustable communications media

ANNEXES

VIOLENT EVENTS AGAINST INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES DUE TO MINING EXPLOITATION BETWEEN MARCH 2016 AND MARCH 2022

Date	Event	Deaths	Location
Jan-18	Alleged members of the band of alias "el Negro Fabio" hit, dismembered and disappeared Óscar Eliézer Meya Lambos, 36 years old, indigenous belonging to pemón taurepán and arekuna community	1	El Dorado, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
06/05/2018	At least five indigenous of Pemón community were murdered in San Luis de Morichal, allegedly by armed groups.	5	San Luis de Morichal, Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
08/23/2018	Alleged confrontation between criminal bands for fight over mining territory caused the death of two community representatives. Other four men were beheaded, they belonged to "labor unions".	6	El Silencio, Maripa, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
12/08/2018	An incursion of the General Direction of Military Counterintelligence left one Pemón dead and two injured. According to the ex-mayor Emilio González, the attack would have had as aim the militarization of La Gran Sabana and create distress among the indigenous population.	1	Canaima, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
02/22/2019	Repression of the Army to the Kumarakapay community, which supported the enter of humanitarian aid promoted by Juan Guaidó and international community.	7	Kumarakapay, Santa Elena de Uairén, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
11/22/2019	Armed groups attacked persons who were in front of an establishment in Ikabarú. Among the deceased was a sergeant of National Guard and Pemón indigenous.	6	Ikabarú, Gran Sabana municipality, Bolívar state
03/28/2021	Alleged members of an armed group of El Dorado murdered Luis Mario Meya Márquez, cousin of indigenous captain of San Luis de Morichal Pemón community.	1	San Luis de Morichal, located in Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state
04/10/2021	Alleged guerrilla groups murdered two members of Jiwi indigenous community.	2	Mines of National Park Cerro Yapacana in Amazonas state.
04/28/2021	Three indigenous from the Jivi community and a creole were murdered in El Silencio mine, Sucre Municipality, Bolívar state, in Wednesday, April 28th. Among the deceased was a general captain of Jivi area, Nelson Martín Pérez Rodríguez, 30 years old. The murdering occurred in Puerto Cabello del Caura town.	4	El Silencio mine, Sucre municipality, Bolívar state
01/12-16/2022	Aggression of armed groups against indigenous communities. At least two hounded.	0	Road 10 at the level of Sifontes municipality, Bolívar state

Source: reports of civil society organizations and trustable communications media



TransparenciaVenezuela



@NoMasGuiso



nomasguiso



Transparencia Venezuela



TransparenciaVenezuela