



Organised Crime

and corruption in Venezuela:

A problem of State



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA



June 2020



Transparency Venezuela

Mercedes De Freitas

Executive Director

Mercedes De Freitas

Manuel Sánchez Trujillo

General coordination of the study

Miriam Arevalo

Research Team

Transparency Venezuela

Luis Izquier

Fermín Marmol García

Luis Alberto Buttó

Dorennys Angulo

Collaborators

Mauricio Pernía

Alba Sánchez

Briceida Morales

Jesús Urbina

Regional Coordinators

Transparency Venezuela

María Alejandra Domínguez

Design, computer graphics and layout

Table of content

Introduction: Anomie and Impunity	4
I Anatomy of crime: the 9 major crime rings controlling venezuela	7
II Corruption and crime in the regions: lawless states	30
III Military power, crime and corruption	61
IV Differential impact of corruption and organised crime on women in venezuela	85
V Crime, security agencies and human rights	106
VI A proposal to dismantle organised crime in venezuela	121

Introduction

Anomie and Impunity

Organised crime and corruption in Venezuela have become a state problem that not only keeps Venezuelans in constant danger, but their effects are already impacting a number of Latin American countries, while the United States and several European nations have witnessed how illegal operations of power groups have infiltrated their financial and real estate systems with dirty money stolen from Venezuela's coffers.

A simple explanation for the complex humanitarian emergency facing Venezuela is that the country was subjected for several years to misguided public policies and decisions by authorities, which in most cases right out aimed to steal large amounts of money from the nation's Treasury. It was a Grand Corruption scheme,¹ with systematic measures that impinged on the entire population.

This context was a breeding ground for organised crime, which became stronger with substantial firepower and economic resources, to the point of collaborating—in many cases—with agencies at all levels of authority, including senior officials in the administration. In view of this situation, at the end of this investigation we propose a set of initiatives to combat this evil, which will require forceful and unprecedented actions in Venezuela, such as resorting to the support of international organisations in the search for solutions that have been effective in other countries of the hemisphere, to punish the culprits.

This work encompassed a nationwide vision—as opposed to the 2019 Organised Crime and Corruption study² focused on border issues—which shows the map of criminal organisations, the types of crimes, the regional situation in various states, the role of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), as well as an analysis of the situation of women regarding organised crime and corruption.

The most important findings of this new study can be summarised as follows:

1. The existence of at least 9 major organised crime rings in Venezuela, involving more than 13,000 criminal organisations, some of which have ties to policy makers and public officials.
2. Crimes and acts of corruption boast total impunity.
3. The lack of robust public institutions, the dismantling of some of them, as well as the existence of incentives derived from some public policies such as price controls and fuel subsidies, are a breeding ground for misdeeds, crimes, human rights violations and the theft of public funds.
4. Venezuelan migrants are victims of illegal groups.
5. The implementation of a model called garrison state, “banana republic” style, whose main characteristics include institutionalised violence, colonisation of public administration and the incorporation of members of the Armed Forces into the economic leadership of the country.
6. The differentiating aspect of organised crime and corruption among Venezuelan women

1 <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/actualizacion-patron-de-gran-corrupcion-un-esquema-para-el-desfalco-y-la-violacion-de-ddhh/>

2 Scope study on corruption and other forms of organised crime causing instability and human rights abuses in border areas of Venezuela, Transparencia Venezuela, 2019

In this investigation, the effort was focused on determining the institutional, social and economic aspects of criminal activity in Venezuela and is developed in 6 chapters:

1. Anatomy of crime: the 9 major crime rings controlling Venezuela
2. Corruption and crime in the regions: lawless states.
3. Military power, crime and corruption.
4. Differential impact of corruption and organised crime on women in Venezuela.
5. Crime, security agencies and human rights.
6. A proposal to dismantled organized crime in Venezuela.

The general objective has been to gather and organize relevant information, with the purpose of providing sufficient data and empirical analysis for political leadership, with power to lead the country, can design the strategies and public policies that will defeat and overcome corrupt practices, incentives to corruption and the action of organized crime that, to the detriment of governance and institutional integrity, have had devastating consequences for the lives of Venezuelans with violations to the human rights, destruction of the productive apparatus, of the public services, opportunities to overcome poverty, and that have generated a process of unprecedented degradation that led to the complex humanitarian emergency that they are suffering and still waiting for solutions.

The statements, opinions, and ratings present in all chapters correspond experts, witnesses, victims and affected persons, some of whom have chosen not to disclose their identity.

**Anatomy of crime:
the 9 major crime rings
controlling venezuela**



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

The six-month investigation of our team of experts identified and classified the various types of organised crime organisations into **9 major rings**, with different origins, nature, business, scopes, structures and objectives.

These crime rings coexist in Venezuela at different levels of tension or harmony, alongside the FANB, the national, regional and municipal police forces, as well as other government agencies. **Some control territories and have created micro-states within the country.** Most of these criminal groups materialise the third type of primitivism, i.e. the criminal type, which is characterised by **violence, atrocity, and perversion**, and enjoys the harm it inflicts, to the detriment of the great majority of good and honest citizens.

The 9 crime rings:

1) Large criminal gangs

2) The construction, oil and mining “syndicates”

3) The armed and violent “*colectivos*”

4) The “*pranes*” and their prison organisations

5) Bolivarian Liberation Forces or “*Boliches*”

6) Holding of corruption

7) Drug traffickers

8) FARC, ELN

9) Smaller criminal gangs

1 LARGE CRIMINAL GANGS

Crime has a natural tendency to organise, as this process allows criminals to make larger profits from their criminal actions, makes it easier for them to overpower rivals and gives them a greater ability to confront law enforcement. Therefore, large criminal gangs are proliferating in Venezuelan territory.

Large criminal gangs:

- Organisations with no political ideology, whose only purpose is to obtain economic benefits from their misdeeds.
- Gangs with at least 50–60 members (up to hundreds)
- They control a specific (urban or rural) territory
- They have great firepower (including rifles and grenades)
- Well-defined vertical command structure.

Crimes include

drug trafficking, murder, car hijacks (especially cargo trucks), extortion and kidnapping, among others.

Territory

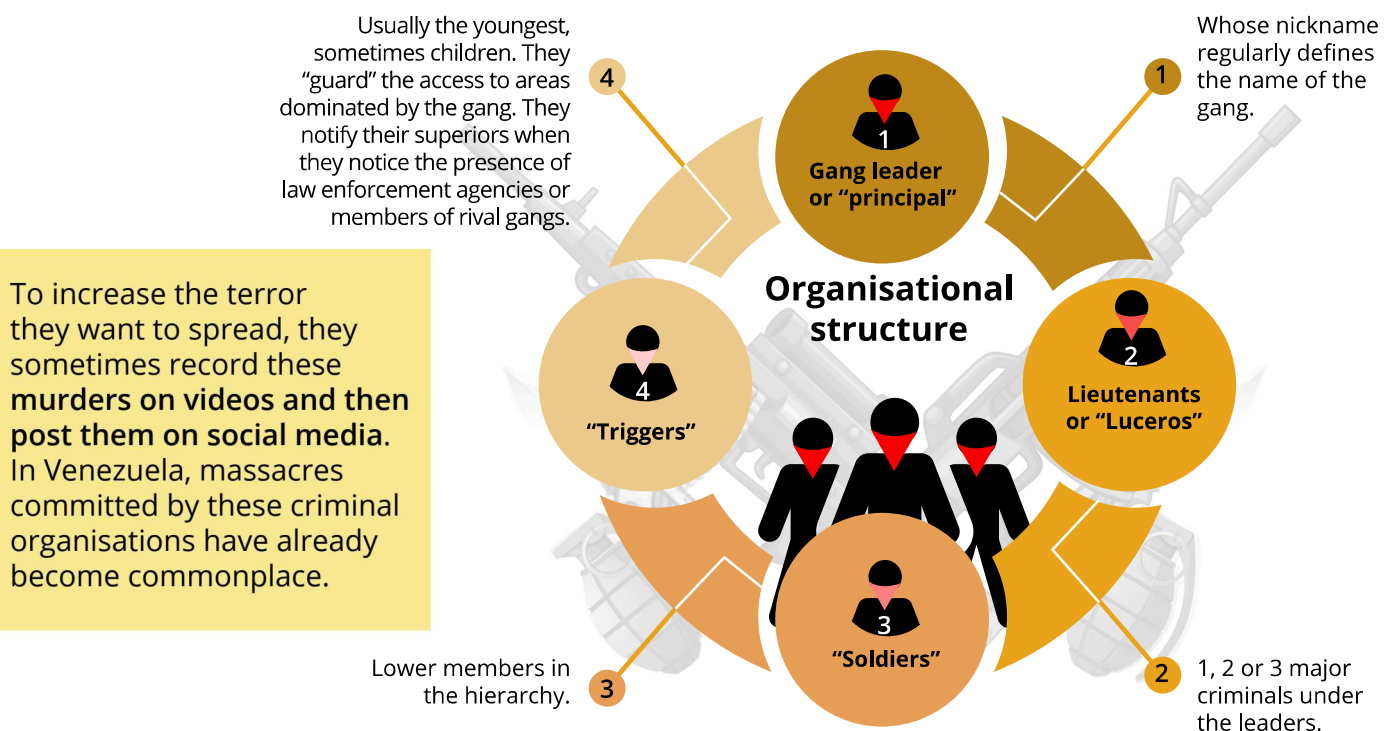
Many operate in Caracas (in neighbourhoods such as Cota 905, El Valle, Coche and Petare, among others). They are also active in other urban areas in different cities of the country and in towns or villages.

Number of large gangs

By 2017, there were 19 large gangs in Venezuela.³ Today that number has increased.

Atrocious murders

Like Mexican drug cartels, the murders committed by members of these large gangs against their rivals are often atrocious, as a way to send messages to other criminals trying to challenge their power.



³ 2017. Mayorca, J. "Megabandas, una aproximación a la insurgencia criminal venezolana, del Observatorio de Delito Organizado".

Composition of a large gang

Organisational structure:

- Gang leader or “principal”: whose nickname regularly defines the name of the gang.
- Lieutenants or “*Luceros*”: 1, 2 or 3 major criminals under the leaders.
- “Soldiers”: lower members in the hierarchy.
- “Triggers”: usually the youngest, sometimes children. They “guard” the access to areas dominated by the gang. They notify their superiors when they notice the presence of law enforcement agencies or members of rival gangs.

Factors that favoured their growth

The growth of these large gangs in the country was enabled by different circumstances, but the so-called “**peace zones**” decreed by Nicolás Maduro’s regime in 2013 were undoubtedly a determining factor, as it gave them recognition, an **official recognition** of sorts, while providing them with a territory **with no police presence**, which made it easier to consolidate their criminal activities.

Area of Influence

The relevance of the leaders of these gangs in the communities they control is so entrenched, that sometimes they serve as a sort mediators or “justices of the peace,” and have the last word in the disputes they resolve. At other times, they regulate activities in the sector, deciding, for example, who can or cannot throw a party, or the location of a street food stand, and even who should be evicted from a property because of a family or commercial dispute.

Large gangs and communities

There is a growing concern about the **social acceptance that many of these large gangs** can achieve in the territories they dominate. There are several determining factors:

1. The “principals” of these gangs regularly **do not accept any thug in the area committing petty crimes against people in the community**, as the “business” of the large gang is different. Violation of this rule would result in severe punishment.
2. The large gangs **defend the territories that they dominate and fight other gangs that trespass to commit crimes in these sectors**.
3. They can even distribute part of the **loot among the community**, for example, the load of a hijacked food cargo truck. This type of action, which takes place in the total absence of law enforcement, often gains them the support of part of the people. This is undoubtedly a sign of the social decomposition as a result of 20 years of so-called “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela.

Under the cover of impunity

The power of these criminal groups is so great that they have even banned police officers from living in the sectors they dominate. There are cases in which police officers have had to move from the sector where they lived on the orders of the dominant gang.

Law enforcement officers often go to their agencies to report this situation, but are told that there is nothing they can do for them or their families.

4 Art. 4, number 9, of LOCDOFT, which establishes that organised crime is the action of three or more people associated for a given period of time, with the intention of committing crimes established in said law.

The brain is in the prisons

A good part of these large criminal gangs have their “brains” inside the country’s prisons. Such is the case of the so-called “Tren de Aragua,” considered the largest gang in the country, run from of the Aragua Penitentiary, popularly known as the Tocarón prison. This, of course, can hardly happen without the complicity of officials.

The mere fact that criminals join these large gangs is in itself a crime (racketeering), which should be punished with a prison sentence of 6 to 10 years, as set out in Article 37 of the Law Against Organised Crime. But there is no action by the justice system, due to the degree of impunity that prevails in Venezuela.

Large gangs for export

There are recent indications that Venezuelan large gangs are spreading their tentacles to neighbouring countries. This is the case, for example, of members of “Tren de Aragua,” who have been captured in Peru and Colombia when conspiring to or after having committed a crime, including robbery, kidnapping or others.

The inability of the Venezuelan regime to contain these large gangs has gradually become a regional problem as well.

THOUSANDS OF GANGS

In addition to the large gangs, there are about 18,000 smaller criminal gangs in Venezuela, which, from a legal perspective, could also be considered as organised crime organisations,⁴ but whose characteristics differ from the former.

These large criminal gangs, although well organised, have not yet reached the level of sophistication of the Central American “Maras” or the large gangs in Brazil, such as the First Command of the Capital (PCC) or “Comando Vermelho.” If urgent measures are not taken to eradicate them, however, they can become a problem, even for the very existence of the State.

2 CONSTRUCTION, OIL AND MINING “SYNDICATES.”



Construction syndicates

The “syndicates” in the construction industry—clearly different from workers’ organisations that defend the rights of their members—are in fact criminal gangs that extort workers in this sector in exchange for jobs in construction works. They also extort the managers or foremen at construction sites, threatening them into hiring only workers indicated by the gangs, and sometimes also, for example, to buy materials only from a certain supplier.

IN THE SHADOW OF LARGE PROJECTS

The origin of this M.O. used by gangs goes back to the time when, through Chinese loans, a series of government-run projects began to be executed in different sectors of the country, most of which were never completed. At that time, these gangs started their “business” of threatening the heads of the companies in charge of the works and the workers who wanted to join them. Later, these criminal groups began to apply this same method in the field of private construction.

Disputes between these syndicates in the construction industry produce several murders year after year, many of them

committed by hit men. Sometimes the murders are just a way to make good on the threats against workers or project managers.

Syndicates in the oil industry

In the oil sector, criminal groups have also emerged which—acting as fake trade unions—pressure and extort contractor companies into hiring only the workers designated by the criminal group.

Similarly, they charge the workers who want to join the projects carried out by these companies, not unlike the syndicates in the construction industry.

NEAR THE BLACK GOLD

These gangs perpetrate their misdeeds in infrastructure works, maintenance, project development and services in the oil sector.

Mining syndicates

Syndicates in the mining sector are different. The situation is more serious than in the construction and oil industries. These groups, which operate mainly in the state of Bolívar, control several illegal gold mines in that territory and impose terror in order to maintain their power.

Illegal mining has been an old tradition in Venezuela, but it has grown considerably in recent years, with an estimated 50,000 people now engaged in this activity.

EXPROPRIATED!

The expropriations decreed since the first Chávez administration and the attacks against formal mining companies contributed to the expansion of illegality in gold mining.

One of the most emblematic expropriations ordered by Chávez was Las Cristinas gold mine, whose concession had been granted to a Canadian company and then arbitrarily revoked, which led to lawsuits that are still being processed at several international bodies.

The displacement of the formal companies as a result of expropriations paved the way for different criminal groups that, with the complacency and connivance of a number of corrupt officials, took over the mines in the state of Bolívar.

BLOOD AND FIRE

The (large) gangs that dominate the illegal gold mining have turned several municipalities in this state, such as El Callao—with a murder rate of 620 per 100,000 inhabitants—, and Roscio (Guasipati)—with a murder rate of 458 per 100,000 inhabitants—, into the areas with the highest murder rate in the country by 2018,⁵ since the domination of the mining business is fought with blood and fire between the different gangs and between these against foreign groups such as Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN).

These gangs that dominate illegal gold activity in Bolívar call themselves “syndicates,” among other reasons, because they decide who works or does not work in the mines controlled by their leaders. They also ensure “order and security” in exchange for a portion of the profits. They go so far as to

establish codes of conduct and laws in the mines, and offenders pay with their lives.

Deadly Gold

There have been 40 massacres since 2016,⁶ and many of them have been a clear proof of the criminal violence surrounding illegal mining in the state of Bolívar. One of the bloodiest events was the so-called “**Tumeremo Massacre**” in March 2016, when members of the “El Topo” gang or “syndicate” arrived at a mine called “Atenas,” located on the border between the municipalities of Sifontes and Roscio, and **killed at least 17 miners** (the total number of missing persons was 28). Their bodies were later found in a mass grave in the town of Tumeremo.

In July 2019, seven people were killed while at a bus stop in San Félix, Bolívar, and several men in two vehicles shot at them with high-calibre rifles and then fled the scene. The incident is said to have been a settling of scores by criminal gangs linked to illegal mining.

WATCH THE LIGHT!

In addition to the massacres, there are also recurring cases of people being severely mutilated, losing their feet, hands, fingers, tongue or other body parts, as punishment for their failure to follow the rules imposed brutally by these “syndicates” on the mines. One of the terms used to define “violations” is “running a light” or “driving onto the pavement.”

Government-sponsored ecocide

Illegal mining controlled by these gangs or “syndicates” not only leads to massacres, but also represents a voracious destruction of the ecosystem of the state of Bolívar, through deforestation and the rudimentary and uncontrolled use of mercury, which has been rapidly contaminating the local rivers.

In 2016, Nicolás Maduro’s regime ordered the creation of the “Orinoco Mining Arc” over almost 112,000 square kilometres, which covers part

⁵ Annual Report on Violence. Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict

⁶ <https://transparencia.org.ve/cinco-muertos-dejo-masacre-en-la-gran-sabana-este-viernes/>

of the states of Bolívar, Amazonas, Apure and Delta Amacuro, which—despite the text—seems to represent the officialisation of the illegal exploitation of gold and the destruction of the environment in a large portion of the national territory.

Many have complained that Maduro was forced to come up with this mining project because his administration destroyed the oil industry, and now he has found in destructive mining a way to secure a source of income and try to prop up the broken Venezuelan economy he inherited from Hugo Chávez, which the Maduro administration was unable to restore.

Not unlike the “blood diamonds” from some African countries, **much of Venezuela’s gold is stained with the blood** of many victims who have fallen at the hands of these mining syndicates and, in general, of the criminal violence taking place in the state of Bolívar.

Today, these syndicates are a major obstacle for development and competitiveness of the construction, oil and mining industries in Venezuela.

3 ARMED AND VIOLENT “COLECTIVOS”



The creation of paramilitary or parapolice groups to do the “dirty work” of a dictatorship or authoritarian government, acting against the civilian population, is a common occurrence in Latin American and world history. This happened, for example, in Panama, with Manuel Noriega and his “Battalions for Dignity,” or in Haiti, with Duvaliers’ “Tonton Macoute,” or Hitler’s “Brown Shirts,” to mention only three of the many cases.

The same has occurred in Venezuela with the so-called “colectivos,” which thrived during the Chávez administration and have consolidated during Nicolás Maduro’s regime, who has had to rely more heavily on these vigilante groups to stay in power, perhaps because of his mistrust of the military and police forces, or because he believes that it is less politically damaging to present any internal conflict before the international community as a fight of people against people, and thus try to avoid crimes of violation of human rights that may compromise him.

7 Deadly Gold report <https://transparencia.org.ve/oro-mortal-entre-el-crimen-organizado-el-ecocidio-y-la-corrupcion/>

CIVILIAN SHOCK GROUPS

These groups are composed partly of former members of 1960s urban guerrillas who later engaged in other activities. They emerged in the 23 de Enero parish in Caracas, but are currently present nationwide. They have now an estimated 8,000 men deployed in the different states and municipalities of Venezuela. They are in fact an armed civilian faction of the revolution, active mainly in urban areas, and call themselves “guardians of the revolution.”

Their crimes include assault and intimidating, and sometimes even shooting people who gather to demonstrate or protest against the regime. Similarly, they are deployed during elections, to intimidate and harass opposition leaders or voters, during election day and they remain active in the streets after the electoral authority—National Electoral Council (CNE)—announces the results, in order to carry out “control” tasks. These groups also usually gather around the National Assembly, typically when it is in session, insulting and attacking opposition deputies, journalists and other media workers. The Parliament has been subject to vicious assaults by these violent groups. By 2018, a total of 120 MPs had been attacked, according to Transparencia Venezuela.⁸

These “colectivos” usually gear up for battle wearing hoods, riding on motorcycles with no visible license plates, armed with firearms, and blunt and sharp objects. **These groups boast total impunity for their actions**, with obvious support from high-level authorities. If for any reason they are detained by law enforcement, they are immediately released—sometimes without even being brought to court—while police officers who dare to act against them can be punished and even dismissed.

MICRO-STATES

In some parishes in Caracas, such as 23 de Enero, the armed “colectivos” dominate the territory and have set up a sort of micro-state. They have gone so far as to ban the entry of police forces in the area, which have to ask for permission, for example, to access a crime scene to draw up a report or to collect a body.

In the areas that they regularly dominate, they have control over the black markets of price-regulated foodstuffs, which they usually sell at prices higher than official. Colloquially called “bachaqueo,” these groups engaged in this activity in connivance with the central government, perhaps as part of retribution for the “services” provided to the self-proclaimed Revolution.

Although the main function of the “colectivos” is to act as civil shock groups against dissidents, some of their members sometimes use their weapons to commit common crimes, such as kidnapping, extortion, murder and robbery, among others. Honest workers in the administration of justice can attest to this.

They are the law

Another source of concern is the proven involvement of members of “colectivos” within law enforcement agencies, as was evident, for example, in 2018, when rebel police officer Oscar Pérez was murdered in El Junquito, near Caracas, an event in which a member of 23 de Enero’s “Tres Raíces” colectivo was also killed, who was also an officer of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB).

THE DIRTY WORK

Authoritarian systems use paramilitary groups to target political dissidents, trying to avoid accusations of human rights violations that would be brought up if the abuses were directly committed by law enforcement.

⁸ “Insistir y resistir” report. National Assembly <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/insistir-y-resistir-asamblea-nacional/>

In response to these schemes, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights⁹ has ruled that the international responsibility of the State for the actions of private individuals is equally applicable when States create civil groups or become accomplices of these organisations in order to violate the human rights of citizens, which is precisely what has happened in Venezuela.

IN PLAIN SIGHT

Although they are usually out in the street with their faces covered, many members of colectivos, including many of their leaders, have been identified by law enforcement. Some, emboldened by the prevailing impunity and the protection they receive, even dare to give interviews and appear in videos that they later post on social media.

Just the fact of belonging or associating with a group of illegally armed groups, attacking other people, is already a crime punishable by six to ten years' imprisonment (Article 37 of the Law against Organised Crime and Financing of Terrorism). When the rule of law is restored, the new police and justice institutions must devise strategies and take measures to prevent parapolice or paramilitary groups from causing chaos and anarchy in Venezuela.

4 "PRANES" AND THEIR PRISON ORGANISATIONS



The State's neglect of the country's prisons led to the emergence of a kind of "true new man of the 21st century" of whom the self-proclaimed Revolution was so proud at its inception: the "pran," i.e., the leader of the criminal gang that controls a prison's territory.

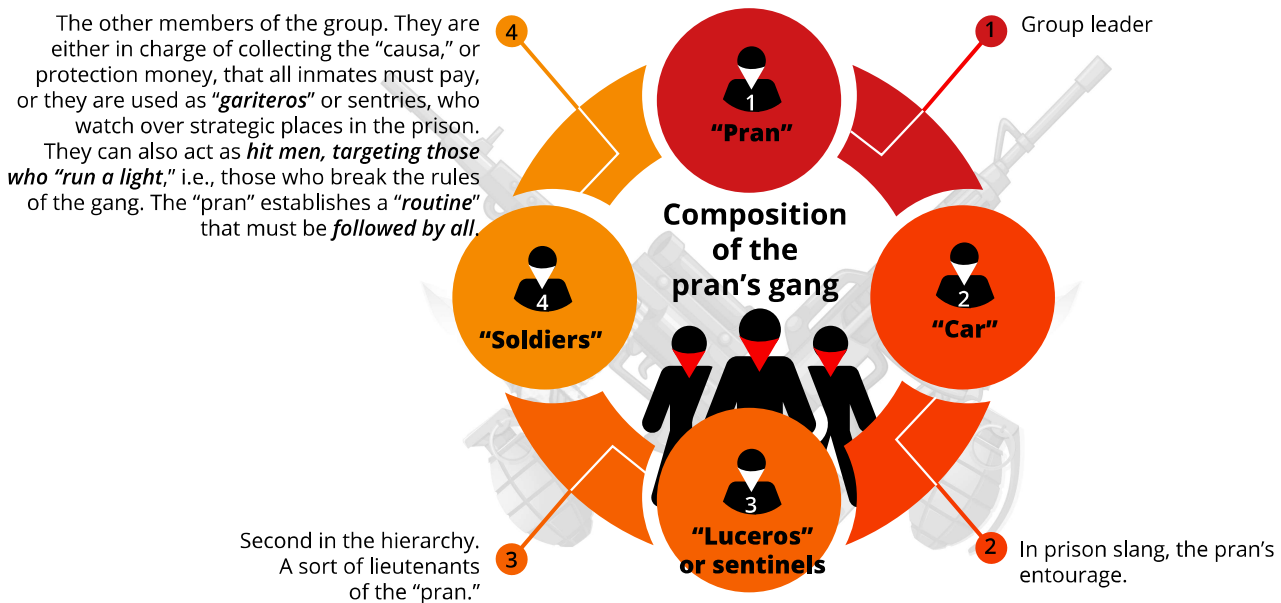
His rule is accomplished by murdering and terrorising the prison population. These individuals have created a sort of micro-state within the prisons where they impose their bloody law.

