

Venezuela's Corrupt Officials Key to Human Trafficking Networks

by *Venezuela Investigative Unit*

8 Aug 2023



The recent arrest of a military officer involved in a human trafficking ring in Venezuela exposes the oft-ignored and covert participation of security agents in this criminal economy.

A sergeant of the Bolivarian National Guard (Guardia Nacional Bolivariana – GNB) was arrested on August 1 for transporting three teenage girls and one woman from Miranda, a state in the center of the country, to the border state of Táchira. From there, they would have been taken to Peru as part of a prostitution network, **reported** the Attorney General's Office.

The soldier was **charged** with the crime of trafficking in women, girls, and adolescents. He is one of the few officers who have been arrested and charged for being part of a trafficking network.

SEE ALSO: [Venezuela Security Policy: The Criminal Exploitation of the Migrant Crisis](#)

In December 2022, a lieutenant from the GNB was arrested and prosecuted for human trafficking in the state of Yaracuy after allegedly recruiting three teenagers, **reported** Últimas Noticias.

In visits to Venezuela's border regions, InSight Crime has collected multiple testimonies that highlight the role security officials play in allowing trafficked victims to leave the country unhindered. However, the high level of impunity at the institutional level prevent these cases from being recorded in the media.

In the last three years, the number of victims of human trafficking has grown exponentially in the country. According to a **report** by Mulier Venezuela, an NGO dedicated to the promotion and defense of women's rights, 1,390 Venezuelan women were rescued from human trafficking networks in 2022, compared to 415 in 2021.

In describing these networks, general coordinator of Mulier Venezuela Estefanía Mendoza said, "The participation of the security forces is key, whether by action or omission."

InSight Crime Analysis

Although the documented cases of Venezuelan government officials charged with human trafficking are ignored by the state and in local media coverage, the complicity of officials in allowing traffickers to transport victims is essential to the success of these networks.

Some government workers who have participated in this crime help move victims to border states, where they are then smuggled through checkpoints manned by security forces, and into neighboring countries.

SEE ALSO: *Human Trafficking Accompanies Illegal Mining in Venezuela's Orinoco*

In 2021, a former judge was arrested in the state of Nueva Esparta for **leading** a sexual exploitation network. The judge relied on his official credentials to get through surveillance points accompanied by adolescent girls.

His success was dependent on officials who looked the other way, allowing victims to pass through internal and **border** checkpoints, often in exchange for money.

A researcher for an organization that monitors trafficking cases in Venezuela told InSight Crime how one teenage girl rescued from a trafficking ring managed to travel from Caracas to San Antonio del Tachira, on the Colombian border, even though she had no documentation.

In addition to Táchira, the coastal states of **Sucre**, **Monagas**, and **Delta Amacuro** have become strategic points for human trafficking of persons due to their proximity to Caribbean islands such as Trinidad and Tobago, a recognized sex trafficking destination.

The potential revenue offered by this criminal economy is appealing to officials who receive low wages. Their salaries are paid in bolivars, a currency that has been devalued by the economic crisis, and cannot compete with the payments in dollars offered by criminal groups.

A member of the NGO Foro Penal, an organization that defends the rights of arbitrarily detained persons, told InSight Crime on condition of anonymity that in Delta Amacuro, officials have increased the number of checkpoints, allegedly to extort those stopped, following an increased flow of adolescents and women from the center of the country bound for Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to the chance to earn extra money, high levels of impunity — evident in how few officials have been implicated in human trafficking — have made the country fertile ground for trafficking networks, according to [Transparencia Venezuela](#).

The participation of police and military officials in human trafficking networks is not limited to Venezuela. Recently in [Colombia](#), two police officers were arrested after being identified as links to a transnational network that sexually exploited young people in France. Cases in other countries such as [Guatemala](#), and [Peru](#) show that this is a regional issue.

© 2024 InSight Crime.

Powered by Newspack