⁹ CIDH 2007. "Maripán Massacre" case.

WHERE DOES THE TERM “PRAN” COME FROM?

The origin of the term “pran,” which is used to refer to the gang leader that controls a particular prison, is not clear. Some theories claim that it comes from the combination of acronyms in the Spanish phrase “born prisoner killer” but this theory does not seem to have a strong hold. The general coordinator of the organisation Una Ventana a la Libertad, Carlos Nieto Palma, believes that the “pranes” were promoted by some corrupt officials in the prison system, because it was easier to deal with one or two inmates who handled the illegal activities inside the prison than with the entire prison population.¹⁰

Understandably, a “pran” does not act alone. His organisational structure is very similar to that used by the large criminal gangs. In this prison underworld, a particular criminal language is used, which often transcends the prison and is unfortunately used by part of society.



Fire power

Before Hugo Chávez's rise to power, prison raids found, on some rare occasions, that inmates were in possession of makeshift knives or shanks, or in the most serious cases, single-shot pipe guns. The controls in place at the time at Venezuelan prisons prevented them to have access to formal weapons. Today, the firepower of prison gangs is unprecedented in Venezuelan prison history.

GANGS WITH WEAPONS OF WAR

The “pran's” power comes from his arsenal, which typically includes rifles, machine guns, pistols and even grenades, which are evidently smuggled into the prison with the complicity of corrupt members of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), who control the perimeter of the prison compound, as well as also officials of the Ministry of Prisons, who are responsible for internal surveillance.

¹⁰ Insight Crime. April 30, 2019.

The business in the prisons

"Pranes" not only make money from collecting the "causa," but also from the sale of drugs, alcohol and even food, as well as from gambling and prostitution inside the prisons.

They also raise large amounts of money from crimes planned inside the prisons and that are committed on the street, such as contract killings, kidnappings, collection of "ransom" for stolen or hijacked vehicles and also extortion and fraud through the use of cell phones and the internet. These crimes are possible because the government has failed to comply with the law requiring the installation of signal blockers on the perimeter of detention centres.

Pranes and their groups also profit from overcrowding in the prisons. Prisoners must pay an extra fee for the best spots in the prison cells and, in some cases, for building or renting housing inside prison grounds. The upshot is that many prison facilities, such as the Aragua Penitentiary in the town of Tocarón, or the José Antonio Anzoátegui Judicial Prison, known as Puente Ayala, have become veritable towns with hundreds of buildings.

A PRISON WITH ALL THE COMFORTS

Money and power allow "pranes" and their entourage to enjoy great privileges inside prisons, uncontested by any authority. These include swimming pools, drugs, clubs, concerts, prostitutes, rodeos and even zoos, among other amenities. In some cases, gang leaders have even set up sort of banks inside the prisons, where the inmate population can receive cash from transfers made by their relatives or friends, for a fee, of course.

Retaking control

In towns with formal prisons dominated by "pranes," the power flaunted by these criminals is evident in society, and in the fear that they instil. Many Venezuelan prisons are in fact the "brains" of criminal activities that take place outside the prisons.

The State must therefore regain control of the country's prisons, not only because of a constitutional duty to safeguard the human rights of the prison population, but also as an indispensable step toward public safety on the streets.

Nelson Mandela once said that a nation should not be judged by how it treats its best citizens, but by how it treats those who have little or nothing. Following this line of thought, and considering how prisoners have been treated, we can deduce what the self-proclaimed Bolivarian Revolution represents in terms of humanism.



5 BOLIVARIAN LIBERATION FORCES (“BOLICHES”)



Another organised crime ring operating in the country is the so-called Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL) and its various branches, known as “Boliches.” This mostly rural paramilitary group operates primarily in Apure, but also has a presence in other states such as Táchira and Barinas, which share or are close to the border with Colombia.

MADE IN VENEZUELA

It is a guerrilla group with a particular characteristic: it emerged and thrived in Venezuela. According to Insight Crime,¹¹ a foundation devoted to studying organised crime, the FBL apparently was created in 1992, when they launched a series of attacks in the city of Caracas, including most notably one against Antonio Ríos, former president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV). It resurfaced when Hugo Chávez came to power. At present, the FBL is estimated to have between 1,000 and 4,000 members.

The same research suggests that the guerrilla group finances itself mainly through extortion of cattle ranchers and businesses on the border with Colombia. It also uses river crossings to smuggle cattle and fuel into Colombia, and has been involved in extortion of migrants, who are charged for safe passage through informal trails into Colombia. The FBL’s control of the criminal economy stems from its links with security forces and public officials in Apure. This group “has considerable political influence in the state, through the control of several community councils and mayoral offices,” the study claims.

The FBL fights for control of illegal activities—in the states where it has a presence—with the FARC, ELN and criminal gangs, which are other crime rings active in the country.

¹¹ Insight Crime. “FBL↔FPLN”

6 HOLDING OF CORRUPTION



The holding of corruption in Venezuela is made up of members of the civil service, private entrepreneurs, international banks, consultants and—national and international—law firms, which have profited from criminal activities. Venezuela has been bled dry by the rampant corruption that has prevailed over the past 20 years. Large sums of money, mainly from oil exports, have been plundered away from the Venezuelan people.¹²

Corruption and money laundering are not exactly violent crimes, but are often closely linked, enabling the action of other organised crime rings operating in Venezuelan territory. Corruption of police officers could allow a criminal caught red-handed to be released—as if often the case—, or, for example, a criminal gang to sell drugs at will in some neighbourhood or sector of the country. Similarly, the questionable moral values of judges and prosecutors at the Public Prosecutor's Office could lead to a guilty criminal being found innocent by the justice system in exchange for a bribe. There are many circumstances in which corruption could be one of the causes of deterioration of public safety.

Much of the money made through other criminal activities ends up being laundered through

various financial operations. In accordance with the relevant law, money laundering “is the process of hiding or giving the appearance of lawfulness to capital, goods and assets derived from illicit activities.” This offence, provided for in Article 35 of the Law against Organised Crime and Financing of Terrorism (LOCDOFT), carries a prison sentence of ten to fifteen years, but prevailing impunity for criminal activities in Venezuela prevent makes it easy to circumvent punishment.

— NOT ONLY A MATTER OF LAWS

The Law against Corruption contains more than 20 types of criminal offences, but the institutions in the justice system, in almost all cases, fail to investigate, indict or issue sentence on those guilty of theft of public property and other acts of corruption.

The Comptroller General, controlled by Maduro's ruling party, has failed to discharge its constitutional duty to oversee and apply administrative sanctions against those who fail to comply with the rules governing public administration.¹³

¹² <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/actualizacion-patron-de-gran-corrupcion-un-esquema-para-el-desfalco-y-la-violacion-de-ddhh/>

¹³ Report: Cambios para no cambiar Contraloría General de la República

In its latest report published in 2018, Transparency International ranked Venezuela among the countries with the highest level of corruption worldwide, specifically in position number 176, out of a total of 180 nations analysed, and the most corrupt country in Latin America.¹⁴

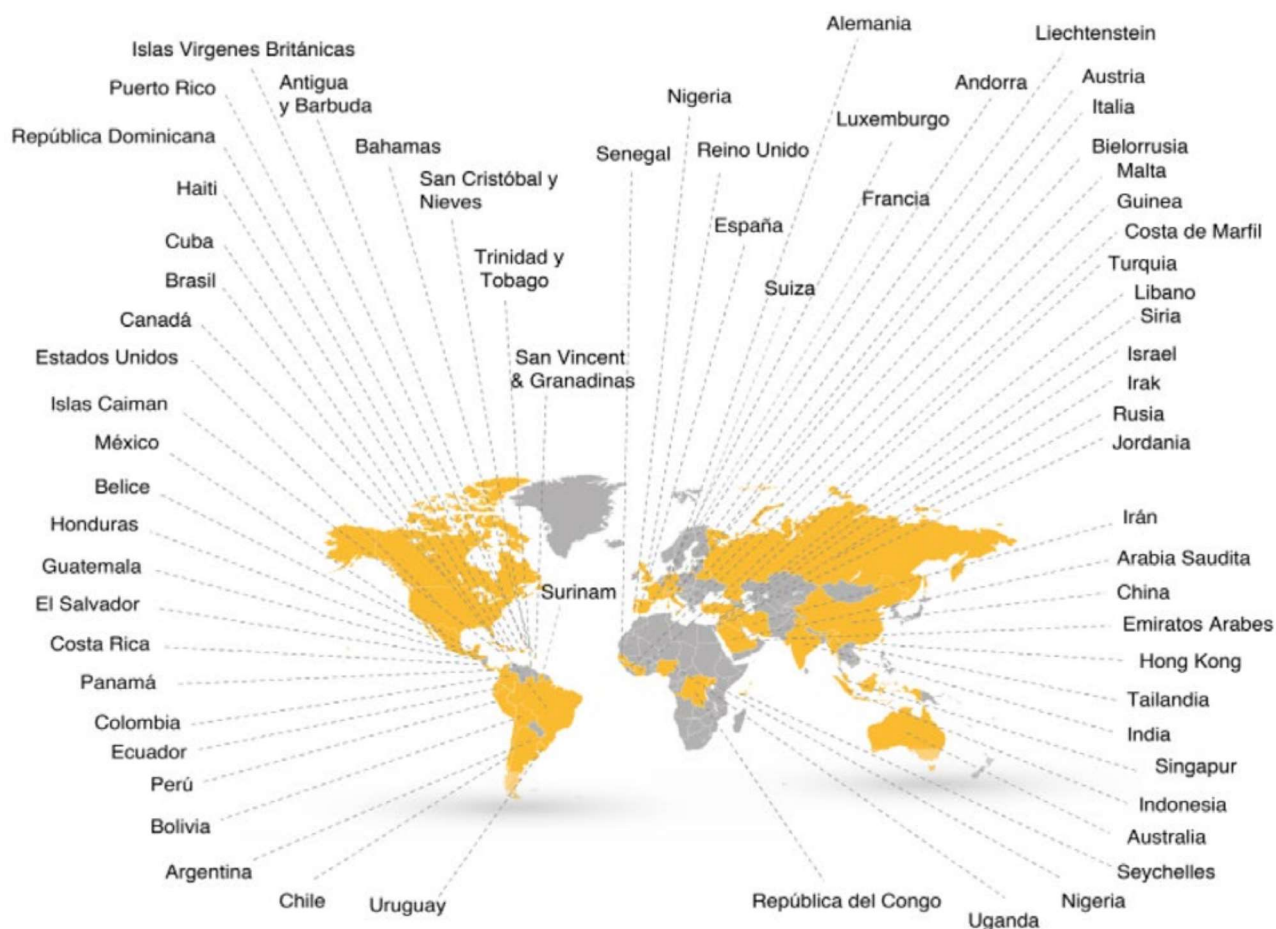
Corruption in Venezuela has taken on international dimensions. By August 2019, courts and prosecutors in more than 20 countries had opened a total of 50 investigations into corruption.¹⁵ By the first quarter of 2020 Transparencia Venezuela had accounted for

nearly **78 investigations into corruption with Venezuelan funds**. The estimated damage caused to the nation amounts to **US\$29,900,609,098.39** by mid-2019, and the figure is rising as more embezzlement against the nation is revealed.

Venezuela's corruption network is believed to be present in at least 70 countries. New announcements surface regularly about other cases that add to the list of crimes committed by this criminal scheme, which meets the criteria for Grand Corruption.

Figure No. 1

Countries in the network



Source: Transparencia Venezuela

¹⁴ Índice de Percepción de Corrupción (IPC) 2019

¹⁵ <https://transparencia.org.ve/al-menos-20-paises-investigan-50-casos-de-corrupcion-con-dinero-de-venezuela/>

The Transparency International 2019 Global Corruption Barometer (GCB),¹⁶ a survey carried out in various countries around the world with a wide coverage of the public's experiences and

perceptions of corruption, revealed these data about Venezuela:

2019 GCB

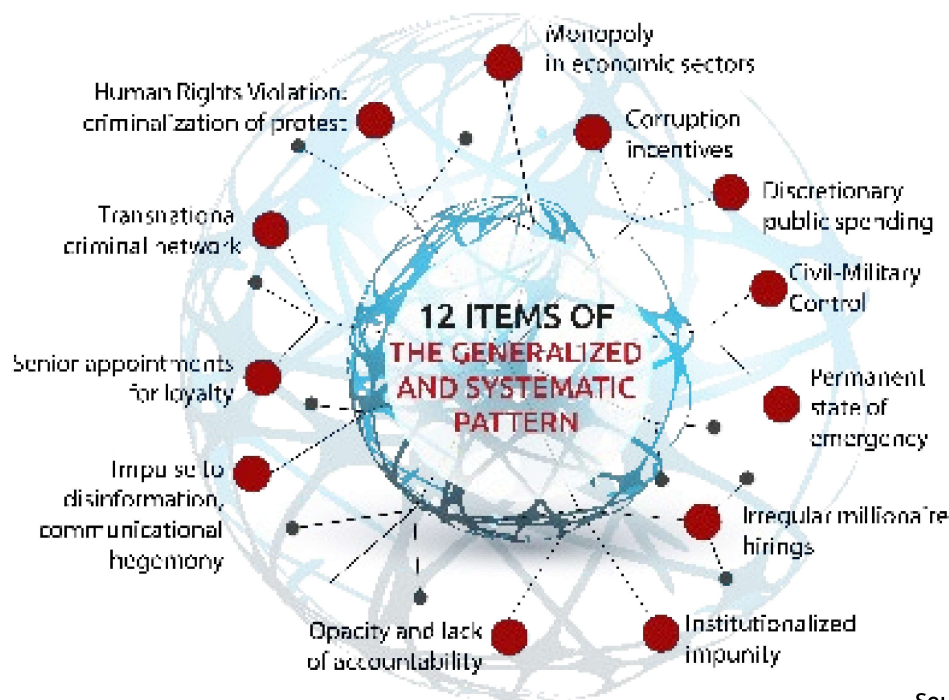
- 93% of Venezuelans define corruption as a serious problem.
- Citizens believe most people in government agencies to be corrupt. This includes the President, ranking first, from 63% in 2017 to 87% in 2019.
- 91% believe that the Government's efforts to fight corruption are increasingly inadequate.

In a study carried out by Transparencia Venezuela in 2018 on state-owned companies, out of 526 companies analysed, more than 70% have been reported for corruption. Among the worst performers are PDVSA, Corpoelec (electricity) and the basic companies of Guayana, in the state of Bolívar.¹⁷

Corruption in Venezuela revolves around a scheme of public actions and policies—fostered at top levels of national government—that has caused widespread and systematic damage to the population—the Grand Corruption pattern¹⁸—, which has consolidated the holding of corruption:

Figure No. 2

Corruption Pattern in Venezuela



Source: Transparencia Venezuela

The establishment of a criminal network that emerges from the state itself requires forceful actions with urgent support of international organisations to apply sanctions to culprits, through a heterodox mechanism of justice,

such as those that have been promoted in other countries of the region and have been overwhelmed by the destruction of their institutional system, especially in the judiciary.¹⁹

¹⁶ Global Corruption Barometer: Latin America and the Caribbean 2019

¹⁷ [SOE Report II, 2018](#)

¹⁸ [Report: Grand Corruption Pattern](#)

¹⁹ [Report: Demandas de justicia ante un proceso transicional en Venezuela](#)

7 DRUG TRAFFICKERS



In the last 20 years of Chavismo, Venezuela has become one of the most prominent bridges for drug trafficking on the planet. Several tonnes of drugs leave our territory every year by air and by sea.

Colombia, which shares a border with our country, produces 70% of the world's cocaine.²⁰ The strategic location of Venezuela for the drug routes to large consumer markets (North America and Europe), and institutional weakness and corruption, as a result of the current political regime, makes Venezuela an ideal passage for international drug traffic.

1 By air

The most important route for trafficking cocaine from Venezuela is apparently through clandestine airstrips, mainly located in the states of Apure, Zulia and Falcón, from where small aircraft take off for Central America, mainly Honduras. The drugs are then smuggled into Mexico and from there into the United States.

In fact, in some parts of Honduras, it is common to find some sorts of cemeteries of small aircraft, with several of these planes abandoned by drug traffickers after landing.

Drugs make it to Africa by air

The UN has also certified that many undocumented flights have departed from our country, and "all the clandestine air shipments of cocaine detected in West Africa seem to have originated in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela."²¹

Citing sources in Colombia and the United States, the UN has ratified that "cocaine trafficked through the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States usually leaves by air from locations near the border with Colombia with destinations in the Dominican Republic, Honduras and other Caribbean and Central American countries, as well as Mexico."²²

But cocaine air shipments from Venezuela are not only made on small planes taking off from clandestine airstrips, but also from the **Simón Bolívar International Airport**, located in Maiquetía, near Caracas, where planes with **hundreds of kilos of drugs** have departed. This is evidence of how far the tentacles of these organisations can reach, as they have managed to infiltrate and use entities that should watch over the integrity and national sovereignty, such as the military, which guards the most important air terminal in Venezuela.

²⁰ [UNODC. World Drug Report 2019](#)

²¹ [UNODC. World Drug Report 2010](#)

²² [UNODC. World Drug Report 2010](#)

THE AIR FRANCE FLIGHT

*A surprising stash of narcotics was found on an Air France flight in September 2013. After leaving Venezuela's main airport and landing at Charles De Gaulle in Paris, it was detained by French authorities which, after a highly controlled procedure, seized more than one **tonne of high purity cocaine**, which was stashed into **30 suitcases**.²³ The shipment was valued at some **270,000,000 euros**, making it the largest shipment ever intercepted in France.*

2 By sea

The drug shipments trafficked by sea from Venezuela—mainly into Europe—are quite impressive. In this regard, the UN has noted that, in recent years, shipments to Europe—particularly large shipments transported by sea—have been trafficked increasingly through Venezuela. In fact, in the case of cocaine seized since 2004, “41% was found to come from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”²⁴

According to the new Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre-Narcotics (MAOC-N), cited in the UNODC global report (2010), 51% of the narcotics cargoes, of all shipments on vessels intercepted in the Atlantic during the period 2006–2008, originated in Venezuela. This means, as shown in the following graph, that more than half of the cocaine shipments attempting to enter Europe in that period had departed from Venezuelan ports.



WALID MAKLED'S BUSINESS

The large shipments of cocaine and other drugs by sea from Venezuela are explained by cases such as that of well-known Venezuelan drug trafficker/businessman Walid Makled, who was granted a concession in the largest port complex in Venezuela, in the town of Puerto Cabello, in the state of Carabobo. The permit was obtained, according to his own testimony, through bribes, which gave him great facilities to send drug shipments by boat. His family also became owners of Aeropostal, one of the most important airlines in the country.



Walid Makled is sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Small boats also depart every day from Venezuelan shores to Caribbean islands. One of the busiest routes used by these boats is from the coast of Sucre to Trinidad and Tobago, which has helped consolidate criminal gangs that control the drug business in this region.

Given the size of the drug cargoes leaving Venezuela, these are only possible with the obvious complicity of organised crime groups

²³ [BCC: Huge cocaine haul seized on Air France plane in Paris](#)

²⁴ [UNODC, World Drug Report 2010.](#)

in different countries, such as the Central American Maras, Mexican drug cartels, illegal armed groups in Colombia and European criminal mafias, among many others. That is why international cooperation is essential to minimise or end drug trafficking in our nation.

No international cooperations

Despite the need for international support, the Chávez administration terminated in 2005 the existing cooperation agreements with the DEA and the British police, which had cracked down on drug traffickers in Venezuela.

The repercussions of this situation can be summarised in statements by the UN²⁵ about the reduced number of drug seizures since that date: "In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, [cocaine] seizures reached their maximum in 2005, with 59 tonnes, and since then they have decreased by approximately half."

"NARCO-REGIME"

In 2005, Dr. Mildred Camero was removed from the governing body of the fight against drug trafficking, the National Commission against Drug Abuse (CONACUID), which was later replaced by the National Anti-Drug Office (ONA). The former official has been pointing out to Venezuelan authorities, calling them a "narco-regime," a complaint that was cited in the book Chavismo, Narcotráfico y Militares (Chavismo, Drug Trafficking and the Military).²⁶

In addition, there is almost no cooperation with Colombian institutions and with nearly 60 countries, including the United States and most European nations, which do not recognise Maduro's regime as legitimate.

UNODC²⁷ has stressed the importance of international cooperation and has emphasised that "the higher rates of interception of opiates

and cocaine shipments since the 1990s show that cooperation at the regional and interregional levels yield good results."

We can reasonably conclude the large drug trafficking business in Venezuela has been able to grow this size only the participation of corrupt and unscrupulous officials. On this issue, Mildred Camero has maintained that "unlike other Latin American countries, the drug business in Venezuela is not necessarily handled by civil groups, but rather by members of the military, top government officials and the Venezuelan police.²⁸ Perhaps this is why there is talk of the so-called "Cartel of the Suns," named after the most significant distinction in the ranks of Venezuelan generals.

— HIGH RANKING DRUG TRAFFICKING

The Cartel of the Suns is an alleged drug trafficking network made up of officers of the National Armed Forces who maintain control of border checkpoints, ports, airports and other government agencies.

Recently, the International Narcotics Control Board of the United Nations, in a session held in Geneva in February 2020, presented a report which states that "in Venezuela, criminal groups have managed to infiltrate government security forces and have created an informal network known as the Cartel of the Suns, to facilitate the entry and exit of illegal drugs."²⁹

Several officials and former officials of the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro have been listed by the Office of Foreign Affairs Control (OFAC) of the U.S. State Department, accused of being complicit or somehow involved with drug trafficking.

Drug trafficking has a direct relation with serious and violent crimes. The UNODC World Drug Report 2016 states that "drug use can lead to acts of violence related to the psychoactive effects of drugs, as well as to crimes committed

²⁵ UNODC. *World Drug Report 2011*.

²⁶ "Venezuela is a narco-regime" Interview with Mildred Camero, former president of CONACUID, 2014.

²⁷ UNODC. *World Drug Report 2017*.

²⁸ Landaeta. H. (2014). *Chavismo, narcotráfico y militares*. Venezuela: Libros Marcados.

²⁹ *JIFE reconoce influencia del Cartel de Los Soles de Venezuela en narcotráfico*

in order to obtain funds to buy them. However, the intensity of drug-related violence is greater when it is linked to trafficking (systemic violence), as the example of Latin America shows.”³⁰ Therefore, in order to reduce the crime rate in Venezuela, a full-on fight against drug trafficking is decisive.

8 FARC AND ELN



The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are criminally active and control territory in Venezuela.

Two main factors are behind the intensification of activities of Colombian illegal groups in recent years in Venezuela: Chavismo coming to power in 1999 and its ideological affinity with these criminal groups and, secondly, governments in Colombia with a clear policy of combating these guerrillas, which has forced them to withdraw and use Venezuelan territory as a haven and place of operations.

FARC

In recent years, Venezuela has been a major stronghold of FARC dissidents who did not join the peace process. According to Insight Crime, during the “Colombian conflict, the country

(Venezuela) provided the guerrillas (FARC) with key drug trafficking corridors and places to escape the pressure from Colombian law enforcement, conduct military training and resupply their war arsenal. After the Peace Agreement in Colombia, Venezuela continues to play that role for the mafias made up of dissidents of the peace process, offering an economic lifeline and haven to regroup and consolidate their forces.”³¹

As soon as Hugo Chávez came to power, he declared himself neutral in the Colombian conflict, which in public international law meant that he recognised the FARC and the ELN as belligerents, i.e., as armies with the same legitimacy as that of the Republic of Colombia, which was an outrageous demonstration of the open support he offered them.

³⁰ UNODC Informe Mundial Sobre las Drogas 2016

³¹ Insight Crime. “FARC en Venezuela.” Accessed: Oct. 17, 2019.

OPEN SUPPORT

In 2008, before the National Assembly, Hugo Chávez went so far as to say that “the FARC and the ELN are not terrorist organisations, they are armies, real armies, that occupy space in Colombia. They must be recognised (...) they are insurgent forces which have a political project, which have a Bolivarian project, which is respected here.”³²

This support for the FARC has continued over time. During the Sao Paulo Forum, held in Caracas in 2019, Nicolás Maduro said about two of the main leaders of this guerrilla and terrorist organisation:

“Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich are welcome in Venezuela and at the Sao Paulo Forum whenever they want to come, they are two leaders of peace (...) The FARC are welcome in Venezuela whenever they want to come.”³³

A few days after this statement, Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich—from somewhere in Venezuela, according to Colombian intelligence—announced on a video their return to guerrilla activities.

The relationship of the Venezuelan regime with the FARC and other Colombian illegal groups is an important point to understand the magnitude of drug trafficking in Venezuela. The UN World Drug Report 2017 noted that “several sources estimate that the total annual income from drugs trafficked by the FARC amounts to about \$1 billion.”³⁴

International collaboration, mainly with the Colombian Government, is essential to effectively combat these illegal groups, but this has been impossible since 1999. In this regard, Mayorca³⁵ points out that “the Venezuelan government has repeatedly refused to pursue members and collaborators of the FARC who may be in this territory, even though Colombian authorities have regularly indicated that they have precise information to locate them in Venezuela.”

For the purposes of this report, we found it useful to list all the crimes committed by the FARC in Venezuela and the various expressions of support they have received from different Chavista leaders. The truth is that today the dissidents of this guerrilla group who did not join the peace process—who now will surely be joined by those who decided to return to arms—maintain an active presence by committing crimes in our territory and constitute another major crime rings that scourge the country.

The FANB must fulfil its constitutional duties and guarantee the independence and sovereignty of the nation, as well as ensure the integrity of the geographical space, by fighting all these illegal armed groups that act freely in Venezuela. But as long as a regime that protects these guerrillas remains in power, this seems almost impossible.

National Liberation Army (ELN)

The ELN’s presence in Venezuela dates back to before Chavismo came to power, but its actions have multiplied and diversified since 1999. Today it is probably the main Colombian group operating in Venezuela.

According to Insight Crime,³⁶ the ELN is believed to have a presence in twelve Venezuelan states: Táchira, Zulia, Trujillo, Anzoátegui, Lara, Falcón, Amazonas, Barinas, Portuguesa, Guárico, Bolívar and Apure, with armed groups and clandestine radio stations to indoctrinate. This group uses Apure as a hideout for its leaders and to commit various crimes, and has become so powerful that it acts as a de facto state authority, resolving disputes among citizens and maintaining some sort of “order.”

In the states of Amazonas and Bolívar, where the inhabitants know them as the “rubber feet,” because of the rubber boots they usually wear, the ELN has focused on controlling some mines within the so-called Mining Arc, where they engage in the mining and commercialisation of minerals.

³² [Lanación.com](#). “Chavez: las FARC no son terroristas.” Jan. 12, 2008

³³ [Eluniversal.com](#). “Iván Márquez y Jesús Santrich son bienvenidos a Venezuela.” Jul. 28, 2019.

³⁴ [UNODC World Drug Report 2017](#)

³⁵ Mayorca, J. 2010. “FARC en Venezuela: un huésped incómodo.”

³⁶ [Insight Crime](#). “ELN en Venezuela.” March 1, 2019.

ELN RUNNING WILD

In 1995, the ELN murdered 8 members of the Venezuelan navy at a naval border post in Apure, in what was called the “Cararabo Massacre.” This and other vicious and cowardly attacks against the Armed Forces have not been an obstacle for the ELN to strengthen ties with the ruling class in Venezuela.

Ideological affinities have not prevented new attacks. In November 2018, three National Guard sergeants and one captain were killed

and 12 other GNB members were injured in an ambush in the Atures municipality in the state of Amazonas. Although there was no official acknowledgement of attack, it is known that this event was carried out by members of the ELN in retaliation for the previous arrest of a leader of this guerrilla group in the area.

It is curious that a militaristic regime such as Venezuela’s allows the ELN to act as freely, engaging in extortion, kidnapping, drug trafficking and illegal mining, among others, which clearly violate national sovereignty.

9 CRIMINAL GANGS (“BACRIM”)



The term BACRIM is an acronym that was coined in Colombia to describe the criminal gangs that emerged in that country after the demobilisation of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). These criminal groups are involved, like the guerrillas, in drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping, among other crimes.

THESE ARE THE GANGS

There are several of these gangs operating in Venezuela today. These include the Black Eagles, the Rastrojos, the Urabeños, the Envigado Office and the Gulf Clan. BACRIMs are mainly active on the states of Táchira, Zulia and Apure, engaged in collecting “vacunas” (“protection” money) from many merchants, cattle breeders or industrialists, and also to kidnapping and contract killings.

In recent times, given the boom in Venezuelan migration and the closure of borders ordered from time to time by Nicolás Maduro, these gangs are engaged in controlling some informal trails where they charge people for crossing the border into Colombia and also profit from smuggling fuel and other goods.

At present, criminal violence is common in the border states, particularly disputes between BACRIMs, and between them and guerrilla groups for control of various illegal businesses in the states where they operate.

CONCLUSIONS

1. At least 15 foreign and national paramilitary or parapolice groups are currently operating in Venezuela, dominating territory, exercising social control and engaging in various organised criminal activities. They have been joined by various gangs, the criminal large gangs and “colectivos.”
2. Venezuela is currently used as one of the main bridges for international drug trafficking, both by air and sea.
3. Several of the nation’s prisons are controlled by internal gangs that have displaced government authorities.
4. The economic, political and social crisis in Venezuela is leading to an increase in trafficking and smuggling of persons from our territory.
5. Organised crime activities represent a serious obstacle to the development of economic activity in Venezuela.
6. The lack of internal controls means that most organised crime organisations have easy access to rifles, grenades and other powerful weapons and explosives for their violent operations.
7. There is evidence of clear support from some officials of the incumbent government, including police and military officials, which reinforces the presence and impunity of organised crime organisations in Venezuela.
8. On some occasions, the actions of organised criminal groups cause population displacements
9. Smuggling of fuel, illegal mining of gold and other minerals, among other activities involving organised crime, are causing serious economic damage to the nation.
10. Venezuelans have a deep mistrust of the nation’s police and justice system institutions. Thus, in most cases, they do not report crimes of organised crime groups, which has increased impunity in such cases.

**Corruption and crime
in the regions:
lawless states**



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

Regarding this specific issue, we will analyse the situation in some states of Venezuela in relation to the actions of organised crime and corruption. These include Aragua, Delta Amacuro, Falcón, Nueva Esparta and Sucre. In addition, some of the information obtained in 2019 has been updated for the states of Apure, Barinas, Bolívar, Táchira and Zulia.



ORGANISED CRIME IN ARAGUA

Approximate population: 2.505.937 inhabitants

Murder rate: 82/100.000 inhabitants (OVV 2019), the third highest in the country.

Criminal groups

In the state of Aragua, the situation is quite peculiar, since the largest criminal large gang in Venezuela, called “Tren de Aragua,” operates here with nearly 1,000 members. The headquarters and brain of this criminal organisation are located in the Aragua Penitentiary Centre, better known as “Tocorón,” and its main leader is a prisoner named Héctor Rustherford Guerrero Flores (ID No. 17.367.457), a.k.a. “Niño Guerrero.”

This criminal large gang was formed around 2002, around a syndicate that controlled access of workers to railroad construction sites in Aragua. This syndicate fulfilled its duties illegally, **charging workers fees to get a job and then weekly fees to keep it.** This practice evolved into criminal activities that led to the murder of those who refused to pay or who dared to challenge the power of the crime syndicate. These criminals, who committed the crimes in this context, began to be called the “*Tren de Aragua*” or “Aragua train.”

This criminal group consolidated, diversified and expanded its reach across the state of Aragua, under the protection of the criminal impunity prevailing in Venezuela.



Source: La Nación
Photo No. 1. Alias “Niño Guerrero”

CONTROLLING A “PEACE ZONE”

The members of the “Tren de Aragua” syndicate settled mainly in the San Vicente area, (70,000 inhabitants), in the Los Tacariguas parish—near a once thriving industrial area—, in Girardot municipality in Aragua, just opposite the unfinished railway construction site. This sector is one of the “peace zones” created by Nicolás Maduro’s regime. They also have an important presence in “La Pedrera,” located in Las Delicias parish in Maracay, the state capital.

For years, several criminals have headed factions of this gang. Some of them were killed in clashes with other criminals or with law enforcement, such as “Chino Pedrera” and “Carlos Breaker.” Others, e.g. “Larry Changa,” “Johan Petrica” and “Flipper”—who controlled the San Vicente neighbourhood—are still at large, in different sectors of the country, under the command of “Niño Guerrero.”

Criminal groups

The illicit activities of the “Tren de Aragua” syndicate in the state are diverse. First, **they control the criminal business in the Aragua Penitentiary, known as “Tocorón.”** One of these businesses is the collection of the so-called “causa” or—weekly or monthly—fee that must be paid by the 7,000+ inmates at that prison—just for the “right” to be there. This payment works out to an amount between **US\$10–15** for each prisoner per month. Inmates who fail to pay, because they or their families do not have the means, must perform various tasks in prison. In addition, some prisoners with more money make extra payments for being in special areas and for additional privileges. The revenue of this large gang for these fees alone amount to **US\$1.5 million per year.**



Photo No. 2. “Tokio” Club at the Tocorón prison.
Source: Runrun.es

Within the Tocorón prison they also control **prostitution and drug sales.** There are photographs that prove the existence of **marijuana plantations.** **Alcohol, cigarettes, food, clothing** and other goods are also traded. They also run the **gambling business** within the prison—such as horse racing gambling bars and cockfighting rings. There are several restaurants, one called “El Sazón del Hampa” (The Flavour of Crime), a club called “Tokio,” where Venezuelan and foreign artists have performed, and even a sort of “bank” where prisoners, upon payment of a fee, can withdraw in cash the money that their relatives wire or deposit for them, as well as receive loans, at loan-shark interest rates.

The leader of the gang or “pran,” his “car,” i.e., the structure under his command, and the prisoners who pay for privileges, also have a **swimming pool, a baseball field and even a zoo** inside the prison. “Niño Guerrero” lives in a two-story house in the prison, with cable television and a power generator, where he constantly receives visits from people outside the prison.



Photo No. 3. Niño Guerrero's house in Tocorón
Source: Photo by Jesús Medina E.

Power in the streets

The criminal activity of the “Tren de Aragua” syndicate transcends the prison walls. Extortion is one of the main crimes committed on the streets, charging “vacunas” or protection money to many industrialists, merchants and agricultural producers in the region and nearby states, such as Carabobo and Guárico. Those who refuse to pay may have their property attacked or even killed. In July 2019, members of this criminal large gang set fire to the “María Puig” biscuit factory,³⁷ a century-old company in the town of Tejerías, Aragua. This gang also controls the distribution and sale of drugs in slums and neighbourhoods of Aragua.

Kidnapping is also a huge source of revenue for the “Tren de Aragua” gang. Abductions are often planned within the prison and after the victim is taken, the ransom is also collected from inside the prison. **Contract killings** are also arranged inside the prison, upon payment of the fee.

Car theft and stealing in Aragua has a peculiar feature: In many cases, thieves reach out to the victim, and if they wish to get their car back, they must pay a ransom of approximately 20% of the value of the car. In many cases, people must take the ransom money to the criminal himself and, only after that, they tell the victim where to find their stolen vehicle or motorcycle. Testimonies about this practice abound.

Tren de Aragua works as a kind of **criminal franchise**. The associated leaders, who are on the streets, are allowed to control their own businesses completely, but there are others who must share the profits with “Niño Guerrero.” Similarly, there is a common defence agreement, against rivals that may arise and also against security forces.

POLICE UNDER FIRE

This gang has launched several attacks with rifles and grenades against police stations in Aragua. In September 2016, a total of 8 police stations in the state were attacked in less than 24 hours³⁸.

We can reasonably suggest that the criminal activity of Tren de Aragua from inside the Tocarón prison **would not be possible without the connivance of officials**. This prison compound, like all the others in the country, is guarded on the outside by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and on the inside by personnel of the Ministry of Penitentiary Services. Therefore, everything that takes place inside the prison happens right under their noses.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY INSIDE PRISONS

The coordination of entry of weapons, drugs, alcohol, as well as of outsiders into the prison, and the planning of serious crimes—kidnappings, extortion, fraud and ransom payments for stolen vehicles—is done through the use of cell phones and other technologies, in violation of the Law regulating the Use of Cellular Telephony and the Internet inside Prisons, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Penitentiary Services, currently headed by Iris Varela.

The “Tren de Aragua” syndicate exercises social control in the communities in their area, going so far as to issue curfews whenever they wish. One example was in February 2016, when leaders of this criminal organisation forced the shutdown of all commercial activity and transportation in a sector of the city of Maracay,³⁹ in mourning for the death of one of its members. This criminal group also organises protests with people from the sectors it controls when security forces carry out raids or actions against members of the large gang.

Niño Guerrero has benefited from court judgments, such as the one issued by the Sixth Court of the Judicial Circuit of the State of Aragua, which acquitted him in June 2018 of the charges of kidnapping and association to commit crimes. In this trial, the direct testimony of the victim was disregarded and it was conducted in the presence of the defendant. In the same month, in another criminal case in which he had been sentenced to 17 years in prison, the Criminal Chamber of

³⁷ <https://www.elestimulo.com/vinculan-incendio-en-la-fabrica-de-galletas-puig-a-un-caso-de-extorsion/>

³⁸ <https://runrun.es/tag/sedes-policiales/>

³⁹ <https://www.reportero24.com/2016/02/05/anarquia-toque-de-queda-del-hampa-en-maracay/>

the Supreme Court of Justice ordered the Aragua State Court of Appeals to review and readjust Héctor Guerrero's sentence.⁴⁰

Testimonies obtained for this investigation and other evidence indicate that the criminal activities of the "Tren de Aragua" syndicate have spread to and consolidated in other states in the country. The state of Bolívar is a clear example, where members of this large gang reportedly control several illegal mines. This has been reported by deputy of the National Assembly Américo De Grazia, who declared that an individual known as "John Petrica," one of the main leaders of "Tren de Aragua," very close to "Niño Guerrero," controls a mine located in the "Las Claritas" sector in Bolívar.⁴¹

Different sources have confirmed that in the state of Sucre, in towns like San Juan de las Galdonas, San Juan de Unare, Río Caribe and Güiria, among others, there are "Tren de Aragua" cells that control drug trafficking and smuggling by sea to Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean islands. Gangs led by "Niño Guerrero" have reportedly displaced local gangs by blood and fire and then taken over the lucrative illegal business.

During the investigation, evidence was also found showing that this criminal group has a presence in Carabobo and in the south of Guárico, where they also commit multiple crimes, such as robbery, kidnapping, homicide and extortion against merchants, industrialists and agricultural producers.

It seems logical to assume that the presence of the "Tren de Aragua" syndicate in the states of Aragua, Bolívar, Sucre, Carabobo and Guárico has been possible thanks to the **complicity of government officials and the military**. The impunity they boast is possibly due to bribes and associations with government representatives, which difficult to confirm in a country where institutions of the justice system do not perform as required.

Tren de Aragua has also spread beyond our borders. Several of its members have been captured in countries such as **Peru, Brazil and Colombia**, for their involvement in crimes including robbery, homicide, kidnapping, and arms, human and drug trafficking, among others.



"El Cheo Pistola"

TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

A recent report by the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation, entitled "Godless, Lawless."⁴² An Analysis of the Security Situation on the Colombian-Venezuelan Border," states that:

"The 'Tren de Aragua' gang is engaged in trafficking of persons from Venezuela and Colombia. With promises of formal job opportunities, they deceive women who have their documents withheld once they cross from Venezuela to Colombia and are forced to engage in sexual work. Venezuelan women, girls and adolescents are the main victims of this gang.

This criminal organisation is based in the state of Táchira, with presence also in Colombia, it also operates in countries such as Brazil and Peru. It is attributed with murders committed in La Parada, Villa del Rosario, Norte de Santander, fighting for territory and drug trafficking. In Colombia, this gang also controls the Los Mangos border trails and the Cortina Roja sector in Villa del Rosario. According to local sources, their entry into the country was possible with the help of the Gulf Clan."

⁴⁰ <https://www.sumarium.es/2018/06/20/tsj-ordeno-revisar-condena-del-nino-guerrero/>

⁴¹ <https://www.elimpulso.com/2018/11/23/de-grazia-nicolas-ernesto-maduro-guerra-y-diosdado-cabello-tienen-pranes-para-controlar-las-minas-en-bolivar-23nov/>

⁴² <https://pares.com.co/2020/02/10/sin-dios-ni-ley-un-informe-de-la-violencia-en-la-frontera/>



ORGANISED CRIME IN TÁCHIRA

Approximate population: 1.600.000 inhabitants

Murder rate in 2019: 46 for every 100,000 inhabitants (OVV, 2019), ranking 17th in this index.

The state of Táchira, in the southwest of the country, is home to many Venezuelan and foreign criminal groups, which engage in various organised crime activities, such as drug trafficking, extortion, smuggling of fuel and other goods, while also controlling informal border crossings or “trochas,” among other crimes.

Criminal groups

This state, with approximately a 160-kilometre border with the Colombian department of Norte de Santander, is home to most criminal groups. Testimonies collected for this report point to organised armed groups (OAG) such as **Los Rastrojos**, **Los Urabeños** (also known as the “Gulf Clan,” “Usuga Clan” or “Autodefensas Gaitanistas”), **Águilas Negras** (Black Eagles) and the **People’s Liberation Army** (EPL), known as “Pelusos.” The **ELN** and the **FARC**, with various cells, fronts or residual groups, are also present.

Criminal groups such as “**La Línea**” (which emerged between 2013 and 2014) also operate on this border, as an offshoot of the “Gulf Clan” apparently led by a Venezuelan national nicknamed “El Causa,” whose real name is presumably Jesús José Hernández Almarza. This highly violent organised armed group is mainly deployed in Ureña.

There is another criminal group, mainly active in San Antonio and Ureña, known as “**Bota de Cauchos**” or “Botacauchos” (“rubber boots” because of the Wellington boots they usually wear), composed mainly of Venezuelan nationals, with apparent links to civil and military officials of the Maduro regime, according to testimonies given during of this investigation.

There is evidence showing that the FBL (also known as “Boliches”) and the “**Tren de Aragua**” criminal group also have a presence in Táchira and control some border crossings. Similarly, since early 2018, when Freddy Bernal was appointed by Nicolás Maduro as “Protector of Táchira,” some parapolice groups, so-called “colectivos,” have been taking a leading role in the control of several informal crossings and other illegal activities in the region. One of the main groups is known as “Colectivo de Seguridad Fronteriza” (Border Security Collective) which, in February 2019, in San Antonio, was very active in preventing the entry of humanitarian aid secured by Venezuelan opposition.⁴³

Incentives for crime

The factors that encourage the presence of all these organised crime groups—including other smaller ones—in this bi-national territory, with the largest flow of people and commercial exchanges in Latin America, include:

43 <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/colectivo-fronterizo-ayuda-humanitaria-venezuela/>

- The repeated **border closures**, ordered mainly from the Venezuelan side.
- The **increasing number of Venezuelans migrating to or traversing Colombia** on their way to other countries in the region.
- The **difference in the cost of many goods**, sometimes abysmal, e.g. the price of fuel.
- The **shortage of many products** on the Venezuelan side.
- The **difficulties in obtaining the necessary documents** to cross the border from either side.
- The **search for exit routes for cocaine** produced in Colombia.
- The **full-on combat of the Colombian government against illegal groups**—in sharp contrast to the permissiveness shown by the Maduro regimen—, which drives them to Venezuelan territory as a haven.

This is a breeding ground for smuggling of various goods, charging passage fees, drug trafficking, corruption, extortion, trafficking in persons for prostitution, arms trafficking and forgery of ID documents, among other crimes.

Clashes

The war for the control of the crossing trails—which could total 50 or 60 in Táchira—and for the other illegal activities is being fought in blood and fire in this region. These organised crime groups are constantly engaged in armed conflict over control of informal border crossings and other illegal businesses, leaving hundreds of people murdered and missing, year after year.

The victims are not only the members of these illegal groups, but also military and law enforcement officers, as well as civilians who cross the border or make their living in the area. Several massacres have taken place on the Táchira border as a result. In June 2019, a total of 12 people were killed, apparently in a clash between members of “Los Rastrojos” and another criminal gang.⁴⁴ NGO Fundaredes noted out that in October 2019 alone, another 33 people were executed on the Táchira border by illegal groups.⁴⁵

One of the most recent cases of this type of clashes occurred on February 15, 2020, when the ELN attacked the Rastrojos gang—also known as “La Empresa” (The Company)—in Boca de Grita, resulting in several people injured. The shooting was apparently caused by disputes between these two groups over control of the trail near

the La Unión bridge, which connects Boca de Grita with Puerto Santander.



Photo No. 4. Boca de Grita Crossing.

Source: Photographer Mario Franco, La Opinión, Cúcuta, Colombia

⁴⁴ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/enfrentamiento-entre-grupos-armados-deja-12-muertos-en-frontera-con-venezuela-377330>

⁴⁵ <https://www.fundaredes.org/2019/04/29/fundaredes-eln-convirtio-a-la-frontera-en-un-territorio-de-sangre-y-muerte/>

GRUESOME MURDERS

In July 2019, in Ureña, a group of Venezuelan military captured five individuals carrying three human heads in a bag as they tried to cross the Táchira River.⁴⁷ A month earlier, in the same border town, the decapitated body of another person was found—some versions suggest that it was a member of the ELN—whose head was then thrown in front of a Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) post in Ureña.⁴⁸ In December 2019, three paramilitaries were captured while carrying the head of a missing GNB soldier.⁴⁹ These killings usually go unpunished.

Violent deaths in the Táchira border region also result from clashes between security forces and members of illegal groups. In February 2020, six alleged members of the organised armed group called “Los Rastrojos” were killed in a gunfight against officers of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) in the municipality of Ayacucho in Táchira.⁵⁰

The constant clashes between gangs and the exercise of power they represent have caused the displacement of many people who flee from the horror and violence. This is happening both on the Venezuelan and the Colombian side of the border.

These informal crossings represent a highly lucrative business for illegal groups that control them, earning them thousands of dollars a day. Each migrant or anyone who wants to cross the border through these trails must pay a fee in Colombian pesos to these mafias. These illegal crossings are used to smuggle huge amounts of petrol into Colombia, while other types of goods go from side to side.

Corruption enables smuggling at the Táchira border. In September 2019, 17 officials were arrested for smuggling fuel from Táchira state into Colombia. **Ten of them worked at PDVSA,**

five at Corpoelec and two were National Guards.⁵¹ However, the network of officials involved in this illegal activity is certainly much larger and fully operational.

A cross-cutting element of all organised criminal activity in Táchira is the direct involvement or complicity of certain military and public officials.

Impact

Illegal groups operating at the border, mainly those most organised and with larger membership, such as the ELN and the FARC, exercise social control over the communities in the territories they dominate, going so far as to replace authorities in some tasks such as policing.

Punishments for those who break their rules can range from a **fine to death**. They often obtain **significant support from local residents, as they help communities with ill-gotten money**, such as renovating a school, donating some medicine or, as witnesses interviewed for this investigation noted, even distributing boxes from the Local Production and Supply Committees (CLAP) subsidised food programme.⁵²

Another source of concern, confirmed by testimonies obtained for this study, is the **forced recruitment, including of children and adolescents**, by these groups at the Táchira border.⁵³ Similarly, the awful living conditions of Venezuelan people, from the social and economic point of view, drive many young people to join one of these organised crime groups.

According to several non-governmental organisations and people consulted in this investigation, **the ELN uses several radio stations for ideologisation, indoctrination and political propaganda**. These include 90.1 FM and 96.7 FM in the border region.⁵⁴

46 <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/02/16/violencia-en-la-frontera-entre-colombia-y-venezuela-el-eln-ataco-a-un-grupo-paramilitar-en-tachira-y-luego-intervino-el-ejercito/>

47 <https://www.laopinion.com.co/frontera/sorprenden-5-hombres-con-3-cabezas-humanas-en-costales-180254>

48 <https://www.laopinion.com.co/judicial/lanzaron-cabeza-de-guerrillero-comando-de-la-gnb-en-urena-178160>

49 <https://diariolavoz.net/2019/12/30/decapitan-a-un-sargento-de-la-gnb-y-los-aprehendieron-en-la-frontera-con-colombia/>

50 <https://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/muertos-seis-presuntos-integrantes-de-los-rastrojos-en-frontera-venezolana-YB1993818>

51 <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/reverol-17-funcionarios-fueron-detenidos-por-contrabando-de-combustible/>

52 <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/investigacion/aparece-el-sello-del-eln-en-las-cajas-clap-de-maduro-363740>

53 <https://www.fundaredes.org/2018/09/11/boletin-007-jovenes-venezolanos-son-reclutados-por-grupos-armados-irregulares-en-la-frontera/>

54 https://caracol.com.co/radio/2017/08/10/internacional/1502400681_513164.html



ORGANISED CRIME IN SUCRE

Approximate population: 1,000,000 inhabitants.

Murder rate: 61 per 100,000 inhabitants (OVV, 2019), the 6th highest in the country.

With nearly 700 km of coastline, the state of Sucre was once a peaceful, quiet paradise. Today, it is the epicentre of various organised crime activities, such as drug trafficking, cargo robbery, human trafficking, extortion and kidnapping, among other crimes, making it one of the most violent, crime-ridden areas in Venezuela.

Criminal groups

The proximity of the coast of Sucre to Trinidad and Tobago encourages various illegal activities between the two points, most notably drug trafficking. At present, many of its towns, mainly those located in the Paria Peninsula, in the municipalities of Arismendi, Mariño and Valdez, are controlled by organised criminal gangs that have taken over the drug trafficking along this route.

Testimonies collected in interviews conducted as part of this investigation show that towns such as Río Caribe, San Juan de Las Galdonas, Santa Isabel, San Juan de Unare, Güiría, Yaguaraparo, Guacuco and Guarataro are now controlled by criminal gangs that traffic drugs to the Caribbean, with Trinidad and Tobago as their main destination. According to various sources, the main criminal group is known as “Los Valencianos,” which is actually an appendage or cell of the “Tren de Aragua” large gang, run from Tocarón prison by “Niño Guerrero.”

THE PRISON LAW

This criminal group is reportedly made up of criminals who should be paying sentences in the Aragua prison, but are somehow at large, clashed with another gang in September 2018.⁵⁵

The incident took place between the towns of San Juan de Las Galdonas, the centre of operations of the “Tren de Aragua” gang in the region, and San Juan de Unare, which reportedly left dozens of people dead, whose bodies were never found.

*Some locals reported that some of the dead were **dismembered and then buried**, while others were **thrown into the sea**.*

Interviews conducted for this investigation indicate that the arrival of these Aragua criminals in Sucre can be explained by the close relationship between Tareck El Aissami, former Aragua governor and current oil minister, and Sucre governor Edwin Rojas, who was also a deputy minister under El Aissami at the Ministry of Interior and Justice.

The drug trafficking gangs in these villages operate with state-of-the-art technology. Locals reported the use of drones by these groups to monitor the areas they dominate.

Other groups engaged in drug trafficking in Sucre are the “Zacarias” and “Ring Doblado” gangs. The former is led by a criminal operating mainly out of the state of Bolívar, where he is reportedly also involved in illegal gold mining. In Río Caribe, a criminal with the alias “Edguer”—along with his lieutenants, nicknamed “Chipilín,” “Chuche” and

⁵⁵ <https://elmercurioweb.com/noticias/2018/9/28/militarizada-san-juan-de-galdonas-del-estado-sucres-tras-enfrentamiento-de-bandas>

“Coco”—is reportedly the leader of a gang that dominates drug trafficking and exercises social control in the town, with the alleged support of the incumbent mayor.

The residents of towns on the Paria Peninsula live in fear and are generally reluctant to provide details of drug trafficking activities and other forms of organised crime, out of fear of being killed. Many residents of the area believe that civilian and military officers are also involved in these crimes.

RAVISHED LAND

The presence of drug trafficking in the coastal towns of Sucre has also changed the livelihood of a good part of their residents. Many fishermen have now been recruited, of their own free will or by force, as collaborators with drug trafficking gangs. Tourism in these villages used to be bustling, but today it is almost non-existent. Agricultural production has been reduced to a fraction of its former self, which has impoverished most of the population.

Fishing on this coast has also been impacted by the theft of boats or boat engines, with criminals often leaving crews adrift. Often these actions are aimed only at stealing equipment, but on other occasions **fishermen are targeted in an attempt to clear the drug trafficking route** between the state of Sucre and Trinidad and Tobago.

These criminal gangs not only target the civilian population, but also police and military officers. In July 2019, three coast guards—a lieutenant, a sergeant and a corporal—of the Venezuelan Navy were killed while patrolling the coast of Paria.⁵⁶

As if that were not enough, organised gangs in Sucre, especially in the Irapa-Yaguaraparo-Güiria axis, target agricultural producers, stealing cocoa crops, livestock and other goods. On occasion, criminals forcibly appropriate the land.

Smuggling of migrants and human trafficking

The economic, social and political crisis facing Venezuela has led to a major migration, which already reaches 4.7 million people according to the UN agency for refugees UNHCR.⁵⁷ The state of Sucre is one of the main points of transfer of illegal migrants to Trinidad and Tobago, on boats leaving from Güiria, capital of the Valdez municipality. Unofficial figures put the number of Venezuelans in this Caribbean country between 40,000 and 50,000, both illegally and legally.

Interviewees said that people have to pay about US\$300 to be taken to Trinidad and Tobago on a boat. The 100-kilometre trip between Güiria and the Caribbean island usually takes about three to four hours. Often these cargo or fishing boats are overloaded with migrants and smuggled goods, which increases the risk of shipwreck, especially when sailing through a sector known as “Boca de Dragón,” in the Gulf of Paria, with strong currents and waves.

A large number of the boats that set sail from Güiria reportedly transport women who, of their own free will or under false pretences, go to Trinidad and Tobago to be sexually exploited. Venezuelan and Trinidadian mafias are said to be involved in these trafficking activities, including corrupted officials, who turn a blind eye to the illegal departure of these vessels.

Between May and June 2019, two vessels shipwrecked en route from Güiria to Trinidad and Tobago.⁵⁸ Dozens of Venezuelans died in these two incidents. Deputies of the National Assembly denounced that Venezuelan women were travelling on these trips as victims of human trafficking.

Road pirates

Another organised crime activity in the state of Sucre is road piracy, which targets cargo vehicles. Both in Troncal 9, which connects the state of Sucre with Anzoátegui, and in Troncal 10, which connects Sucre with Monagas, there are gangs

⁵⁶ <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/asesinaron-a-tres-guardacostas-de-sucre-en-la-costa-de-paria/>

⁵⁷ <https://www.acnur.org/situacion-en-venezuela.html>

⁵⁸ <https://armando.info/Reportajes/Details/2574>

that engage in robbery of cargo trucks, transport vehicles and even private individuals. The so-called “El Curi” gang operates in Troncal 10. The Arapo-Nurucual and Casanay-Monagas axes are particularly dangerous in terms of road robberies, with gangs armed with weapons such as rifles and grenades.

On 31 December 2018, Sucre governor’s sister Lisbeth Rojas and her husband were killed on a stretch of road from Cumaná to Cumanacoa, after being intercepted by members of a criminal gang.⁵⁹

The M.O. is diverse. Sometimes the criminals place objects on the road so that the vehicles must pull over. On other occasions, they take advantage of protests on the road to target vehicles that are forced to stop. They also often set up checkpoints, passing as uniformed police, have cars pull over and then proceed to commit their crimes.

Cargo drivers are so afraid of driving on Sucre roads that many wait at military checkpoints and leave only at a certain time, in a caravan, escorted by a convoy of the National Guard.

Impunity

A constant feature in all criminal activities in Sucre is impunity. The processing of the few reports that are filed is slow and yields no results. There are practically no known cases, at least relevant instances, in which the Public Prosecutor’s Office has conducted investigations until the culprits are brought to justice.

It seems that security forces only act when a criminal group affects their interests. This makes the hidden data of crime—cases that go unreported—a huge figure, since people do not trust the police or the Judiciary. Several interviewees perceive the Sucre state government as outlawed, inefficient and complacent with the region’s criminal activities.



ORGANISED CRIME IN DELTA AMACURO

Approximate population: 160,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 60 per 100,000 inhabitants (OVV)

In spite of being one of least populated states in Venezuela, with a mainly rural territory, Delta Amacuro has today the seventh highest murder rate in Venezuela (60 per 100,000 inhabitants). In this situation, the violent action of organised criminal groups that have taken over vast sectors of its territory has been a determining factor.⁶⁰

Criminal groups

A powerful organised crime gang, called “El Evander” or “Delta Liberation Front” operates in Delta Amacuro and has spread to other states, even beyond Venezuela’s borders. Although its leader Evander Miguel Barradas was gunned down in 2019 when he faced a joint task force from the army and the CICPC, his lieutenants and other members of the criminal group continue to operate.

⁵⁹ <https://elestimulo.com/hermana-del-gobernador-del-estado-sucre-es-asesinada-durante-intento-de-robo/>

⁶⁰ <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/informe-anual-de-violencia-2019/>



Photo No. 5. "El Evander" Criminal Gang.
Source: Twitter

BROKEN ALLIANCES?

Sources consulted pointed out that, in principle, the members of this gang acted at will, in the face of inaction by local authorities, but that later, differences emerged between criminals and regional authorities.

Law enforcement agencies decided to take action after governor Liseta Hernández (PSUV) received death threats from the "Evander" gang. The gang's leader was gunned down in March 2019, in a gunfight against police and military officers.⁶¹

After the death of Evander Miguel Barrada, a.k.a. "El Culón" reportedly assumed leadership of the criminal group, but he was arrested in May 2019 in Trinidad and Tobago along with other accomplices.⁶²

This criminal group is engaged in extortion, robbery of farms or boats, murder, kidnapping, gold, fuel and drug trafficking, among other crimes. The tentacles of this group also reach to the state of Monagas. Their leader, Evander Barradas, was serving a sentence at the Monagas Penitentiary, known as La Pica prison, where he was one of the "pranes."

Members of the criminal gang "El Evander" charge "vacunas" or protection fees to farmers and merchants in the areas they control. They also extort money from owners or handlers of the boats that sail the waterways of Delta Amacuro. One source said that boats leaving from the port of Volcán (Tucupita municipality) to San José de Amacuro, a town on the border with Guyana, must pass through at least five river checkpoints, where they must pay corrupt officers of the **Bolivarian Armed Forces and organised crime gangs that control the region a \$5 fee for each jerrycan or container of fuel** that is smuggled internally or into the neighbouring country.



Photo No. 6. Volcán river port in Tucupita. Source: Notidiario.

⁶¹ <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/megabanda-venezuela-trinidad-tobago/>

⁶² <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/venezuelas-evander-gang-leader-held-in-tt-6.2.849655.de097b4f83>

Several murders are committed by organised crime gangs for the control of waterways in Delta Amacuro. Sometimes the victims are members of rival groups or civilians, including local indigenous people.

As in Sucre state, the proximity of Delta Amacuro's coastline to Trinidad and Tobago makes the region prone to smuggling of goods, trafficking in persons and drug trafficking, among other crimes. In this context, the "El Evander" gang is one of the main players in the business of drug and weapon trafficking to the Caribbean island. In May 2019, one of its leaders, alias "El Culón," along with seven gang members, was arrested in possession of firearms in Trinidad and Tobago, where they have forged alliances with local criminal gangs.⁶³ There is grave concern on the island nation about the rising influence this criminal group.

Journalist Sebastiana Barráez, a specialist in border issues and organised crime, has noted that members of "El Evander" are part of a criminal alliance with paramilitary groups, such as *Los Rastrojos*,⁶⁴ for the transfer of cocaine from the Colombian-Venezuelan border in Táchira, to Delta Amacuro, to then ship it to Trinidad and Tobago. This operation allegedly involves two leaders of the group, alias "Pepe" and "Ivancito," who reportedly have direct contact with alias "Necoclic," the leader of *Los Rastrojos*.

DEFENCELESS ETHNIC GROUP

Another source of concern is the continued involvement of indigenous Waraos in illegal fuel smuggling and drug trafficking, mainly to Guyana. Many have already been arrested in these actions.

They are driven by poverty and hunger, and are often used by organised crime gangs because they are less suspicious when sailing in their canoes and because they are skilled navigators in the state's intricate canals and other waterways.

Another organised crime gang in the region is the so-called "**Barrancas Syndicate**," which operates out of Barrancas in Monagas, but is also active in Delta Amacuro, using the Orinoco River, which connects the two regions, as means of transport.

This criminal group has capitalised on a weaker "El Evander" gang to reinforce its drug trafficking activities, both domestically and to Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana. They navigate the waterways of Delta Amacuro, targeting fishermen and forcing them to pay protection fees. They are also involved in human trafficking, the smuggling of petrol into neighbouring nations and various murders.

Human trafficking and smuggling

Delta Amacuro's proximity to Trinidad and Tobago makes trafficking and smuggling attractive to organised crime gangs in the region. As in Güiria, Sucre, boats illegally transporting people to the Caribbean island often depart from Tucupita and other parts of the state. Passengers must pay about US\$300 for the trip. Many corrupt officials charge to let the boats depart. Young women—often underage—are forcibly put on the boats, in some cases under false pretences, to be sexually exploited in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sources claim that criminal gangs in Trinidad and Tobago pay amounts of up to **US\$1,000 for each young woman handed over to them by criminal groups** from Delta Amacuro. After the transaction they would also be paid a monthly commission. Many of the victims are recruited or abducted in different regions of Venezuela.

Sometimes, the boats used by the criminal gangs are not suitable for sailing to Trinidad and Tobago with such large number of people on board, which increases the possibility of shipwrecks. In June 2019, 20 people were rescued from a drifting boat that had departed from Delta Macuro for the Caribbean island eight days prior.⁶⁵ Two of them, who reportedly belonged to the "Barrancas Syndicate," were arrested for human trafficking.

⁶³ <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/megabanda-venezuela-trinidad-tobago/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/06/17/surgio-un-grupo-paramilitar-venezolano-al-servicio-de-la-temida-banda-los-rastrojos-y-gana-terreno-en-la-frontera-con-colombia/>

⁶⁵ <https://puntodecorte.com/rescaten-20-personas-delta-amacuro/>

Wildlife trafficking

From Pedernales to the Antonio Díaz municipality, mafia groups capture animal species, mainly birds, to be sold and transported to Trinidad and Tobago and, to a lesser extent, to Guyana.

The most sought after species include ruddy-breasted seedeaters, dickcissels, red siskins, yellow-crowned parrots, and scarlet macaws, which are almost extinct in the region. These birds can be sold in Delta Amacuro for about

US\$20 or US\$30 a piece, but once in Trinidad and Tobago, they can go for up to US\$100. This is a lucrative business, involving local and Trinidadian mafias, which has a tremendous impact on the local wildlife.

To get a glimpse of the size of the problem, in 2016, three Trinidadian nationals were arrested on board a boat near Mariusa, a town northeast of Tucupita, transporting more than 1,000 birds in six cages, along with some mammals.⁶⁶



ORGANISED CRIME IN BARINAS

Approximate population: 980,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 53 per 100,000 inhabitants (OVV), the 14th highest in the country.

Barinas borders Táchira and Apure, which in turn border Colombia. Although it is not as violence-ridden as the other two states, there are important expressions of organised crime. Eighty-three per cent of interviewees in the field work on this state believe that organised crime has increased in the last two years.

Criminal groups

A criminal group with a strong presence in Barinas is the “Bolivarian Liberation Forces,” known as “Boliches,” also known as “Patriotic Forces of National Liberation” (FPLN). It is a guerrilla organisation that emerged 1992 in Venezuela and gained strength during the Chávez and Maduro administrations. These criminals are mostly active in the municipalities of Zamora and Andrés Bello Blanco. They engage in **extortion or collection of protection money** from agricultural producers, **kidnapping** and other illegal

activities. All under the alleged protection of state authorities.

Sources claim that this guerrilla group has a sort of political wing, called “Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar Zamora.” Six members of the political organisation were killed in July 2019, in the Ticoporo forest reserve in Socopó, Barinas, when they were ambushed by an armed group.

According to the interviews conducted for this analysis, there is a political alliance between the FBL, together with its civil representation groups, and the ruling party PSUV. In July 2017, during the closing of the campaign for the election of the illegitimate National Constituent Assembly, several alleged members of this paramilitary group were seen carrying—seemingly replicas of—rifles, in a caravan organised by the local government in the streets of the Antonio José de Sucre municipality (Socopó) in Barinas.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ <http://noticias.masverdedigital.com/venezuela-mp-acuso-a-tres-trinitarios-por-contrabando-de-mas-de-mil-aves-de-fauna-silvestre-en-delta-amacuro/>

⁶⁷ <https://runrun.es/nacional/318819/boliches-armados-cerraron-campana-constituyente-en-barinas/>

“LA DOÑA”

The power of Zamora municipality mayor Maigualida Santana is clear and unrivalled. Some call her “La Doña,” and she has an alleged close relationship with the FBL.⁶⁸ Santana reportedly controls distribution of fuel, food, cement, water and other subsidised goods in the region,⁶⁹ but she also allegedly issues threats against local ranch owners.⁷⁰

The FBL in Barinas reportedly act together with the “colectivos” in acts of intimidation against the opposition in the state. Sources noted that in the most recent election of the leadership of the National Assembly in January 2020, members of this criminal group went to the residences of some opposition deputies in the region to pressure them into supporting the current president of Parliament, Juan Guaidó. There are also reports of threats against all those they identify as possible financiers of the democratic forces.

Witnesses noted in the context of this investigation that the **FBL has control over a large number of petrol stations in Barinas**, so they have easy access to petrol for resale and smuggling. They also tend to place improvised checkpoints on the different roads to target drivers. They do not use a particular uniform, but a distinctive feature of their clothing is the use of a black belt bag and long Wellington boots.

Another relevant fact that proves the presence of the guerrilla group in the region is the permanence of FARC leader “Jesús Santrich” in a production unit located in El Cantón, Andrés Bello municipality in Barinas. That was allegedly the location of the video where the criminal group announced its return to arms in 2019. In May 2020, the special commissioner for security and intelligence of Juan Guaidó’s interim government, Iván Simonovis, disclosed



Photo No. 7. FBL followers, in a motorcade in Barinas, in 2017
Source: La Patilla

photos and videos that allegedly prove that Jesús Santrich lives in Caracas.⁷¹

Sources claim said that although the ELN and the FARC do not have a permanent presence in the state, they often make inroads or send emissaries to extort money from Barinas merchants, industrialists and agricultural producers. According to one of the sources for this study, there are around 300 “boliches” controlling the La Gabarra area.

Impact

Agricultural production in Barinas has dwindled due to criminality. Cattle theft and robbery are commonplace here, as in other nearby regions. There are gangs of cattle rustlers that frequently target agricultural producers.

There are countless cases of criminals who break into production units, kill the cattle and take the meat. They then sell the product to consumers without any kind of sanitary control.

⁶⁸ <https://www.reportero24.com/2017/07/07/sebastiana-barraez-los-ataco-las-fblfpln/>

⁶⁹ https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/concejal-denuncio-a-alcaldesa-de-municipio-zamora-de-barinas-por-venta-irregular-de-agua/?fb_comment_id=2608770169186629_2610364292360530

<https://www.entornointeligente.com/venezuela-denuncian-en-fiscalia-de-barinas-a-la-alcaldesa-maigualida-santana/>

⁷⁰ <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/diputado-superlano-denuncio-asedio-de-grupos-irregulares-a-los-ciudadanos-del-municipio-pedraza/>

⁷¹ <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/con-fotografias-denuncian-que-jesus-santrich-esta-viviendo-en-caracas/673810>

Entire herds—cows, bulls and even buffalos—are stolen from the farms, taken by foot up to the road, where they are brought onto cargo vehicles, sometimes smuggled into Colombia. Some producers explained that those who engage in these crimes operate with impunity, because security agencies show little interest in the issue, despite the Cattle Raising Protection Law.

Many **farms are invaded** by individuals who supposedly belong to farmer groups, but who are often actually people with connections in the regional government. Sources claim that these private property violations are sometimes a form of political retaliation, or an excuse to extort money from the victims or to collect money with the promise of solving the situation.

Some producers in Barinas have complaint about the actions of officials from the National Land Institute, including Luis Soteldo, Luis Mendoza and Mariela León.⁷² In January 2020, the mother of Barinas MP Julio Cesar Reyes accused them of taking over her farm, without any judicial order whatsoever.⁷³

There are complaints about some farmer leaders who would extort money from producers in exchange for finding palliative measures for the invasions. The “solutions” involve moving the professional invaders from one production unit to another. Sometimes land plots are sold after the takeover has been completed with the help of members of alleged cooperatives.

Cattle theft, land invasions and expropriations of productive farms, as well as the crimes committed by gangs, reduce agricultural capacity in Barinas, which translates into more poverty and unemployment in the region.

Land invasions in Barinas by criminal gangs account for 23.22% of the territory fit for agricultural use in this state, with the municipality of Barinas being the most affected, with 38.47%. In the following maps, the red zones represent the invaded lands:

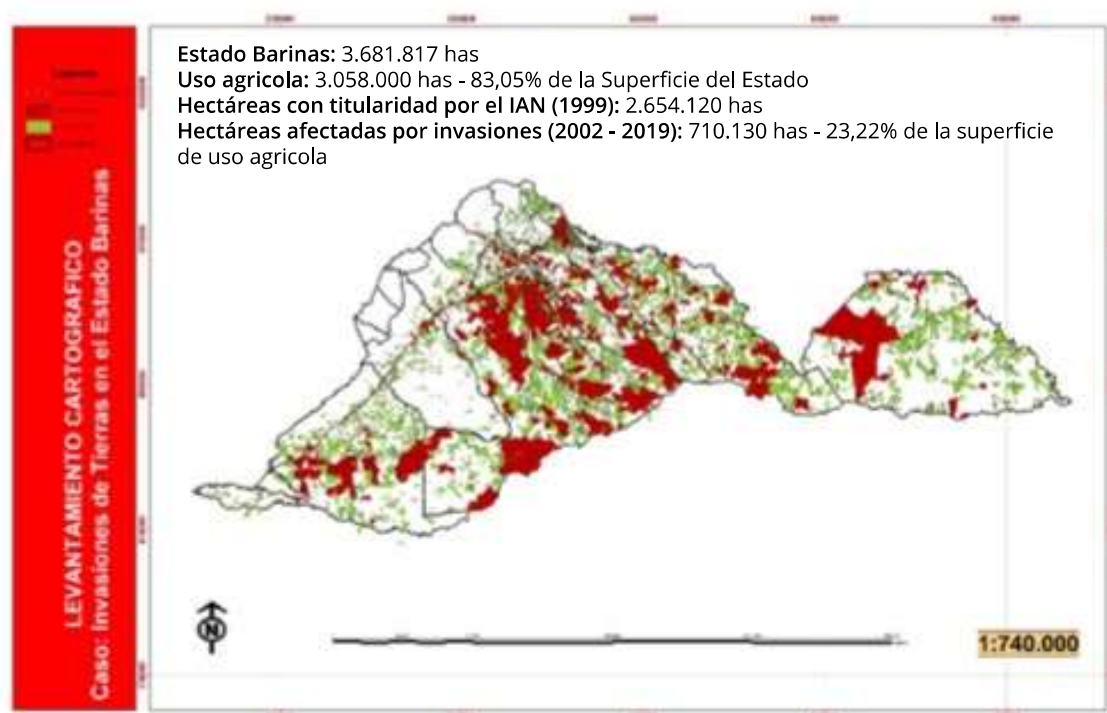


Figure No. 3. Map of invaded lands in Barinas
 Source: Authors

⁷² <https://www.eluniversal.com/politica/60049/denuncian-que-inti-paralelo-invade-finca-dona-rosa-en-barinas>

⁷³ <https://efectocucuyo.com/politica/expropian-finca-en-barinas-de-la-familia-del-diputado-julio-cesar-reyes/>

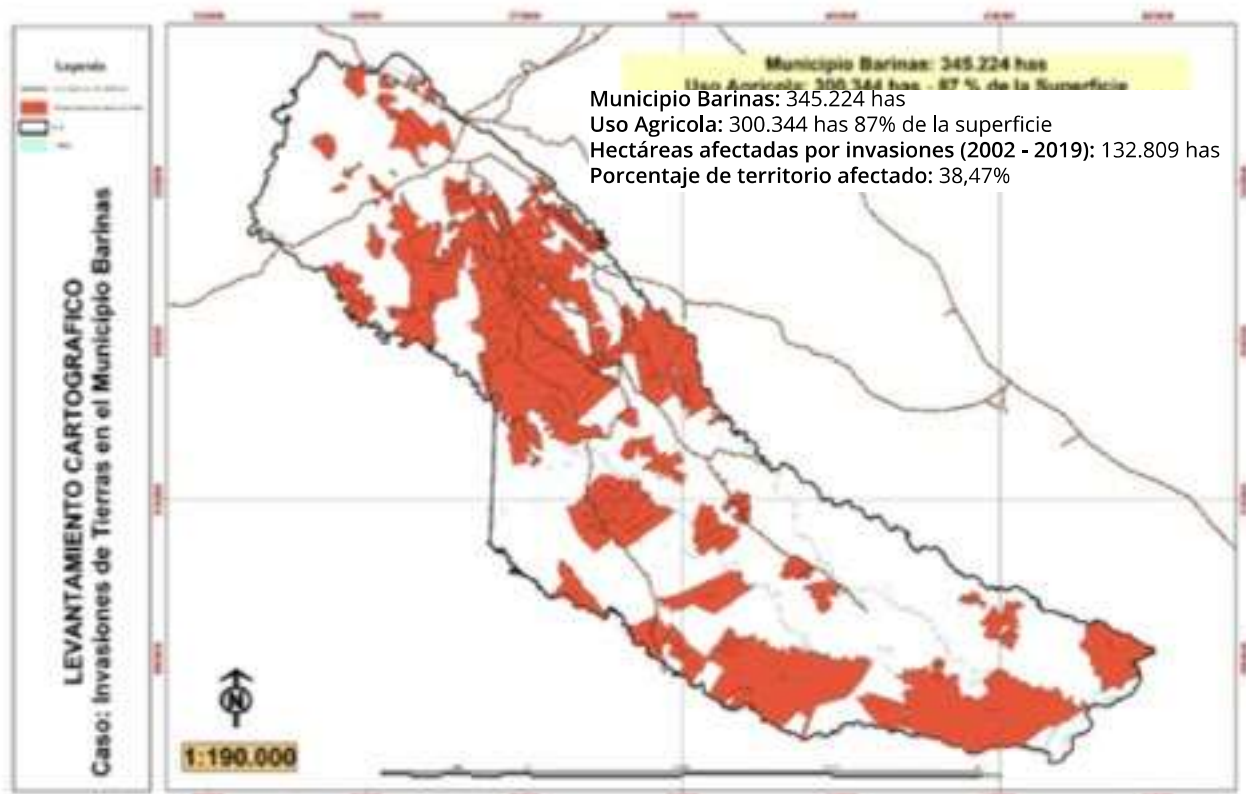
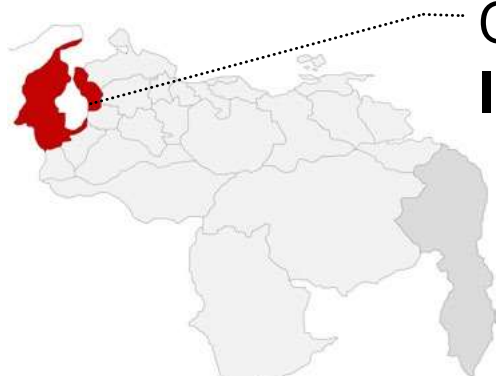


Figure No. 4. Map of invaded lands in the Barinas municipality
Source: Authors



ORGANISED CRIME IN ZULIA

Approximate population: 3,800,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 60 per 100,000 inhabitants, the 8th highest in the country (OVV, 2019).

The State of Zulia continues to be the entry and exit point for precursors, raw materials and processed drugs. This territory is home to large gangs and criminal networks, and paramilitary groups.

The northern area is a strategic point on the border between Venezuela and Colombia, as a bridge between both nations and a doorway to commercial and cultural exchange. It has become, however, an area disputed by criminal gangs and other groups. Some 80% of interviewees believe that organised crime has increased at the border in the last five years.

Power cuts—for hours or even days—are common in Zulia, along with political violence. In 2017, elections for governor were won by Juan Pablo Guanipa of Primero Justicia, but when he refused to be sworn in before the questioned Constituent Assembly, the National Electoral Council held a repeat election and swore in PSUV's Omar Prieto, who has been the subject of complaints of police abuse and violent discourse.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ <https://talcualdigital.com/de-como-prieto-y-sus-muchachos-sembraron-el-terror-en-el-zulia/>

Types of crimes

Fuel smuggling is the most common crime. In addition, there is the **trafficking of goods, strategic materials and weapons**, as well as **abuse of authority, influence peddling and corruption**. Drug trafficking is one of the crimes that most impacts the population in this region, as shown by the large number of reports, cases discovered by the police and constant reports of clandestine airstrips in La Guajira, used for landing drug cartel aircraft. On the road to La Guajira, the illegal sale of petrol and diesel in large quantities takes place in broad daylight.

A source in the Venezuelan tobacco sector noted that **smuggling of cigarettes** accounts for 25% of the domestic market, entering mainly through La Guajira in Zulia. The “Las Pulgas” market in Maracaibo is reportedly the distribution centre for illicit cigarettes. This situation impinges on fiscal revenues and the legally established manufacturers in Venezuela.

Criminal groups

The guerrilla group with the largest presence in the state is the **ELN**, but **Colombian paramilitaries** and **drug cartels** also operate. However, there are also **mafias** that fight for territory, including two of the most traditional gangs called “Mushana” (phonetic reproduction of a name with no written record) and “Los Gavilanes,” whose leader is called Fernández, who operates on the road between Paraguaipoa, Guarero and Paraguachón, and a third mafia, which reportedly has the endorsement of the government, called “La Zona.”

The latter group operates in La Guajira, and is allegedly led by Douglas Chacón, brother of former mayor of La Goajira Hébert Chacón, who after leading a smaller gang has become the leader of “La Zona.” Their objective seems to be to “sweep away” the other mafias that control smuggling in the Paraguachón corridor and the traffic on the informal crossings. This seems to be also the goal of mafias that have traditionally

controlled the historic centre of Maracaibo, operating out of the Las Pulgas market. “La Zona” has been gaining ground to the point that the ringleaders of the other two criminal groups are currently outside Venezuela.

Chacón has introduced criminal methods that have violated an unspoken pact or code of conduct between the groups operating there, including “Mushana” and “Los Gavilanes,” about refraining from targeting people of the Wayúu ethnic group. In this regard, an NGO in the region has recorded about 70 young Wayúu killed since May 2018. As a result, tensions have been mounting among native inhabitants of the Guajira, who have historically lived together with paramilitaries, guerrillas and parapolice groups without seeing their lives and property threatened.

CHÁVEZ EXACERBATED BORDER ISSUES

*The presence of illegal groups on the Colombian-Venezuelan border is not a new occurrence, but Hugo Chávez's coming to power introduced a series of issues that aggravated this reality. One determining factor was his **expulsion of the DEA**, despite the agency's vast experience in fighting drug cartels. Also, the creation of a **subsidised and asymmetric economy** based on the immense Venezuelan oil bonanza, which brought about a **structural distortion** that turned the border into a crime paradise.*

An informant reported the existence of the following gangs in Zulia, in addition to those mentioned above:

- The FARC and the People's Liberation Army (EPL), which are in full agreement on charging passers-by for protection fees. The areas of Perijá, Machiques, El Cruce, Santa Bárbara, and their surroundings, are dominated by these groups in specific sectors, and over which no law enforcement agency has any control.

- Boliches or FBL, which are in certain sectors of Barinas, notably strong in Santa Bárbara de Barinas, La Gabarra, and in much of the states of Mérida and Táchira. In places where they operate, such as La Gabarra, in Santa Bárbara de Barinas, Army, National Guard and CICPC officers allow them to move freely around the area. They extort and harass agricultural producers.
- Colectivo del Pueblo, a collective group MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement) infiltrates all the police forces, creating new groups such as the D.C.I. FAES (FAES Counterintelligence Department), under the command of the collective that calls itself Marcos Portillo.
- El Cagón gang, the king of vehicle theft in the Lara-Zulia region, where they extort and commit acts of terrorism that extends from Zulia to the states of Trujillo, Mérida, Falcón and Carabobo. Its members use all types of clothing, as well as high-calibre National Guard firearms. They are known for their relationship with the protector of the Sucre municipality, the prison gang leaders of Trujillo, Urbana, San Carlos and El Dorado, as well as with CICPC officers at Caja Seca, Trujillo, Mene Grande and Ojeda, who are known to be their main collaborators.

These criminal groups also have the following allies: alias Memo, allied with the Elenos from Machiques; "Chourio" and "El Capulina," allied with the "Cobra Vacunas" of the Tulio Febres Cordero municipality; alias "El Abuelo" and "El Yamirito," allies and accomplices of hit man and extortioner alias "El Grabelito," with contact and friends with informants and criminals known as José Luis and "Cuatro Perniles."

Journalist Sebastiana Barráez revealed in February 2020 that the ELN has imposed a curfew on El Guayabo while Los Rastrojos have installed land mines in areas close to the Catatumbo region. "El Guayabo is the capital of the Udón Pérez parish in the Catatumbo municipality of

Zulia, on the border with Colombia. For days, heavily armed men arrived, dressed in uniforms and identifying themselves as members of the National Liberation Army (ELN), and ordered the inhabitants not to leave their homes," Barráez said.⁷⁵

"More recently, the producers farthest away from El Caño were told by Los Rastrojos that they'd better leave, because they were planting land mines in the area. They said they didn't want to see people walking around and that they should take all their belongings, including the cattle; they insisted they were planting land mines in the grazing lands, around the houses..."⁷⁶

Official warnings in Colombia

In September 2018, the Colombian Ombudsman's Office issued an early warning⁷⁷ about the high-risk situation for its nationals and foreigners transiting through Paraguachón, Maicao municipality, in the northeast of La Guajira, due to the presence of armed groups such as "La Zona" and "Los Mercenarios" throughout that year.

The official document of the Colombian state, which describes these gangs as "transnational criminal" organisations, warns about the illegal and violent control that "La Zona" exercises over the informal crossing at "La 80." Furthermore, it claims that "Los Mercenarios"—a group formed after division of the former—is a gang that carries out "extremely violent practices against the civilian population," including murder and dismembering and incinerating the bodies of the victims.

The Colombian Ombudsman's Office also identifies the presence of the National Liberation Army (ELN), 'post-demobilisation' groups of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) and other organised crime groups led by "pranes" and pro-government Venezuelan colectivos.

⁷⁵ <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/02/12/paramilitares-siembran-minas-en-la-zona-del-catatumbo-venezolano-y-la-guerrilla-impuso-el-toque-de-queda-en-el-guayabo/>

⁷⁶ Idem

⁷⁷ Ombudsman's Office, Early Warning No. 039 of Sept. 7, 2018, updated Sept. 16, 2019.

The alert is regularly updated, and it includes reports of frequent violations of international humanitarian law, including: attacks on the life, liberty and physical integrity of the civilian population; use of terrorist methods and means; displacement, recruitment and forced disappearance of civilians; trafficking in persons—including children and adolescents—and gender-based violence.

These criminal organisations are involved in other crimes in the vast border area between Venezuela and Colombia: smuggling of fuel (especially petrol) and livestock, drug trafficking and illegal trade in firearms.

The report by the Colombian authority includes a section with the description of cases of forced recruitment and use of children and adolescents—mostly indigenous and migrants from Venezuela—in criminal activities, mainly by the ELN and Venezuelan gangs.

Given the nature of the crimes and the frequency of aggressions committed by organised crime at the border, the Colombian Ombudsman's Office describes the risk faced by nationals and foreigners in the areas surrounding the formal crossing between the two countries, through the Guajira, as high. The aforementioned report recommends the intervention of civilian authorities—including the Ministry of the Interior—and law enforcement, including the Colombian Ministry of Defence, to protect the fundamental rights of vulnerable groups (indigenous people, farmers, Afro-Colombians and Venezuelan migrants) and to restore the rule of law in the town of Paraguachón and neighbouring areas.

The most recent version of Early Warning No. 039 dates from September 2019 and covers the extent of the impact on situations described during the first ten months of that year.

Impact

The penetration of organised crime has had a **direct impact on the Wayúu ethnic group**, both from the cultural point of view and regarding human rights violations.

Most interviewees in Zulia believe that law enforcement agencies are **complicit in criminal acts**. Government agencies perceived as most corrupt include the **police, the FANB and the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)**. Furthermore, the state government is allegedly involved in promoting the “La Zona” mafia, making the regional government one of the groups fighting for control of territory, to act as a criminal actor instead of fulfilling the duties entrusted by the Constitution.

This suggests a possible **participation of government agencies in criminal activities**, which implies a de-institutionalisation and subsequent distrust by citizens in these agencies.

Socially, values are in decline, leading to a different lifestyle that directly impacts the behaviour of children and young people. Migration is also on the rise, due to increased insecurity, unemployment and murder, among other crimes.

Politically, there is a marked lack of confidence in any political leader, while economically, investment is moving away from our borders. There is no security or guarantee for investors.



ORGANISED CRIME IN BOLÍVAR

Approximate population: 1,900,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 84 per 100,000 inhabitants, the third highest in the country (OVV, 2019).

The state of Bolívar borders the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Brazil. The border with Brazil is 2,199 km long and with Guyana 743 km. This is a vast territory where serious crime and great business opportunities converge, which has made the area one of the bloodiest regions in Venezuela.

stakeholders. The amount of material and money handled in gold smuggling make it the most important illegal business after petrol. Specialists estimate gold smuggling in 2018 alone in the excess of **US\$2.7 billion**.

Most of the gold is flown out of the country through clandestine airstrips.

Types of crimes

The most frequent crimes are those related to the **gold business, arms trafficking, petrol and drug trafficking**, in that order. Interviewees of this study agree that the illegal traffic of all these goods and strategic material require association to commit crimes, **involving official authorities, as well as some members of law enforcement and defence forces**, which adds abuse of authority, corruption, influence peddling, extortion and money laundering to the list of crimes.

In Bolívar, the **gold business gives a different dimension to organised crime and violence**. A vast territory disputed by the “gold syndicates,” pranes who control sectors with groups of mines and miners, in addition to the trade in supplies needed for extraction. They also handle distribution of drugs, food, medicines, transportation and regulate prostitution to prevent disease.

Indigenous chieftains confirm the information gathered in the investigation. The life of miners and the gold market involve regional, local, national and international authorities and



Photo No. 8. Clandestine airstrip in Bolívar

Criminal groups

Illegal mining of gold, coltan, iron, prostitution, arms trafficking, and other crimes have made this border very appealing to criminal groups, as the area remain lawless and with no protection for citizens. **In Bolivar, there are 300 indigenous communities impacted by the exploitation of the mining arc.** In an effort to protect themselves from the ELN and the organised gangs or *pranatos*, which fight over control of the mines, indigenous people created in 2015 the **Indigenous Security Corps**.

The exploitation of the so-called **Mining Arc** has been, since 2016, an evil incentive that began with the granting of mining concessions in **112,000 km²** for the legal exploitation of coltan, gold and diamond. In this territory, which overlaps five national parks, **mafias, illegal miners, the ELN, drug traffickers** and indigenous people coexist and have joined in the mining activities, exploiting even protected territories such as the Canaima national park. The **military and former FARC members are also involved**.⁷⁸

A MUCH COVETED GOLD

The mines—the booty to be “shared” or fought over—have the most diverse names, some of which make reference to the location or landscape: “Campanero,” “Las Cristinas,” “Morichalito,” “Sofía,” “El Valle” or “Florinda”; while others suggest the horror happening in the area, such as “El Muerto” or “El Muertico” (The Dead).

This territory is disputed by the ELN, which boast the protection of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), and illegal armed gangs called “gold syndicates” or “*pranatos*,” which are reportedly linked to former governor of Bolivar and the Cartel of the Suns, comprising about **25 criminal groups whose names are still unknown**.

Crime and links with the government exists within each of the local and regional institutions. “When a former REDI commander, such as Jesús Mantilla Oliveros, conceals the presence of the ELN he

is effectively protecting them, or when National Guards ignore the presence of the ELN after the Casablanca checkpoint, as noted by deputies of the National Assembly who were on their way to Anacoco, that is a criminal act,” says a member of civil society in the area, who will remain anonymous for their protection.

MP Sergio Vergara said that during the visit of the group of parliamentarians to the border with Guyana in November 2018, the presence of ELN members was directly confirmed, as they were seen on Anacoco Island, wearing their uniforms and carrying AK44 rifles.

In Bolivar, the groups that control the iron mines are different from those on the coltan or diamond business, and the aliases of gang leaders or “syndicates” are mentioned always in a hushed voice: “el Negro Fabio,” “El Coporo,” “Capitán or Gordo Bayón.”

“El Jairo” is the leader of the ELN group in the state of Bolivar, where the Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO) is located, with more than 100 gold mines distributed in areas that are managed from the towns of Tumeremo, El Dorado and El Callao. “El Jairo” is known to be present in the area for two and a half years, especially after the end of the term in office of governor General Francisco Rangel Gómez (PSUV), and the arrival of the new governor, also a general, Justo Noguera Prietri (PSUV), who has reportedly given green light to the ELN to eradicate the mining gang system (“gold syndicates”) created by his predecessor.

PRAY TO GOD

“El Jairo” is a Catholic and has had priests brought to him to celebrate mass in the jungle.

He identified, one by one, indigenous and community leaders, and then visited them in order to negotiate with them. Several reliable sources claim that he moves with total freedom throughout Guyana, despite the fact that there are 30 checkpoints on Troncal 10 (800 km from Puerto Ordaz and Ciudad Guayana to the Brazilian border). How this man reaches indigenous leaders in broad daylight is inexplicable.

⁷⁸ <http://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/>

The ELN leader reportedly recruited former military snipers to control the mines and the population of the area of Tumeremo and El Callao, imposing a curfew in those areas. This is where the most violent clashes have taken place since September 2018. He has an estimated 9 snipers, who are paid US\$400 a month (minimum monthly wage in Venezuela is US\$6). They also recruit young people to become guerrilla soldiers and pay them US\$300. The main training centre for these young people is reportedly located in the Sifontes municipality, in a mine called “El Beta.”

There are more than 300 press reports, published by different media outlets in recent years referring to guerrilla incursions, clashes between gold syndicates and the FANB, massacres, attacks on indigenous populations or communities. One of the most recent events occurred in November 2019, when at least five people, one National Guard sergeant and four indigenous people, were killed in the Gran Sabana region.⁷⁹

In November 2019, one of the most bloodthirsty leaders, known as “El Toto,” also reappeared and is now ruling El Callao, one of the richest areas in terms of gold deposits. Two communiqués that were distributed in the area with serious accusations were attributed to him. There he claims that Bolívar governor Justo Noguera Pietri opened the doors to Colombian guerrillas and that local mayor Alberto Hurtado received gold from him for the electoral campaign.

According to another informant, the stakeholders involved in these events are the ELN, or “Elenos,” in the southern sector of El Callao, from Uputa all the way to Santa Elena, a mining area. Forces that call themselves the **Revolutionaries of Colombia** also operate in Puerto Ayacucho. There is a presence of the **People’s Liberation Army**, “**Los Pelusos**,” at Kilometre 88. “**Los Diablos**” operate in San Felix. “**Los Rastrojos**” were also active, but were finished off by the ELN. The gold syndicate was clashing with the Elenos, and they divided up an area around El Callao and El Dorado. The “**construction syndicates**” hardly exist anymore because of the decline in the industry.

In the groups there are **women involved**, not only in cooking and similar chores, but they are also **active in campaigns, surveillance and raids**.

There are complicit officials, otherwise all these crimes could not be committed. Such is the case of the head of the military zone and his subordinates. It is presumed that government representatives maintain relations with these groups, which are managed directly from Caracas and in the region by the state governor.

Impact

Of the total gold mined, **only 10% to 30% is processed by state-owned company Minerven and delivered to the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV)**. The rest is smuggled out of Venezuela by various routes in cargo trucks, planes, helicopters and even with human “mules.”

The gold business in Bolívar is **done in an artisanal manner**, which is causing environmental destruction in the 112,000 km² of the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO), because there is no environmental protection programme in place. But, in addition, the operational structure of the business is irregular and illegal in all its phases, including drugs, services, supplies and the labour required by the business.

The basic companies that operate in the state, such as Sidor and Venalum, are bankrupt and, in the face of the economic crisis, their workers have joined the illegal mining industry, contributing to the serious environmental impact, because—like the rest of the miners—they work with mercury, also known as quicksilver, a material that exposes them to poisoning.

The criminal activities in Bolívar have had a strong negative social impact on the indigenous populations, especially on the Pemón people, who have seen their **hold on their territories** threatened. **Young people are recruited** by criminal groups operating in the area, while **prostitution** continues to rise.

The gold rush has unleashed widespread violence that has impacted the residents of

towns near mining operations. There have been unprecedented **massacres**. People have **precarious services, live in insecurity and among illegal groups**. This extreme situation has almost become the new normal. In addition, they have serious **problems in getting fuel and cooking gas**. They are most excluded.

Survival in the mining towns is ensured only for those with access to fuel, gold or foreign currency. In these areas, the national currency, the bolivar, is of no use whatsoever.

Authorities handing over territory to illegal groups, in particular the ELN, has turned Bolivar into a geopolitical problem, while promoting the existence of a **“parallel state.”**

Government entities perceived as **most corrupt** in relation to crime include **mayor’s offices, governor’s offices, the police and the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)**. In addition, there are

alleged links between the incumbent governor, Justo Noguera, and the previous governor, Rangel Gómez, and illegal groups. This contravenes the duty of public management. These are signs of the kleptocratic model that characterizes the current regime.

The corrupt, criminal and illegal groups reportedly receive funds from the regional and national government. When a member of the military is arrested for alleged crimes, it is because “he did not pay the full fee.” Similarly, when a report is filed against any police officer, at the CICPC or the Prosecutor’s Office, the report may be processed, but if the criminals are government allies, authorities turn a blind eye, unless there are political ramifications to the crime.



ORGANISED CRIME IN APURE

Approximate population: 600,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 37 per 100,000 inhabitants, the 21st highest in the country (OVV, 2019).

Criminal groups

In Apure, the action of the **ELN, FARC and former members of this guerrilla group** is commonplace. In the area known as Alto Apure, the People’s Liberation Army (EPL), the FBL or “Boliches,” common criminals and violent groups are still present.

There are complaints about the alleged links of these groups with municipal, regional and national government representatives. There are alliances that allow entry into Venezuelan territory, through the 800-km border of Apure with Colombia, with a 300-km border on the

Arauca River. The Capanaparo River is in the south, which is used by the gangs under the surveillance of the FARC. It is a fishing zone where guerrillas fine fishermen as a form of “collaboration.” Fuel smuggling is common in the area.

There are 3 regions with different dynamics:

- East to West in Alto Apure: the westernmost area, in Guasdalito
- Medio Apure: Includes the cities of Bruzual, Mantecal and Elorza, a FARC stronghold.

- Bajo Apure: Including the state capital, San Fernando.
- Alto Apure: with the Arauca River, bordering Colombia.

Guerrilla groups, gangs of cattle rustlers and former military, as well as paramilitaries are also active in Apure. A former MP of the ruling party (PSUV) currently critical of the government, gave his view on the action of these groups:

*“Three groups operate in the **Guasdalito** area: the National Liberation Army (ELN), the strongest group, that is, with the largest number of camps. Then there is the **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)**, whose members, after the peace agreement, decided not to lay down their arms and have joined the ELN, although there are also **camps of FARC dissidents**. The third insurgent force is a Venezuelan guerrilla group that calls itself the **Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL)**, which also has a division in the **Bolivarian Patriotic Liberation Forces (FPBL)**, with a presence in Guasdalito, in the Muñoz municipality—located in Medio Apure—and in the states of Barinas and Táchira. The FARC operates in Medio Apure, with no notable presence of ELN camps. The FARC and the ELN operate in Bajo Apure.”*

GUERRILLA HAVENS

The former parliamentarian said that there are guerrilla camps in Guachara, in the Achaguas municipality, in Las Campanas sector, in El Yagual, in Samán de Apure, and in Guasimal. In the area known as the Apurito parish, there is a very famous farm that is known as a guerrilla haven, with a small camp, very close to the GNB detachment. That was the “resting place” of Colombian guerrilla leaders like “Manuel Marulanda,” “Raul Reyes” and “Mono Jojoy.”

The ELN and the FARC were operating in the Pedro Camejo area, according to the same former MP. They are reportedly in Puerto Paez—

on the border with the Colombian department of Vichada—, and also in Cinaruco, Rio Claro, Cunaviche, La Macanilla, Araguaquen and San Juan de Payara. They reportedly have camps in all sectors, except in San Juan de Payara. In the Biruaca municipality, there is a FARC camp in the area of Isla La Catira, very close to Juanaparo, and they have another camp in the San Fernando municipality, in the Arichuna parish.

Ringleaders

The commander of the FPBL is alias “Jerónimo.” The ELN is led by alias “Lenin,” who is also known as “the old man.” The leader of the FARC is alias “Quijada.”

These groups generally engage in kidnapping and smuggling, but their natural activity is drug trafficking, and more recently they have ventured into cattle ranching.

As regards smuggling, most of the petrol goes through the informal crossings at El Nula and El Piñal, sometimes in PDVSA vehicles, directly to the town of Arauca. It is also smuggled through the savannahs of the Capanaparo River in Elorza and through Guachara. The “La Cañada Avileña” farm is located here, which was expropriated by the government because it was used for drug trafficking; it is currently a food smuggling route controlled by the FARC and officials from the Rómulo Gallegos municipality.

In the Pedro Camejo municipality, in Meta, there is an area known as La Raya, a land crossing on the Colombian border, with no need to cross the river, where mostly the Army collaborates. It is also a crossing for contraband petrol, under the control of the ELN and some Pedro Camejo municipal authorities.

All illegal groups engage in drug trafficking. They smuggle drugs out of the Guasdalito area and the Capanaparo River, Puerto Infante and Guachara through clandestine airstrips.⁸⁰

The former parliamentarian interviewed for this study stated: “In Pedro Camejo, specifically in the area of Santa Bárbara de Cunaviche, there

⁸⁰ http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari37-2019-viannadeazevedo-reemplazo-redes-colombianas-por-venezolanas-narcotrafico-fronterizo-internacional

was a National Guard command post that is now abandoned, we don't know why. Less than 10 kilometres from that abandoned command post there are approximately six clandestine airstrips made of concrete, there are some indigenous groups who work as mules hauling the cocaine packs."

There are women in all these groups, usually very young, who work mainly as cooks, although they are active in other tasks alongside men.

Another expression of kleptocracy, as collaboration of government agencies and officials with organised crime groups, is that the creation of the FBPL was promoted by the government. The former MP said: "...they were armed with Venezuelan Army rifles given to them by the then vice president Elías Jaua Milano, but before that, they were given weapons by the National Institute of Socialist Training and Education (INCES) and the Ministry of Communes. The FBL even boasted direct support of members of parliament, and also of Érika Farías (current mayor of Caracas), and Aristóbulo Istúriz (Minister of Education). Today they have the support of Apure governor Ramón Carrizalez, the mayor of the Paez municipality, José María Romero, and the constituents José Domingo Santana, José Lisandro Solórzano and Orlando Zambrano. Zambrano is known by the alias of *El Lapo* by the guerrillas." Another example is the mayor of the Pedro Camejo municipality, Pedro Leal, who "has been supporting and receiving support from illegal groups for nearly 12 years." This is a rural municipality, where communities vote at gunpoint with the full consent of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB).

The National Guard is precisely most criticised because of their links to criminal activities such as smuggling. In the Guachara area, mostly National Guards take Venezuelan cattle to Colombia, where they sell them in dollars and Colombian pesos. Recently, according to the source, approximately 700 horses were smuggled and sold in the meat industry in Colombia.

The GNB commander and the head of detachment 351 also have close ties to the ELN and FARC, according to our source. They drive imported SUVs, own apartments—sometimes entire buildings—in several areas of the country. The former MP consulted claimed: "*General Francisco Corona Preciado and Colonel Roberto Gil Ugas are clearly linked to and collaborate with these groups. In the case of Corona Preciado, he must be the worst smuggler in the area and has a direct and close relationship with Governor Carrizalez and the ELN. Retired General Eslain Moisés Longa Tirado, former director of the Strategic Integral Defence Region (REDI) Los Llanos, a man trusted by Minister Padrino López, always reported to guerrilla groups on security operations and where they would be carried out. Longa Tirado was a permanent liaison with those groups.*"

It is no secret that the government supports these groups, says the former parliamentarian, and state authorities send them food and medicine to the camps, and this is by the way not a new or exclusive activity of government officials. "In the regional governments of Luis Lippa—former Acción Democrática leader and current Primero Justicia MP—these groups also received constant support. It was the same with former Governor Jesús Aguilarte Gámez (PSUV). Aguilarte told us privately that he had instructions from President Chávez to support the guerrillas. Aguilarte was, without a doubt, one of the strongest supporters of the guerrillas. Incumbent governor Carrizales has delivered medicine, food and ammunition to those groups. I don't know if he has delivered weapons, but I do know that he has delivered a lot of ammunition. In the area of Puerto Paez they delivered boats that were supposed to be ambulances, and all of them are in the possession of the ELN," said the former legislator.

This relationship between the government and illegal groups is also evident in government officials who play the double role of discharging public duties and, at the same time, of tasks

related to “servicing” these criminal groups. Another similar case is that PDVSA directors in Barinas and Guasdualito, who provided intelligence about the largest contractors, and thus made large sums of money by being complicit in kidnappings.

Some of those in charge of ensuring security and fighting crime are reported to receive payments from criminals. They are accused deliberately allowing the smuggling of goods—from meat, petrol, to precursors for processing drugs—as well as of forging waybills with mayors and other officials to move the goods in cargo vehicles and even letting cattle through on their feet. An informant claimed that some officials are linked to these illegal groups.

These criminals carry short and long arms, drive small, all-terrain and cargo vehicles and move around the state in plain sight. In this scenario, it is reasonable to think that they have the support of certain authorities.

Impact

In the states of Apure and Barinas, land invasions and cattle rustling have had a rather negative impact on national agricultural production. Former Colombian immigration director Christian Krüger, in an interview on Feb. 4, 2019, said that a head of cattle in Venezuela cost around US\$160 in 2018, but can be sold for about **US\$600** when smuggled into Colombia.

According to a topographical and cartographic study carried out by a professional from Barinas, and with data provided by the local Association of Rural Producers, **by December 2019, some 535 production units had been invaded.**

The invasion of farms, the presence of illegal groups and the high crime rates in the states of Apure and Barinas have prompted a widespread migration of agricultural producers.

The Apure Livestock Producers’ Association has filed reports with the Ministry of the Interior. In a letter sent to that entity, he warned of “permanent rise of crime against production and producers,” which entails risks of extortion,

kidnapping, sexual abuse of our wives and daughters, and harassment against children and the elderly.

Some testimonies from producers in the area reflect the level of **defencelessness and agony of producers in Apure**, who believe that “the countryside is in state of emergency” and that there is no presence of the government authority but rather a “lack of government.”

One of the interviewees, who will remain anonymous, noted that 13 milking cattle had been stolen from him within one week. *“I was able to recover four, they slaughtered two because I found the carcasses, and I’m tracking the rest. (...) We have to do something because we’re on the fast track,” he said.*

“Food supply is severely compromised due to the anarchy prevailing in rural Venezuela,” said another interviewee.



Photo No. 9. Cattle theft and slaughter in Apure

As in the state of Bolivar, the occupation of Venezuelan territory by illegal groups from Colombia, ELN and FARC dissidents, with the complicity of authorities—and in some cases in alliance with them—is causing a geopolitical and a national sovereignty problem.

In Apure, public agencies perceived as the most corrupt include mayor’s offices, governor’s offices, the police force and the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB).



ORGANISED CRIME IN FALCÓN

Approximate population: 1,100,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 44 per 100,000 inhabitants, the 18th highest in the country (OVV, 2019).

Falcón is bordered to the north by the Gulf of Venezuela, the Caribbean Sea and the leeward group of the Netherlands Antilles (Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire), to the east by the Triste Gulf (Caribbean Sea), to the south by Yaracuy and Lara, and to the west by Zulia. Its capital is Coro, founded on July 26, 1527. "A culture of smuggling prevails in Falcón due to its geographical position," claim local residents.

Types of crimes

According to witnesses interviewed for this investigation, the most frequent crimes are **drug trafficking, smuggling of fuel and other oil by-products, money laundering and corruption. Residents also claim there is smuggling of strategic materials (copper wires and steel pipes).** Gold is reportedly trafficked from the state of Bolívar, by land, and leaves by air off clandestine airstrips located in Sierra de Coro, including the perimeter road—an unfinished regional motorway—as a runway for aircraft.

On the southern beach of Adícora, in October 2019, a drug stash was seized and two innocent fishermen were charged, and Falcón police officers who reported it were arrested. Unofficial versions say that "the business" was run by people close to the government.

In Aruba, 5,000 kilos of pure cocaine were seized, which were shipped by sea from the international port of Guaraná, using steel scrap pipes as camouflage, transported on the ship Aressa. The crew, 10 Europeans, were arrested on February 25, 2020.⁸¹

The city of Punto Fijo is an entry and exit point for drug trafficking. La Vela de Coro is also frequently used as departure of drug shipments. Other crimes in the area include prostitution and sexual slavery: women are taken by criminal organisations to the ships that anchor in Paraguaná.

In order to analyse this issue, a group of former criminal investigators with extensive experience in organised crime was consulted, who highlighted the criminal activities that are usually committed in Falcón.

- Illegal arms trafficking from the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire.
- Contract killings.

Smuggling of Jirahara blocks, granite and sand.



PHOTO NO. 10. DRUGS SEIZED IN FALCÓN
Source: Notitarde

81 <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/asciende-a-cinco-toneladas-de-cocaina-incautada-en-barco-que-salio-de-paraguana/>

- Production of ecstasy, specifically in Punto Fijo.
- Drug trafficking, leaving through and official ports and government-controlled areas: Puerto Guaranao, Puerto Real de la Vela de Coro, Tucacas, Chichiriviche and Sabana Alta.

Criminal groups

With regard to the main gangs operating in the state, the group of experts consulted for this research mentioned the following:

- A gang lead by Emilio Martinez, alias “El Chiche Smith,” engaged in drug trafficking.
- The “Los Camacaro” mafia
- A mafia led by Simón Álvarez (now deceased)
- “Los Cruz” led by Jose Angel Cruz, who has an Interpol Red Notice for murder⁸²
- There is also a mafia that controls the commercialisation of the scarce water resources in the area.
- The “Caramelito” fuel gang

Regarding the gangs in Falcón state, a retired military officer, whose identity is protected, said that some time ago there was a gang called “Los Bolivita,” which was most iconic; it still exists, actually, but very much reduced since they eliminated four of its most prominent members.

The Pablo Escobar of Carirubana?

According to a testimony of this military officer, “El Chiche Smith”⁸³ is a kind of Pablo Escobar in the town of Carirubana, because he distributes food, gives away cell phones and even dollars in cash, proceeds of drug trafficking. With this type of action, he won the support of the area’s residents, which was evident even when law enforcement agencies carried out raids on several of his properties in April 2020.⁸⁴

This source claims that Martinez’s main ally is the mayor of Carirubana, Alcides Goitía.⁸⁵ “El Chiche Smith” is reportedly smuggling gold, in an alleged alliance with national government officials. The reports indicate that he bought all the houses on the beach in his hometown, Carirubana, for money laundering. The houses were demolished and he promised to build a boulevard.



PHOTO NO. 11. A VIEW OF THE CARIRUBANA BEACH
Source: Transparencia Venezuela

⁸² <http://www.crimenensincastigo.com/2014/10/a-merced-del-hampa.html>

⁸³ <https://talcualdigital.com/el-pais-merece-explicaciones-sobre-fotos-de-funcionarios-con-supuestos-narcos/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/vecinos-de-carirubana-protestaron-por-el-allanamiento-de-la-fundacion-de-presunto-narco-chiche-smith/>

⁸⁵ <https://elcooperante.com/en-video-el-cartel-de-paraguana-tambien-salpica-al-alcalde-chavista-alcides-goitia/>

An interview with a Carirubana resident provided more information about “El Chiche Smith” or “Tio Chichi,” as he is known in the area. According to this source, drug trafficking is not a new crime in Falcón, nor is diesel smuggling. Trawlers were used to commit both crimes, turning fishermen into criminals.

“El Chiche Smith” is the son of a well-known smuggler from Carirubana, Angel Smith, who has passed away. He was a fisherman with his brother; his business grew and so did his fleet. He started with a small boat, then he moved to larger fishing vessels, which he used to start smuggling diesel and whisky. Finally, he purchased trawlers, and started smuggling electrical appliances, and later he engaged in drug trafficking activities. His relationship with drug trafficker Walid Mackled, currently in custody, cannot be ruled out.



PHOTO NO. 12. PHOTOS OF “EL CHICHE SMITH”
Source: Twitter

In Carirubana, where he was born and raised, he created the Carmen Virginia Martinez Foundation, chaired by his brother. This foundation has become the State authority in that town. It has hired more than 100 people

for cleaning activities, carries out social work, sometimes together with the municipal and state government. He renovated the local clinic, the square, the high school and the primary school. He also refurnished the petrol station, and then claimed that the work had been done by the governor’s office.

These groups have, in addition to weapons of all kinds, other assets such as hotels, shopping malls, grocery stores, artisan breweries, restaurants.

Also noteworthy is that the former governor, Stella Lugo (PSUV) also reportedly turned a blind eye to the actions of the criminal groups.⁸⁶

Impact

The high command of the Falcón state police was completely dismantled during the government of another PSUV official, Jesús Mantilla, which has created a breeding ground for criminal groups, according to a team of former investigators consulted for this study.

The Mauroa-Dabujuro-Democracia-Federacion-Buchivacoa-Petit-Piritu axis, which is famous for goat production, has been disappearing due to the presence of drug trafficking. The theft of cattle and goats is constant. **Producers have abandoned their farms and the new production units have clandestine airstrips.**

This situation has created a **subculture of social acceptance of these groups as they substitute the government in the territories where they operate**, given the institutional weakness of public administration in Venezuela and military officials being bought off by criminal groups.

Many **small businesses have closed down** due to the situation in the country, while **extortion** by all sorts of government officials is common. Victims refrain from reporting, as they prefer to pay these criminals, who in many cases are in connivance with local authorities.

⁸⁶ <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2019/12/15/quien-es-stella-lugo-le-enviada-de-maduro-para-la-embajada-en-argentina-que-integra-un-polemico-clan-familiar/>



ORGANISED CRIME IN NUEVA ESPARTA

Approximate population: 500,000 inhabitants

Murder rate: 32 per 100,000 inhabitants, the 23rd highest in the country (OVV, 2019).

Criminal groups

In the state of Nueva Esparta—made up of three islands: Margarita, Coche and Cubagua—the Directorate of Security and Public Order of the Governor's Office has identified **more than 60 criminal gangs operating in the area**. This information is in privy to the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigation Corps (CICPC).

Although it would be a relatively easy task for police investigation and intelligence agencies to control these criminal organisations in an island state, there is no political will to act. In Nueva Esparta, the state police have been intervened by the Maduro administration, but not to improve security, but rather as political retaliation. Security has not improved, despite failed attempts at police campaigns and national plans.

Hezbollah in Margarita

Hezbollah means "The Party of God," and it is an organisation created in Lebanon in 1982 after the Israeli occupation. It has both a political and an armed wing. It has the backing of Iran and the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, who are open allies of Chavista officials and Maduro.



It is considered a terrorist group by most Western countries.

Its presence in Venezuela is well documented. It is believed to be engaged in money laundering, drug transport and control of many smuggling activities throughout the continent. They are also active in Bolivia and Nicaragua, but members have reportedly found a safe haven in Venezuela.

Margarita Island is where the three main cells of the region—Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay—converge. For many, it is a haven for terrorists and drug traffickers. In fact, Venezuela is believed the largest centre of Hezbollah operations on the continent.

CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

The head of Hezbollah in 2011 was Ghazi Atef Salameh Nassereddine Abu Ali, who was born in Lebanon but was naturalised as a Venezuelan citizen in 2002. Together with his two brothers, he allegedly coordinated the organisation's cell in Venezuela, which has allowed the group to expand its influence across the region.⁸⁷

These gangs are entrenched in the state, and have formed a **pseudo-government of crime** that feeds on people's fear. An alarming fact is that most of the murders in the region are in retaliation between these groups. In all these groups, women are involved and sometimes actively participate in criminal actions.

The most common crimes committed by these groups include **drug trafficking to and from the islands, robbery, contract killings, collection of protection fees, influence peddling, extortion, money laundering and human trafficking**.

⁸⁷ https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/columnista/hezbollah-venezuela_220823/

There are reports that these criminal groups are supported by the regional government and certain national authorities. In addition, they have sophisticated and high-calibre firearms.

Impact

Tourism has been fundamental for Nueva Esparta's economy, but at present it is almost non-existent, and the state is **no longer an important destination for foreign visitors, as it once did, mainly due to the prevailing insecurity on the island.**

In the fishing sector, the situation is no less serious. Fishermen are forced to buy overpriced oil and spare parts for their boats. In addition, they live in fear of **their boats or engines being stolen, which affects consumers, who must pay higher prices for the fish.**

From the political point of view, the **abuse of power** fractures institutions and favours criminal actions. Nicolás Maduro stripped opposition state governor Alfredo Díaz Figueroa of his public health responsibilities and transferred them to Dante Rivas, the "Protector" of Nueva Esparta, who was hand-picked over the will of the voters to look after government interests in the area. This is the very essence of despotism and the perversion of top politics. Previously, the governor had been stripped of his authority over the port and airport, and policing duties were also taken away from him.



MILITARY POWER, CRIME AND CORRUPTION



Embajada Británica
Caracas



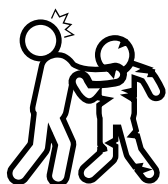
TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

In addition to reference to individual officers, which is mandatory when documenting, analysing and denouncing the participation of members of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) in the violation of human rights and/or their involvement in acts of corruption during the last two decades of Venezuelan history, we must point out that this behaviour is fundamentally related to the emergence of a structural process

linked to the **sustained and progressive implementation of a model of socio-political domination in Venezuela**, which started in 1999, the year in which the self-styled Bolivarian Revolution came to power.

This model fits in perfectly the definition of a garrison state “**banana republic style**,” whose basic indicators include:

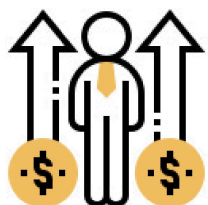
"Estado Cuartel". Indicadores básicos



The **use of violence** as a systematic government practice



A communicational hegemony, which allows the dissemination of a sort of **distorted patriotic discourse** used as a resource of national ideological unification.



A substantial number of the members of the military become part of the **most socio-economically wealthy groups** in a privileged position, based on the economic advantages and benefits acquired in a legal or illegal manner by controlling core areas of the state and/or government.



Absolute centralism.



The **president with legislative powers**.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ For more detail in the conceptualisation of the political notion known as the garrison state and the detailed explanation of the key indicators for identification; see: Luis Alberto Buttó. “El Estado Cuartel en Venezuela: bases teóricas para su estudio,” in Luis Alberto Buttó and José Alberto Olivar (coordinators). *El Estado Cuartel en Venezuela. Radiografía de un proyecto autoritario*. Caracas: Universidad Metropolitana, 2018. pp. 17-33

As regards the reason why members of the Armed Forces are involved in human rights violations and acts of corruption, the first two indicators are decisive. Regarding the first aspect, institutionalised and widespread violence,⁸⁹ the issue derives from the **imposition of a military perspective on the community, with a glorification of war**, which is expressed in political terms within the subjected community, in the operational implementation of the dichotomy “allied side versus enemy side.” It is a mechanism designed to resolve both generated by socio-economic demands and conflicts arising from access to control of the various government bodies, at national, regional or local scales:

VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON

In other words, this means the use of violence against the population in general and the political opposition in particular as a means of recurrent subjugation, which, by definition, implies a systematic violation of human rights. In this process, the military obviously play a vital role as the custodian of the largest firepower in society.

Regarding the second aspect, the **economic power achieved by certain factions of the armed forces**, the roots of the problem are found in the process of military colonisation of the centralised and/or local public administration deployed upon the enthronement of the “Chavismo” as political project. This process must be understood as the penetration and consequent domination of Venezuelan government agencies by the military, which allowed members of the armed forces, and their families, to climb rapidly the income pyramid of Venezuelan society all the way to the top, in many cases without a consistent explanation and, at times, in an offensively evident display of wealth in the midst of overwhelming poverty in the country. In the following pages we will delve deeper into the explanation and examples of this issue.

THE MILITARY AND REPRESSION

The excessive, cruel and illegal use of force (violence) of armed forces against opposition groups, movements and/or individuals has been commonplace since the arrival of “Chavismo” to power. The reason behind this illegitimate behaviour lies on the fact that **based on the very conception of the model of socio-political domination associated with this ideological trend, the notion of internal enemy** was activated, which is why the regime started off with **unquestionably authoritarian features** that quickly mutated to the point of being equated in multiple aspects with the **totalitarian paradigm**.

INTERNAL ENEMY

The garrison state created in Venezuela since 1999 was based on the deliberate, systematic and widespread use of repression to violate the political and civil liberties of the population, which, as was to be expected, led to a blatant violation of human rights as a defining process of the system itself, emulating the dreadful National Security Doctrine that was implemented in Latin America in mid-20th century.

The first instance was the **violence by national security forces**, which was used against opposition protesters in demonstrations, with the practical aim of abolishing or minimising the action of groups that could potentially challenge the incumbent political power.

In some cases, this violence was open and blatant, to the point that **formal prohibitions were established for opposition groups to operate**. This included, on the one hand, the establishment of **insurmountable economic obstacles** based on which opposition parties, and even non-governmental organisations, found themselves unable to raise funds to ensure their logistical operations and, on the other hand, **the legal disqualification of the main opposition parties, the imprisonment and/or persecution**

⁸⁹ We must differentiate the concepts of force and violence. The concept of force is in keeping with the rule of law, insofar as it expresses moderation and ethics in the use of mechanisms of punishment and the firepower available to the State. This behaviour is, at the same time, an inalienable commitment and responsibility of democratic governments. The concept of violence must be understood as the lack of moderation and the lack of ethics in the use of force, i.e. on the one hand, the brutal action against the population by the armed forces and, on the other, the use of the judicial system as an instrument of punishment designed to crush political dissidence. This behaviour is typical of non-democratic regimes. For more information on this subject, see: Juan Federico Arriola. Teoría General de la Dictadura. Mexico: Editorial Trillas, 2000.

of elected opposition officials and of important leaders, militants and members of opposition political parties. This culminated in the **death of opposition detainees** who were in the custody of the government, some of them showing clear signs of **merciless torture**.

In other cases, this violence was surreptitious because, having achieved beforehand the objective of inhibiting certain opposition movements, there was no need to prohibit and/or persecute their operation, as these groups decided to cease to challenge the incumbent power and engage in behaviours such as **self-censorship** in order to avoid exposing themselves to punishments.

The second instance, government violence exercised against organised or spontaneous expressions of popular discontent, aimed at **concealing people's claims in the face of growing and permanent dissatisfaction with their basic needs (food, health, transport, etc.) or in case of injustice** with which they were treated by the government, which trampled on their fundamental rights, subsequently **denying them the appropriate justice and reparations**. This is a despicable government practice designed to maintain a certain illusion of harmony in the face of criticism by national and international public opinion which, from a certain point in the historical development of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, began to realise how it had subdued the nation and its people into **unimaginable levels of destitution**, to the point of creating a **complex humanitarian emergency**, as defined by the opposition-controlled National Assembly. This was certainly unusual for a country that—at the time of declaring such an emergency—was not in war nor had it been hit by any natural disaster.

Obviously, in the framework of this violence scheme exercised by the government against

the people, both the **criminalisation of protests and the use of the judicial system for punitive political purposes** played a vital role. In other words, there was a deliberate act of giving a criminal character to actions that, by definition, constitutionally or legally, cannot and should not be deemed so. Therefore, these actions were processed through punishment mechanisms applied with no valid legal foundation, leading to all kinds of judicial outrage.

Consequently, precisely because this takes place within a scheme known as “garrison state,” during the first two decades of the 21st century in Venezuela, military justice has been one of the instruments of punishment ready to strike not only at political dissidents in general but even at dissidence in labour unions or professional associations. This instrument of criminalisation is clearly illegal because, when used to judge civilians, it contravenes the provisions of the National Constitution, in the sense that everyone has the right “to be tried by their natural judges in the ordinary or special jurisdictions, with the guarantees established in this Constitution and in the law”⁹⁰ and in relation to the fact that “the competence of military courts is limited to crimes of a military nature.”⁹¹

Specifically between 2014 and 2019, **more than 800 civilians were prosecuted by military courts**,⁹² a figure consistent with reports made by Venezuelan opposition in May 2018, in the context of the 28th hearing of the 108th period of public hearings of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), when they pointed out that, as a mechanism for punishing participants in the massive protests that took place in the first half of 2017, a total of **757 civilians were brought before military courts**, charging them with military crimes such as rebellion, treason and attacks against the sentry.⁹³

89 We must differentiate the concepts of force and violence. The concept of force is in keeping with the rule of law, insofar as it expresses moderation and ethics in the use of mechanisms of punishment and the firepower available to the State. This behaviour is, at the same time, an inalienable commitment and responsibility of democratic governments. The concept of violence must be understood as the lack of moderation and the lack of ethics in the use of force, i.e. on the one hand, the brutal action against the population by the armed forces and, on the other, the use of the judicial system as an instrument of punishment designed to crush political dissidence. This behaviour is typical of non-democratic regimes. For more information on this subject, see: Juan Federico Arriola. *Teoría General de la Dictadura*. Mexico: Editorial Trillas, 2000.

90 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 5453 (Extraordinary). March 24, 2000.

91 Ibid.

92 Juan Francisco Alonso. “Casi mil venezolanos han sido procesados por la justicia militar en el último lustro,” in *La Gran Aldea*. Nov. 6, 2019. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2RnlW9b>. Accessed: Nov. 18, 2019.

93 IACHR Hearing Summary: “Venezuela: Military Justice.” Available at: <https://bit.ly/2tIis99>. Accessed: Jan. 18, 2020.

On that occasion, members of the IACHR made it clear that “the trial of civilians by military courts is clearly prohibited in the Inter-American System, pursuant to the fundamental principle that ‘in time of peace, civilians cannot be tried by military courts,’ since this impinges on rights of the natural judge and impartiality,”⁹⁴ and warned that any Venezuelan internal regulations that undermine that principle “run counter the convention.”⁹⁵ They also noted their “concern about the severity of the sentences handed down by the military courts.”⁹⁶



When the officers claimed that the application of military jurisdiction to civilians violated the “convention,” they were referring to Articles 8 and 25 of the American Convention on Human Rights, which reads: “Every person has the right to be heard (...) by a competent, independent, and impartial judge or court (...) in the determination of any criminal charge against them, or of their rights and obligations of a civil, labour, fiscal, or other nature.”⁹⁷ The second states: “Everyone has the right to simple and prompt recourse, or any other effective recourse, to a competent court or tribunal for protection against acts violating the fundamental rights granted to them by the constitution or the law or by this Convention.”⁹⁸

Precisely based on these articles, and recalling that “the United Nations Human Rights Committee has condemned the trial of civilians by military or special courts as this could cause serious problems for a fair, impartial and independent administration of justice,”⁹⁹ the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has stated that “the right to a fair trial is a fundamental right of every person.” At the time, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled:

*The transfer of jurisdiction from common justice system to the military justice system and the subsequent prosecution of civilians for the crime of treason in this jurisdiction imply the exclusion of the natural judge from hearing these cases. In fact, military jurisdiction is not naturally applicable to civilians who have no military role and who therefore cannot engage in conduct contrary to functional duties of this nature. When military justice assumes jurisdiction over a matter that should be heard by ordinary courts, the right to a natural judge and, hence, the right to due process are compromised, which, in turn, is closely linked to the very right of access to justice.*¹⁰⁰

The most paradoxical aspect of the establishment of this entire repressive scheme, expressed in the use of military jurisdiction as a mechanism for punishing political and labour dissidents of the self-styled Bolivarian Revolution, lies in the fact that this line of action contradicts what the Venezuelan Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) itself has stated in relation to the scope and competence of military courts in prosecuting civilians. In fact, the Supreme Court of Justice, in Ruling No. 403 issued on November 16, 2017, ruled very clearly that “illegal acts perpetrated by civilians are expressly excluded from the jurisdiction of military courts (...) Thus, military jurisdiction is not naturally applicable to civilians who do not have military duties, and must be

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 American Convention on Human Rights signed at the Inter-American Specialized Conference on Human Rights. San José (Costa Rica). Nov. 7–22, 1969.

Available at: <https://bit.ly/2GdqJVh> Accessed: January 22, 2020.

98 Ibid.

99 Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Case: Castillo Petruzzi et al. v. Peru. Judgment of May 30, 1999 (Merits, Reparations and Costs). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2GwAvSR> Accessed: Jan. 18, 2020.

100 Ibid.

limited to strictly military offenses - because they are of a special nature"¹⁰¹ and, on the other hand, warned that, in the event of similarity in the offences in question, the criterion issued by the Criminal Chamber (ruling No. 59 of February 2, 2001) should always prevail, namely that "in the presence of two similar provisions, and in view of the civil status of the accused, it must be concluded that ordinary criminal jurisdiction shall prevail."¹⁰²

As has already been pointed out, official violence deployed since the coming to power of the revolutionary political project—which eventually became a garrison state—sought to systematically persecute and punish organised opposition, while preventing, dissolving and fiercely harassing any mass demonstrations.

To illustrate the argument on this last point, two highly significant facts must be recalled. The first is that top government officials ordered law enforcement agencies: "From this moment on, anyone who goes out and sets a hill or a tree on fire, or blocks a street... throw them tear gas and put them in jail (...) The heads of the police, the National Guard, authorities must take responsibility."¹⁰³

DEADLY FORCE

The second important fact is that by resolution No. 008610 issued by the Ministry of Defence, members of the FANB were authorised to apply "harsh control techniques, consisting of physical restraint, causing physical discomfort aimed to dissuade resistance and opposition,"¹⁰⁴ in the face of what is considered defensive violence exerted by participants in a demonstration or public meeting.

They were also allowed to "use intermediate or non-lethal weapons to neutralise such conduct,"¹⁰⁵ assessed as active violence of such

persons, and were authorised to use "potentially lethal force, either with the firearm or with another potentially lethal weapon"¹⁰⁶ in case of assessing an aggression as lethal violence, shown by demonstrators or persons in public meetings. This blatantly disregarded the provisions of Article 68 of the National Constitution which states: "The use of firearms and toxic substances in the control of peaceful demonstrations is prohibited. The law shall regulate the actions of the police and security forces in the control of public order."¹⁰⁷

Against this backdrop of mandates, justifications and illegal authorisations of the use of violence by law enforcement and armed forces against the population, which led to a structured and consistent process of human rights violations, an accurate indicator for determining the degree of involvement of the FANB (especially the Bolivarian National Guard) in these types of acts is the number of people killed and injured with firearms while dispersing demonstrations, given that these military and police forces are the only bodies legally authorised to carry these type of weapons

During the opposition protests that took place in 2014, a total of **42 people were killed, 66% of them by firearms.**¹⁰⁸ Between 2004 and April 2014, a total of **3,507 people were injured as a result of the repression of public demonstrations,**¹⁰⁹ and in the last year, 55% of the injuries were caused by **bullets and pellets,**¹¹⁰ the latter used in shotguns used by the National Guard and the Bolivarian National Police (PNB). It should be noted that, in addition to the total number of victims recorded in that—and in any subsequent—period, we must also consider the number of persons affected by the use of tear gas (material used only by law enforcement and the National Guard). For obvious reasons, this figure is very difficult to determine accurately.¹¹¹

108 PROVEA. Venezuela 2014. Protestas y Derechos Humanos. Caracas: 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/UI5lO7> Accessed: May 12, 2015.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Regarding the use of tear gas bombs in dispersing the protests that have taken place in Venezuela in recent years, we must recall the warning issued by specialists in the field, that the damage caused by this type of gas is increased when "they are thrown less than 50 metres from the demonstrators (...) when people with asthma, hypertension or allergies inhale them; when the bombing of the demonstrators is continuous (...) international standards only authorise the use of chemical weapons in the case of violent demonstrations. But, in Venezuela, bombs are used in order to prevent peaceful concentrations, throwing gas canisters at such a small number of people, in large quantities, non-stop and for a long time (more than thirty minutes), also represents a violation of their rights and can become much more dangerous." Source: Erick S. González Caldea. "Las bombas lacrimógenas se usan como armas letales," in Reporte Proiruris. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2pcgabw> Accessed: February 20, 2020.

In this context of systematic, continuous and widespread repression against public demonstrations against the government, the criminal groups of armed civilians, known locally as “colectivos,” played a prominent role. These groups acted as parapolice or paramilitary forces and have never been formally affiliated with any known institutional structure. They repeatedly harassed oppositionists whenever they took to the streets to participate in a sizeable demonstration, thus replicating in practice, as noted in the first part of this research, the actions of violent organisations that were used by authoritarian Latin American governments (past and/or present) to target dissidents, for example, Haiti’s Tonton Macoute, Cuba’s Rapid Action Brigades, or the Dignity Battalions in Panama (operational during the government of General Manuel Noriega).

The reference to these “colectivos” is necessary due to the fact that although—based on the fact that being the State the main guarantor of human rights, only the government, and the individual officers, can be legitimately accused of violating such rights—there are certain doctrinal clarifications, e.g. the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights has stated that “individuals can also be accused of violating human rights (...) when the State allows, by action or omission, individuals or groups of individuals to carry out government duties, committing specific violations in such acts. For example, paramilitary groups and groups formed to operate in security matters.”¹¹² This is particularly true when bodies such as the Armed Forces or the police are required by law to repel the actions of such groups, and thus, by failing to do so, they encourage, endorse, and/or support such practices, which creates liability in this regard.

Specifically, to support the above statement, it should be noted that, during the 2014 protests, about 15% of the demonstrators injured were

wounded as a result of the direct clashes with these “colectivos,” without counting the instances when they acted in conjunction with security forces or when it could not be determined exactly who was responsible for having caused injuries to the people who were protesting.¹¹³

At that time, and in subsequent instances, both the criminal action of the aforementioned “colectivos” and the participation of members of the National Armed Forces in particular, and of repressive government forces in general, in the perpetration of institutional violence (use of force outside the legal parameters) against opponents of the incumbent regime, the authorities legally responsible for channelling, prosecuting, investigating and/or punishing human rights violations committed during such events generally turned a blind eye, to say the least, and **responded to the demands for justice coming from organised society with inaction, leniency, or early acquittal.**

At some point, the Ombudsman’s Office made a statement on the accusations involving members of the Armed Forces in the repression of public protests in the first quarter of 2014, calling such actions mere “occasional abuses.”¹¹⁴ From the perspective of this organisation, the FANB “today is aware that it must respect human rights, not as it was in the Fourth Republic, when it was an instrument for State terrorism.”¹¹⁵ In fact, this body has disregarding in advance any complaint that may have been made on any matter related to the claim that “regardless of what is said against the country, we are a state, we are a country, we are a nation, and a Bolivarian National Armed Force that respects human rights.” In other words, he put an end to the issue before initiating a due and expected investigation into the events.¹¹⁶

Government-sponsored violence against large sectors of Venezuelan society in 2014 was replicated again between April and July 2017,

112 Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. *Manual de Derechos Humanos para las Fuerzas Armadas*. San José (Costa Rica): Inter-American Institute of Human Rights-Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2005. p. 47.

113 PROVEA. op.cit.

114 JFA. “Defensor afirma que la FAN es respetuosa de los DDHH,” in *El Universal*. Caracas: January 18, 2015. p. 1-4.

115 Ibid.

116 AVN. “The Venezuelan Constitution is a human rights treatise,” in *La Radio del Sur*. Caracas: April 14, 2015. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2qjIOBZ> Accessed: May 28, 2015.

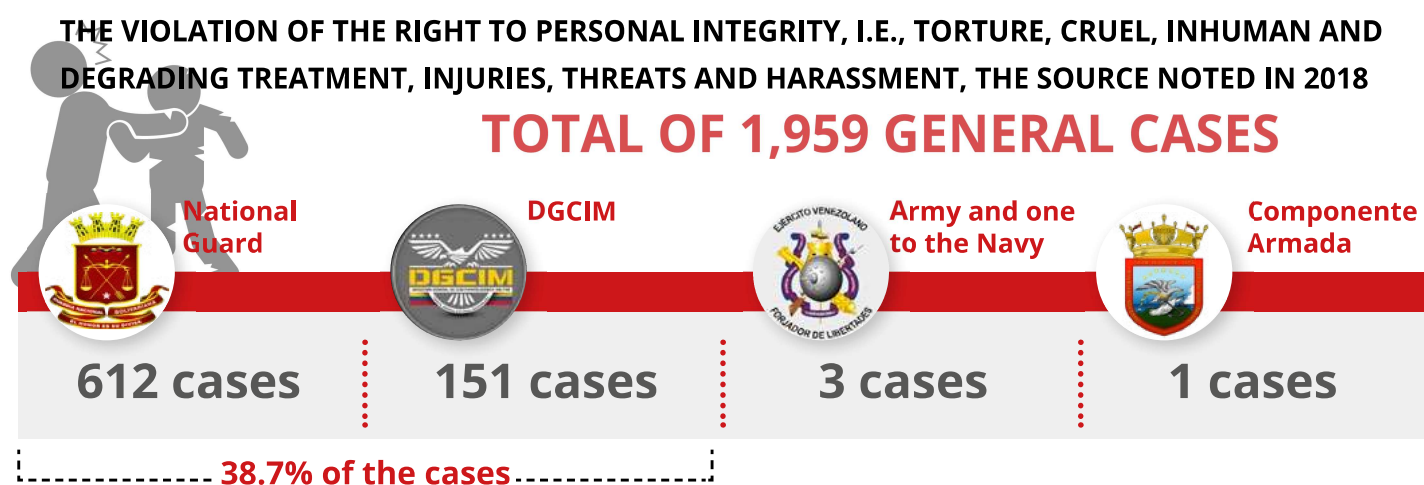
when people once again took to the streets in massive numbers, in nationwide protests in support of four specific demands made by the opposition leadership, namely: to open a channel for international aid in an effort to tackle the acute humanitarian crisis caused by the shortage of medicine and food; to release political prisoners who were detained as a result of repressive, unfair proceedings; to repeal the rulings issued by the Supreme Court of Justice that in practice stripped the National Assembly of all its powers; and to set up an electoral calendar under sufficient and reliable conditions for holding presidential elections. The tragic outcome of these events was that **“139 people were killed by the direct action of the repressive forces of government, by the actions of paramilitary groups acting alongside or with the support of law enforcement, and by the actions of individuals (...) [and] thousands were injured,”**¹¹⁷ many of them with irreversible sequelae.

This **systematic pattern of human rights violations**, developed within the framework of institutional—or worse, institutionalised—violence, was launched against the Venezuelan population as an expression of the political domination model known as garrison state, which was progressively developed since 1999, and did not vary substantially in 2018, despite the qualitative changes in the pattern of public protests which, especially after the first quarter

of that year, when they became more common but also more widespread in the national territory (i.e.; not necessarily concentrated in the large cities), and specifically targeting the above demands—fundamentally protesting dissatisfaction of basic needs and services. Protests were also to a great extent spontaneous, i.e. not necessarily organised and/or convened by the opposition leadership, and evidently not massive in comparison with those that took place, for example, earlier the same year.

In other words, despite these changes, the involvement of members of the Armed Forces in this process of continued human rights violations remained unfazed.

As an example, regarding violation of the right to life (deaths attributed to military or police forces due to executions; torture and/or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; negligence; indiscriminate or excessive use of force), Venezuelan NGO Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos documented in 2018 a total of 353 cases involving security agencies operating nationwide. Of these, 55 were attributed to the Armed Forces in general and two to a particular military unit, the DGCIM.¹¹⁸ In other words, 16.14 per cent of the events identified involved members of the military.



117 PROVEA. Venezuela: rebelión popular. Reflexiones sobre la rebelión popular de abril-julio 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2IL0vc2> Accessed: April 10, 2018.

118 Ibid. Right to life. 2018 Report. Human Rights Situation in Venezuela. Available at: <https://bit.ly/36pF2kp> Accessed: Jan. 25, 2020.

With regard to the violation of the right to personal integrity, i.e., torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, injuries, threats and harassment, the source noted in 2018 a total of 1,959 general cases involving national law enforcement and armed forces, of which 612 were attributed to the National Guard, 151 to the DGCIM, three to the Army and one to the Navy.¹¹⁹ As we can see, 38.7% of the cases were committed by the first two bodies. After breaking down such data into specific sub-patterns, the following specific data were found:

- There were 109 cases of torture committed by different bodies, of which 75 were attributed to the DGCIM, four to the Army and one to the National Guard and one to the Navy.¹²⁰ Relative numbers: 69% committed by the first agency.
- The number of cases of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment totalled 530. Of these, 280 were attributed to the joint action of the DGCIM, the armed force and SEBIN¹²¹ (53% of the total). Individually, the agencies were responsible for: DGCIM, 25 cases; GNB, 5 cases; Army, one case.
- The number of injured rose to 49, 38 of those attributed to the National Guard and three to the DGCIM;¹²² 78% and 6.12%, respectively.
- Cases of threats and harassment totalled 622: 571 attributed to the National Guard and 37 to the DGCIM,¹²³ i.e. 92% and 6%, in that order.

The adjective “institutionalised,” suggested here to describe the recurrent government violence described in previous paragraphs, is no way gratuitous, or the result of some rhetorical exercise in this regard, inasmuch as, as already indicated, in the face of the facts described

above, the response of other government forces, specifically those with legal authority to prevent, correct and/or punish the abuses committed in this regard, was largely ineffective. In other words, the systematic violation of human rights described here was met by **denial of justice** demanded by the victims of such abuses, which occurred repeatedly regardless of whether or not special situations took place that may have justified them. The following example serves to illustrate the approach.

In 2012, a Venezuelan non-governmental organisation presented at a regular hearing of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights a body of evidence that revealed that, between 2006 and 2010, 30,000 reports were filed with the General Prosecutor’s Office in relation to “crimes that are committed by government entities or officials against citizens.”¹²⁴ In other words, these were reports of “situations where there is an aggression or violation with involvement of government officials or groups of people who acted with the acquiescence of the government, or endorsed by the government, with abuse of power, or disproportionate use of public force,”¹²⁵ of which 93% were dismissed, archived with the prosecutor or rejected, and only 7% were referred to the courts to proceed with the corresponding accusation.

At the end of the process, only 4 per cent of these reports resulted in convictions of the officers involved.¹²⁶ The following year, a total of 8,813 similar reports were filed with the same authority: 97% of them were dismissed and in the 3% that resulted in formal charges, there was no conviction.¹²⁷ The reasons for so much impunity? Among others, the fact that “most of the lines of investigation assumed by the Public Prosecutor’s Office were to determine the cause of death, but

117 PROVEA. Venezuela: rebelión popular. Reflexiones sobre la rebelión popular de abril-julio 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2IL0vc2> Accessed: April 10, 2018.

118 Ibid. Right to life. 2018 Report. Human Rights Situation in Venezuela. Available at: <https://bit.ly/36pF2kp> Accessed: Jan. 25, 2020.

119 Ibid. Right to personal integrity. 2018 Report. Human Rights Situation in Venezuela. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2uAGjYo> Accessed: Jan. 25, 2020.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Francisco Olivares. “Sin derechos,” in *El Universal*. Caracas: November 18, 2012. p. 4-5.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

there was no additional line of investigation into the culprits.”¹²⁸ In other words, there were out to determine guilt but not to find the guilty parties. This behaviour clearly favours impunity, which enable the constant reoccurrence of such events.

The institutional violence used to repress political opposition in a year that was undoubtedly turbulent, such as 2017, was so outrageous and disproportionate that even official agencies that had neglected in the past their inexcusable obligation to confront them could no longer ignore their responsibility and had to make a statement. Consequently, in a press conference held in May 2017, the then head of the General Prosecutor’s Office, Luisa Ortega Díaz, could not help but repudiate “violence wherever it comes from. This is not the time for death and political aggression, caused by the actions of criminal groups or by the excessive use of repression by the national security forces.”¹²⁹ The statement was made in the context of a renowned case that had taken place weeks before, in which a young man who was participating in a protest was killed as a result of the impact of a tear gas canister on his chest, which caused “cardiogenic shock due to closed chest trauma,”¹³⁰ and which the

mentioned official attributed to the action of a military official who, however, she did not identify, although she specified that he arrived at such a conclusion as a result of the:

“(...) investigative work based on the analysis of more than 1000 hours of video from more than 20 different cameras, five eyewitnesses, one reference witness, autopsy results, three technical inspections of the site of the event, six planimetric surveys, two chemical analyses, 38 technical examinations of physical evidence, two toxicological analyses, two blood tests, one DNA test, one radiological study, one histological analysis, one anthropometric study, one study of physical matching of dimensions of used tear gas canisters and the print on the victim’s clothing and the physical injury caused, for a total of 79 files, as described in the report.”¹³¹



128 Ibid.

129 Prensa PROVEA. Fiscal Luisa Ortega aseguró que Juan Pernalet fue asesinado con una bomba lacrimógena. Caracas: May 24, 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Stvq30>. Accessed: February 7, 2020.

130 Ibid.

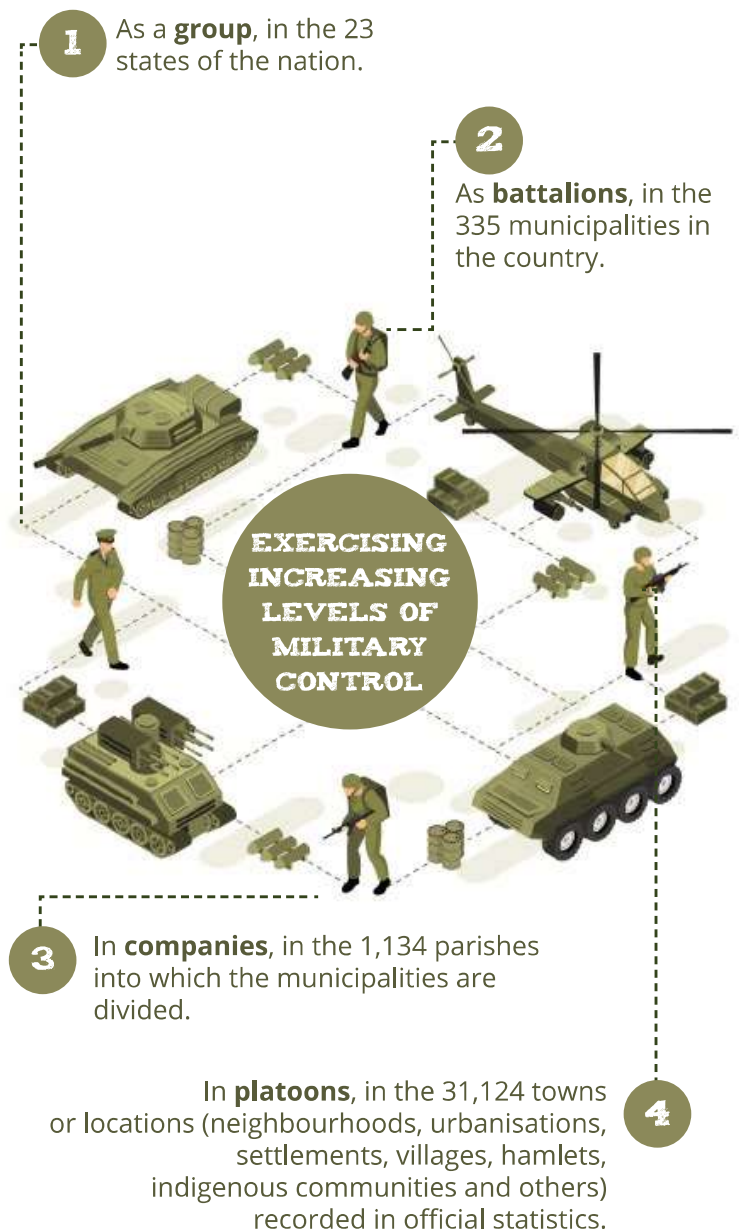
131 Víctor Amaya. “Luisa Ortega Díaz, la cazadora de los represores,” in *Clímax*. Caracas: July 5, 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2UxUb0F>. Accessed: February 7, 2020.

Venezuelan society's concerns about the possibility that the systematic repression described above will progressively increase as alternative forms of expression are established have been exacerbated since the mid-2000's, when the **Bolivarian Militia** was created, and especially since this armed body became an integral part of the Armed Forces as a "special component of a popular nature, composed of men and women who express their patriotic desire to participate actively in actions that contribute to the Security of the Nation, in all areas thereof,"¹³² with the mission of "registering, organising, equipping, training and indoctrinating the people in order to assist in the Security of the Nation, at all levels of the Territorial Defence System,"¹³³ according to the provisions of the so-called Constitutional Law of the National Armed Force issued by the National Constituent Assembly in January 2020. The concerns in this regard are in no way unfounded.

First, ever since its inception, the Bolivarian Militia was conceived as a body created in parallel to the four classic components of the Venezuelan military (Army, Navy, Aviation and National Guard) with the aim of providing the Executive Branch with an armed entity to be used to defend the government, regardless of whether the four branches the armed forces (together or separately) might seem hesitant to act in certain situations as ordered by the president. For example, in April 2002, the president was temporarily removed from power by factions of the Armed Forces that had ceased to recognise him as commander-in-chief.

The Bolivarian Militia was also created with the clear purpose of exercising increasing levels of military control over Venezuelan society, which is evident in the fact that it has full coverage of the entire Venezuelan territory, operating according to the following structure and distribution:

The Bolivarian Militia



¹³² Constitutional Law of the Bolivarian Armed Forces. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 6.508 Extraordinary. January 30, 2020.

¹³³ Ibid.

In other words, this deployment leaves no space in the national territory without a constant military presence, which is why the Bolivarian Militia as an organisation, as has been pointed out by official agencies, has an estimated three million associates. This means that in practice, they are at least as many as public officials in service and greatly exceed the number of active troops from the other four branches of the Armed Forces, which by 2016 totalled 365,315 troops.¹³⁴

Finally, we cannot overlook the direct link of the Bolivarian Militia with flagship programmes and the various types of political organisation (Communal Councils, for example) implemented by “Chavismo” aimed at materialising the socialist-revolutionary socioeconomic model, and also, the role to be played by that armed body in matters of intelligence and counter-intelligence against the population in general and population groups benefiting from those programmes, or grouped in particular political organisations, which is a direct and immediate result of this linkage and was also clearly established as part of the duties of the Militia in the *Constitutional Law of the National Armed Force*, specifically in paragraphs 8 to 11 of Article 78 of this legal instrument.

In summary, during the self-styled Bolivarian Revolution, institutionalised violence, a key indicator of a political model based on a repressive model of the garrison state, became the go-to mechanism for the Venezuelan government in a systematic and sustained manner to resolve internal political conflicts and as merely vindictive campaigns.

The repression exercised by government security forces, which was excessive, cruel and harsh, insofar as it was not subject to effective controls that could prevent and/or stop it as it ensued (illegally, we must add), became one of the key mechanisms for containing the legitimate

people’s demands for political change and substantial improvements in their living conditions.

PUNISHMENT AND COERCION

*The use of undemocratic instruments of punishment and coercion by the government against sectors considered and/or declared as opponents when deemed necessary, convenient and feasible from the perspective of the government, was established in an evil expression of the perverse logic of the internal enemy. It must be understood, therefore, that resorting to violence to such ends was a conscious decision taken by the military and civilian elite in control of the armed forces of the State.*¹³⁵

This has been a process of **systematic and sustained** repression in which, as seen in the relevant indicators, members of the armed forces played a predominant—and condemnable—role. That is to say, they proceeded consistently following the ideological trend known as “Chavismo,” which has aimed, ever since its inception as the dominant political project, at the progressive militarisation of society, expressed—among other important indicators—in the inception of the military spirit and character into society’s psyche. A proof thereof has been the resolution by military force of the most important political and socioeconomic conflicts that have arisen in Venezuela during the period studied, whenever these could not be quenched with the implementation of purely political means, which translated—inevitably, based on the political model described above—in massive violation of the most elementary human rights.

¹³⁴ Latin American Security and Defence Network. Atlas Comparativo de la Defensa en América Latina. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2H27MqR> Accessed: April 8, 2018.

¹³⁵ After the events of April 2002, when an incredibly massive popular demonstration led to the momentary removal of the incumbent president, the government did not feel the need to warn the national community that it would deliberately use its firepower to counteract any similar events. This warning was summarised with astonishing clarity in the threatening and premonitory sentence: “This is a peaceful revolution, but we are not unarmed.” Subsequent events, such as those of 2014 onwards, where institutional violence against the opposition was replicated, clearly demonstrated the extent to which this intimidation was materialised.

Las alarmas de la sociedad venezolana en torno a la posibilidad de que el proceso de represión sistemática descrito, progresivamente vaya incrementándose, al encontrar formas alternas de expresión, se han mantenido encendidas desde el momento - mediados de la primera década del siglo- en que se constituyó la **Milicia Bolivariana** y en especial porque ese cuerpo armado pasó a ser elemento integrante de la FANB. Pasó a ser "componente especial de carácter popular, integrada por hombres y mujeres que manifiestan su deseo patriótico de participar activamente en acciones que contribuyan a la Seguridad de la Nación, en todos los ámbitos de la misma"⁴⁵, con la misión asignada de "registrar, organizar, equipar, adiestrar y adoctrinar al pueblo a objeto de contribuir con la Seguridad de la Nación, en todos los niveles del Sistema Defensivo Territorial"⁴⁶, de acuerdo a lo pautado en la llamada *Ley Constitucional de la Fuerza Armada Nacional* dictada por la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, en enero de 2020. Los resquemores sentidos al respecto en modo alguno son infundados.

En primer lugar, desde su origen, la Milicia Bolivariana fue concebida como órgano estructurado en paralelo a los cuatro componentes clásicos de la institución castrense venezolana (Ejército, Armada, Aviación y GNB) con el objetivo de materializar la posibilidad de que el Ejecutivo nacional dispusiese de una entidad armada a ser utilizada como sostén del gobierno constituido, más allá e independientemente de que los cuatro componentes señalados (al unísono, por separado o en combinación entre algunos de ellos) pudiesen mostrar vacilación para actuar en determinadas situaciones, en las que el primer mandatario se los requiriera; por ejemplo, lo acontecido en abril de 2002 cuando se produjo la deposición momentánea del primer mandatario en funciones, Hugo Chávez, por facciones de la FANB declaradas en contra de su gestión.

La Milicia Bolivariana nació también con la finalidad manifiesta de desarrollar grados crecientes de control militar sobre la sociedad venezolana, lo cual se evidencia en el hecho de que en su funcionamiento tiene plena cobertura del territorio, al operar según la siguiente estructura y distribución:

Milicia Bolivariana



THE MILITARY AND CORRUPTION

A fundamental indicator of the “banana republic style” form of the garrison state imposed in Venezuela progressively and systematically since 1999 after the electoral victory of the self-styled Bolivarian Revolution, is the irrefutable fact that **a very substantial group of members of the military became part of the wealthiest class in the country**, based on the economic advantages and power acquired by controlling core areas of state and government. In other words, throughout two decades of political predominance of “Chavismo” in Venezuela, the military rapidly became economically powerful as an immediate and direct result of the process of **military colonisation of the centralised or local public administration**, which began when national power was left in the hands of the coup-plotting faction that rose up in February and November 1992 and when this faction called on other factions of the armed forces to run the government in connivance with them.

— MILITARY IN CIVILIAN POSITIONS

*Military colonisation of the public administration is understood as the process of increasing and systematic occupation of positions in public administration by military personnel, which that should be exclusively occupied by **civil servants**. This process has never lost its intrinsic purpose of **sequestering public administration**, due to the fact that many officers appointed were retired military personnel, since at the time of their appointment, priority was given not to their active status, but rather to their organisational origin.*

In any case, the percentage of retired officers in these positions was always lower than the number of active military personnel appointed to decision-making positions in public administration.

As a result, officers, technical officers, and even troop sergeants of the four branches of

the Armed Forces, became the hard core of senior management, middle management and operational bodies in important ministries, such as economy, health, food, internal relations, infrastructure, and the president’s office, among others. Similarly, they took over state-owned enterprises, with a large impact on society and the national economy, such as the oil industry, basic industries in the Guayana region, electricity supply, etc.

Similarly, military gluttony for key positions in public administration extended to organisations in charge of managing key sectors of everyday life, such as communications and foreign exchange administration, and including also, of course, the “flagship” projects and programmes of the national, state and regional governments—in these latter two instances, where the ruling party was in power, of course—such as Plan Bolívar 2000 and virtually every other plan or programme implemented since 2003, either as “missions” or “great missions.” In other words, what ensued was a process of military colonisation of the public administration that did not focus only on numbers but aimed at the essential: to conquer the major state and/or government agencies. In other words, in a country whose economy is based on the redistribution of oil income, they targeted agencies that were key to controlling society, while rapidly advancing the country model conceived by the new political elite since 1999.

Thus, in a general context where—since the start of the political process described above—a growing number of individuals linked to the ruling party suspiciously improved their standard of living exponentially over a short time span and against any logic, even making an offensive display of such wealth, it was clear at the same time that certain members of the Armed Forces rose rapidly to the top of the income pyramid of Venezuelan society. This was in flagrant contradiction with the official discourse at the time, which favoured socialist values over

personal property especially among members of the government. In the first five years, however, the so-called Bolivarian Revolution had become the main factor in the re-composition of the economically dominant class, to the point that a large number of statistical studies aimed at describing the changes in the wealthiest sector of Venezuelan society since 1999 determined, for example, that a significant numbers of “high-ranking military officers, bureaucrats at the service of the revolution and front men collaborating with the current government”¹³⁶ have joined this wealthy social group.

Obviously, one of the causes of the process described above is the fact that, right from outset, the process of military colonisation of public administration enabled clear opportunities for civil servants from the military involved to obtain substantial personal benefits which, in turn, benefited top “Chavista” officials as it secured solid loyalties **within the Armed Forces**, in an effort to reinforce support and ensure their permanence in power. These loyalties transcended the ideological trends, which were certainly present in the political realm at the time, but were sometimes based on the defence of merely monetary interests based on the materialisation of two scenarios, not necessarily mutually exclusive and even sometimes converging in some aspects of this context.

The first scenario—less damaging in terms of the impact on public finances—has to do with the regular and legal monetary compensation received by the military as part of their government posts as civil servants under the legal figure of the **secondment**. The second scenario, radically negative and therefore unacceptable in terms of the damage caused to the administration of public funds, was materialised through the **improper use of such funds when certain military officials incurred in acts of corruption**. This ethical deviation can in no way be attributed to any specific social class, but to the military staff involved from the beginnings of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, given the

magnitude of the funds to which they had access and the leniency with which other government agencies acted in the face of such events.

At this point, the main issue to be analysed is the fact that “*Chavismo*” is an essentially military political project (a Praetorian project, i.e., a project that materialises and glorifies military intervention in politics), because of its origin, as well as its scope, establishment, operation and key stakeholders, and because of the underlying ideological vision. Its power was materialised through the establishment of a regime equivalent to a garrison state that, throughout its development, enabled the conditions for the **Armed Forces to become an economic emporium**, or a sort of **parallel or alternative state**. As a result, a context emerged that clearly fostered the material conditions for certain military officers to engage in professional practice outside their natural area of expertise (national defence), and to incur in acts of corruption, against which corrective measures were little—or not at all—effective, thanks to their support to the dominant political ideology.

In other words, given the characteristics of the political model and the accumulation model (economic model) progressively imposed in Venezuela throughout the first two decades of this century, it is reasonable to assume the creation of a favourable environment that would ensure for the military the achievement of their political and economic aspirations, which, in turn, led to—although not necessarily deliberately—the emergence of factors in the equation that enabled acts of corruption, as these by definition are basically “the misuse of a position or role for non-official purposes [and] is equal to monopoly plus discretion minus accountability.”¹³⁷

In other words, “the tendency is to perceive corruption when an organisation or individual has monopoly power over a good or service, has discretion in deciding who will receive it and how much that person will get, and is not held accountable.”¹³⁸ These factors are inevitably reinforced when stakeholders act as part of

136 Katiúska Hernández. “69,6% de los estratos D y E ganan menos de 294 mil mensuales,” in *El Nacional*. Caracas: October 30, 2005, p. A-20.

137 Robert Klitgaard. “La cooperación internacional contra la corrupción,” in *Finanzas y Desarrollo*. USA: International Monetary Fund and World Bank, volume 35, No. 1, 1998. pp. 3-4.

138 *Ibid.*

organisations such as the Armed Forces, which, against the global trend of institutional evolution in terms of citizen oversight of government agencies, boast impunity from autonomous checks and balances.

The above statement—that during the course of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution the foundations were laid for the Armed Forces to become a corporation with growing economic power—is based on the comparison between this organisation and other similar entities of the Venezuelan State and on its analysis in the general context of Venezuelan society, and of the relevant productive sectors. In this connection, it is difficult to ascertain how many domestic or Venezuela-based foreign companies are specifically controlled by the Armed Forces, because of the diverse business areas covered by their respective subsidiaries, and based on the fact the military economic power extends, at least, to the following:

- **CONSTRUFANB.** Created in December 2013, with the purpose of developing construction, architecture and engineering projects, public and private real estate developments for members of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces and the Venezuelan civilian population, infrastructure works, comprehensive maintenance, metalworking and civil construction, piping, hydraulic protection, repairs, purchase and sale of hardware and construction materials; equipment in general for buildings, as well as the promotion, consulting and execution of urbanism projects, landscaping, environmental designs, carpentry and/or joinery, painting, plumbing, electrification, gas installations, execution and laying of ASTM (gas) pipes, waterproofing tests, heater installations, all matters related to steam pipes, gas and pressure and all types of activity directly or indirectly related to the field of design, architecture and engineering, and based on this, industrial buildings, tourist housing, purchase, sale, lease of all types of machinery and/or equipment and construction materials, and any other legal activity or business as decided by the General Shareholders' Meeting.

- **CANCORFANB S.A.** is a joint venture for the development of all types of buildings, including for health care purposes, electrical installations and sewage systems. The share capital is distributed between the Ministry of Defence through Constructora de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (CONSTRUFANB) with 51% and Cantera Cordón C.A. (CANCORCA), a family company established in 1996 with the remaining 49%.

Empresa Militar de Transporte (EMILTRA). It is an organisation of multimodal national or international transport (land, air or sea) of any kind of goods. This includes food, supplies, equipment, materials and machinery, moving services, etc. The goods sold to the public through the food distribution network controlled by the government are mobilised by this company. It also transports goods produced by state-owned companies and general equipment and materials managed by government agencies, and it operates as a cash transport operator for state-owned and private banks.

- Fondo de Inversión Negro Primero S.A. (FIMNP), whose purpose is "...to respond to the social needs of the military and civilian personnel of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, as well as to strengthen the operational readiness for Integral Defence, consistent with the sustainable and sustained development of the economic zone."¹³⁹
- Seguros Horizonte. Provider of individual and group insurance.
- Compañía Anónima Venezolana de Industrias Militares (CAVIM). Company for the production of explosives for civil and military use and assembly—under license of transnational companies—of part of the government-issue weapons of the armed force.
- Radio TIUNA. An FM radio station.
- Televisión Digital de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (TVFANB). Public access television station.

¹³⁹ <https://fimnpsa.wordpress.com/acerca-de/>

- Empresa Mixta Militar Venezolana de Proyectos de Ingeniería de Telecomunicaciones, Informática y Electrónica (TECNOMAR). Communications technology company focusing on security.
- Banco de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (BANFANB). A multi-service bank operating according to Venezuelan legislation.
- Empresa Agropecuaria de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (AGROFANB). Organisation for the production, processing and distribution of agricultural products.
- Diques y Astilleros Nacionales (DIANCA). Company for the design, construction, repair, modification and maintenance of ships, small boats, naval structures and related activities.
- Agua Mineral TIUNA. Bottler of mineral water for human consumption.
- Complejo Industrial TIUNA I C.A. Industrial and commercial mega-complex.
- Compañía Anónima Militar de Industrias Mineras, Petrolíferas y de Gas (CAMIMPEG). Company devoted to “all matters related, but not limited to, the legal activities (sic) of Oil, Gas and Mining Services in general.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, a company that in the future could become the direct competition of Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., and which, was recently awarded “the monopoly of services in the sector, in addition to national mining, in association with national and foreign companies;”¹⁴¹ in other words, a monopoly in the exploitation of the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc, a strip of land of more than 100.000 square kilometres located in the southern region of the country, which holds “reserves of 4,136 tons of gold, 33.79 million carats of diamond and 3,644 million tonnes of iron, in addition to immense reserves of coltan, bauxite and copper.”¹⁴²
- Compañía Anónima de Viajes y Turismo IFAMIL, C.A. A subsidiary of the social Security Institute of the Armed Forces, established in 1980, offering:
 - » Sale of domestic and international flight tickets.
 - » Accommodation services in hotels and inns nationally and internationally.
 - » Advice and sale of national and international packages, full-day tours, tourist circuits, quinceañera packages, cruises, golden age tours and graduation trips.
 - » Sale of national and international travel insurance.
 - » Car rental.
 - » Planning and consulting for group trips, conventions, incentive trips, congresses, vacation plans, guided tours and camps with proven experience.
 - » Organisation of recreational days for company staff, in order to comply with the requirements of the employee welfare law LOCYMAT (INPSASEL).
 - » Round trip airfare on commercial airlines.
 - » Transfer airport/hotel/airport.
 - » Accommodation according to the number of passengers.
 - » All inclusive plans (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner Unlimited alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages) or only breakfast and lunch with non-alcoholic beverages
- Constructora IPSFA, C.A. A state-owned limited liability company, whose corporate purpose is all acts of commerce directly or indirectly related to the construction of civil, mechanical, electrical and industrial engineering works, and especially the development of public and private housing complexes for members of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces and the Venezuelan civilian population.

140 Decree No. 2.231, authorising the creation of a state-owned limited liability company, to be called Compañía Anónima Militar de Industrias Mineras, Petrolíferas y de Gas (CAMIMPEG), which shall be attached to the Ministry of Defence. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 40,845, February 10, 2016.

141 TalCual. “Explotación del Arco Minero del Orinoco por parte de la FAN profundizará la corrupción,” in TalCual Digital. Caracas: Feb. 26, 2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2PedsRv> Accessed: Oct. 20, 2016.

142 Ibid.

- Empresa Mixta Socialista de Vehículos Venezolanos S.A. (EMSOVEN). State-owned company whose purpose is the design, engineering development, manufacture, assembly, renovation and revamping of multipurpose vehicles; armoured vehicles; conventional and other types of vehicles, their accessories and spare parts, for the National Armed Force, some of which may be marketed both nationally and internationally.
- Financiadora de Primas Horizonte, S.A. A financial company created to issue insurance policy financing, carry out credit operations and any other financial activity, in order to contribute to the marketing of the products of Seguros Horizonte C.A.
- Imprenta de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana S.A. (MPREFANB). State-owned corporation created for the exploitation of the printing, typography, lithography, photolithography, design and preparation of printed matter, stationery, books, magazines, cards, diptychs, triptychs, binding, purchase and sale.
- Inversora IPSFA, C.A. A company created for the administration of petrol stations nationwide; administration of spaces or premises to be used as parking lots; administration of real estate, purchase and sale of vehicles and automobiles; general services of cleaning and maintenance of personal property, painting, electricity, repair and maintenance of air conditioning; refrigeration, blacksmithing, gardening, carpet cleaning, remodelling and decoration of environments, minor civil works in terms of waterproofing, painting in general, repair and maintenance, plumbing service, sale and supply of materials in general, wholesale and retail; issuing, marketing, distribution, processing and reimbursement in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela of food bonus cards, vouchers or payment coupons issued by the Republic, or through banking entities, for the purchase of food and other social benefits that employers must pay their workers, with different nominal values and with a clear social and/or administrative purpose; intended for distribution by commercial, industrial or service companies, administrative entities and public and private agencies, to their personnel, wholesale and retail purchase and sale of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages; groceries.
- Neumáticos del Alba S.A. (Neumalba). A company created with the purpose of carrying out activities related to the production, commercialisation, distribution and provision of services in the tyre industry and related industries, including the import and export, purchase/sale inside and outside the national territory, of all type of tyres (new, renewed or unfit for use).

There has always been a strong interference of the military in the sensitive and crucial area of food. The following two examples, presented in chronological order, illustrate the point. First, in mid-2015, by order of the then Minister of Food (an active military officer), a large group of more than 290 companies “both public and private entities, subject to some form of state control”¹⁴³ related to the “production, distribution, logistics and marketing of food”¹⁴⁴ were grouped into conglomerates.

A total of 14 such conglomerates were created; namely the oil and greases conglomerate; the rice conglomerate; the meat conglomerate; the poultry conglomerate; the fish conglomerate; the animal feed conglomerate; the CorpoPDmercial conglomerate; the dairy, musaceous and fruit conglomerate; the silo conglomerate; the transport conglomerate; the food collection and cold storage conglomerate; the packing and packaging conglomerate; the maize meal conglomerate and the mixed conglomerate. The overwhelming majority of these corporations, as well as the companies that gave rise to their creation, were always in the hands of the military.

¹⁴³ Ministry of the People's Power for Food. Resolution issuing the Rules that Regulate the Organisation and Operation of the Productive Conglomerates of this Ministry. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 40.690. June 26, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Second example: In July 2016, based on the powers granted by the economic emergency decree issued at the beginning of that year by the Executive Branch—authorised as a legislative power by order of the Supreme Court of Justice—the government ordered the creation of the so-called *Gran Misión de Abastecimiento Soberano y Seguro* (Great Mission for Sovereign and Safe Supply), with powers over the “efficient and sustained production, distribution logistics, new commercialisation processes, cost, yield and price systems, consolidation of the productive organisation, integral security and defence, research, development, and import substitution.”¹⁴⁵

This body was granted the power to address the problems of: “Price increases, hoarding, speculation, black market; low productive output, deficient distribution system, consumer culture, territorial occupation of the economic apparatus, deficient maintenance systems and deficient articulation mechanisms.”¹⁴⁶ The military presence in the sector was determined because the command of this supra-governmental body was transferred to the Minister of Defence, who was then also the head of the Armed Forces’ Strategic Operational Command, while the other official bodies were subordinated to him, as from that moment on the government ordered that “the ministries and government agencies are subordinated to the Mission for Sovereign and Safe Supply.”¹⁴⁷

In summary, in this particular context characterised by the fact that—due to the resilience of the political and economic project implemented in Venezuela since 1999—members of the Armed Forces came to control extremely important areas of public administration that were in no way related to their areas of competence or expertise or their duties, it is necessary to analyse the case of military individuals being involved in—and/or accused

of—acts of corruption. The material conditions and political characteristics of the established model of domination, being a military-driven regime, laid the foundations for this situation.

Not surprisingly, critical areas of public administration, such as health, food, foreign exchange management or social intervention programmes, i.e., key areas for redistribution of oil income and that could secure support of large sectors of the population, were handed over to the military at different times of the process. This is where iconic cases of corruption took place, which we will describe below in some of the examples that have been publicised throughout the last two decades.

In the area of health, an example is the case of the investigation opened by the General Prosecutor’s Office in 2013 against the Health minister “after finding signs of possible corruption during her tenure.”¹⁴⁸ On that occasion, the events under investigation included the contracting of various companies (specifically Corporación Conmed, Consorcio Corpomed C.V. and MCC London Limited) for the construction of six hospitals in different states of the country (Apure, Barinas, Caracas, Guárico and Miranda), as part of the so-called *Barrio Adentro IV* Mission, one of the flagship programmes of successive revolutionary governments. This procurement process was fraudulent, since, despite the fact that US\$663.6 million were allocated for the construction and supplies of said hospitals, the projected works were never completed.¹⁴⁹

In addition, the same official and part of her team were subjected to alternate investigations for “alleged irregular handling of medical supplies and equipment,”¹⁵⁰ which implied the crimes of “culpable embezzlement and conspiracy with a contractor.”¹⁵¹ This was based on evidence such as the discovery of more than 60 “containers of medical and surgical equipment and supposedly expired medicines.”¹⁵² In the meantime, most

145 Sandra Izarra. “Presidente Maduro activa la Gran Misión Abastecimiento Soberano,” in *Correo del Orinoco*. Caracas: June 11, 2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/39r3fcc> Accessed: February 21, 2020.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Research team at Runrun.es. Ministerio Público emitió 2 órdenes de captura por corrupción contra exministra Eugenia Sader que el TSJ no acata. Caracas: June 13, 2017. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2SN0TPc> Accessed: February 22, 2020.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

Venezuelans were suffering a rampant shortage of medicines that, among others, prompted the National Assembly to decree the Complex Humanitarian Emergency and to request assistance from the international community.

In the area of food, recurrent cases of corruption involving military staff were detected during more than 20 years of “Chavismo.” These cases range from the early scandal at the Ezequiel Zamora agro-industrial complex (sugar production), where in 2004 an investigation by the National Assembly singled out officers linked to the administration of the complex for the diversion of US\$1.3 million allocated for the sugar mill,¹⁵³ to more recent events, such as those that occurred in mid-2016, when National Assembly opposition deputies questioned the directors of the Ministry of Food as they found—as a result of inquiries made into the annual report presented by that Ministry—that the price of certain imported items was sometimes as much as three times higher than the international price at the time, for example, in the case of milk powder.¹⁵⁴

We can only imagine the amount of money lost due to improper procedures such as these in a country like Venezuela, which relies fundamentally on imports to cover its food needs, and the impact this has on the finances of a ministry which, in the annual report mentioned above, acknowledged that it had managed a budget in excess of 13 billion bolivars at the time. But the matter did not end there. Similar accusations were made in a press report in relation to the purchase of yellow maize by the same ministry, which was invoiced at one point with a surcharge of more than 50% compared to international market prices.¹⁵⁵

In fact, according to the same source, U.S. prosecutors opened related inquiries due to the activities related to the handling on U.S. soil of part of the money from those food purchases.¹⁵⁶

These fund management actions should not be able to evade scrutiny and oversight, since they occur in a country where 80% of households face food insecurity and where about 8 million people eat only one or two meals a day, most of them of poor quality.¹⁵⁷

Military personnel were also singled out in what is considered the largest case of corruption in Venezuelan history, which involved the allocation of preferential currencies through the National Commission of Foreign Currency Administration (CADIVI), which operated between February 2003 and January 2014. The names of the officials in question came up in the plot because they had held managerial positions in that body, or because they had been direct beneficiaries of the foreign currency allocations approved by it.¹⁵⁸ Government spokespersons calculated the financial losses caused by the irregularities committed at CADIVI between US\$25–30 billion. The General Comptroller attempted some explanations of the specific corruption mechanisms developed there, in a report prepared about these cases, where he confirmed the allocation of billions of dollars to shelf companies that did not comply with any control procedures and never produced evidence that the alleged products they had imported actually entered the country.¹⁵⁹ In other words, money simply vanished.

Similarly, officials linked to the administration and/or various social intervention programmes implemented by Chavista governments over time were singled out in corruption allegations, and this occurred from the very beginnings of the revolutionary hegemony. The cases of Plan Bolívar 2000 and the Fondo Único Social (Single Social Fund) (FUS) are iconic. The former, between 1999 and 2000, received 73 billion bolivars from the executive branch through a procedure dubbed “transfer of non-executed items from the budgets of ministries and state governments

153 Gustavo Coronel. Corrupción, administración deficiente y abuso de poder en la Venezuela de Hugo Chávez. CATO Institute. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2SXbANK> Accessed: February 21, 2020. p. 7.

154 Gabriela González. “Carlos Osorio, Giuseppe Yoffreda y Rodolfo Marcos Torres serán ‘invitados’ a la AN,” in *La Razón*. Caracas: April 15, 2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2T5mpxr>. Accessed: February 22, 2020.

155 Hannah Dreier and Joshua Goodman. “Venezuela military trafficking food as country goes hungry,” in AP. December 28, 2016. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2SXKM07>. Accessed: February 19, 2020.

156 Ibid.

157 Universidad Central de Venezuela / Universidad Simón Bolívar / Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. National Living Conditions Survey in Venezuela 2017. Alimentación I. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2PhY3Q5> Accessed: December 18, 2019.

158 Research Unit at Siete Días. “La promoción militar de los dólares CADIVI,” in *El Nacional*. Caracas: July 27, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3bYwOn8> Accessed: February 18, 2020.

159 El Carabobeño. “Contraloría constató que empresas de maletín evadieron algunos trámites,” in *El Carabobeño*. Valencia: July 29, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2SMEDot>. Accessed: February 18, 2020.

to set up a fund for military garrisons, to help them develop renovation and social programmes that were normally the responsibility of public (civil) agencies.”¹⁶⁰ The justification behind this irregular allocation of funds was to “build various engineering projects that aimed to solve urgent social problems in the various military garrisons.”¹⁶¹ This is why “soldiers were seen fixing up houses and selling food under the so-called Plan Bolívar 2000.”¹⁶²

Contrary to the populist rhetoric used to justify it, and in complete disregard the potential impact that its implementation was intended to have on the population, Plan Bolívar 2000 led right from the start to outrageous squandering of funds, since the essential monitoring and oversight mechanisms for handling such a large amount of money were not established as part of its design or during its implementation, especially on the understanding that “garrison commanders would receive huge amounts of money to purchase construction materials without any administrative controls. The garrison commands are designed to manage funds in the order of a few hundred thousand bolivars.”¹⁶³

Thus, irregular actions in procedures such as “amended invoices and post-dated cheques,”¹⁶⁴ among other issues, began to be justified, as part of a widespread corrupt behaviour.

The Comptroller General’s Office issued a report condemning Plan Bolívar 2000, which found, among other irregularities, the existence “of non-existent companies, altered invoices, lost or stolen chequebooks, in the 26 regional offices of the aforementioned programme.”¹⁶⁵ However, when certain names of military officers directly responsible for these illegal acts were made public, the president excused them by trivialising the situation in the following terms: “Perhaps it is an administrative fault that calls for a fine (...) it’s no reason to turn on the fan.”¹⁶⁶ According to

calculations presented in studies on this case, the small “administrative fault” resulted in the failure to account for the expenditure of at least US\$ 150 million.¹⁶⁷

With the Single Social Fund (FUS), a programme focused on granting subsidies to unprotected sectors to cover health care, housing and education expenses, among others, the situation was similar to Plan Bolívar 2000, as it was managed without the necessary planning, follow-up and control processes to support the proper administration of the US\$400 million it received from the government. As a result, administrative irregularities accounting for around US\$30 million were committed, including the direct delivery of funds, without any justification, to persons linked to the programme directors.¹⁶⁸

The truth of the matter is that the aforementioned corruption scheme has not gone unnoticed in the eyes of Venezuelan public opinion, and has been under scrutiny of the international community, which has been aware of the situation and has acted accordingly. Thus, for example, for the reasons described and/or because they have been accused of being responsible for human rights violations in Venezuela, several military officers have been sanctioned by the United States Government. Canada has followed suit, listing 29 Venezuelan military officers. The European Union slapped sanctions on five of them, and the same number was sanctioned by Switzerland. In Latin America, Panama applied restrictive measures to 20 military officers. Among other actions, the sanctions imply that “individuals, and in some cases their family members and associates, may not have any relationship with companies or citizens of the country imposing the sanctions. In addition, their assets and property in that territory are confiscated and their visas revoked.”¹⁶⁹

160 El Impulso. “Especial (I de II): Los escándalos del gobierno en los últimos años,” in El Impulso.com. Barquisimeto: June 23, 2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/39TCgGm>. Accessed: February 20, 2020.

161 Fernando Ochoa Antich. “La corrupción y Hugo Chávez,” in el-nacional.com. Caracas: September 14, 2014. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2PbI6uG>. Accessed: October 19, 2016.

162 Joseph Poliszuk. “14 años de corrupción,” in El Universal. Caracas: February 17, 2013. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2vTdnfe>. Accessed: October 19, 2016.

163 Fernando Ochoa Antich. op.cit.

164 Joseph Poliszuk. op.cit.

165 El Impulso. op.cit.

166 Joseph Poliszuk. op.cit.

167 Gustavo Coronel. op.cit. p. 7.

168 Ibid. p. 8.

169 María Josefá Maya. “156 venezolanos han sido sancionados por 31 países,” en Runrun.es. Caracas: February 18, 2020. Available at: <https://bit.ly/37OxmJb>. Accessed: February 22, 2020.

Also in the multilateral field, concerns have been raised regarding the situation in Venezuela, in matters as or more serious than those described above. For example, in its 2019 Report, released in February 2020, as previously noted in this investigation, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)¹⁷⁰ made direct reference to the problem of drug trafficking in Venezuela in the following terms: “(...) in recent years, organised criminal groups have transported large quantities of illegal drugs to Europe and the United States from Colombia, via the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”¹⁷¹ The statement was accompanied by the following warning: “there are signs that, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, criminal groups have managed to infiltrate government security forces and have created an informal network known as the ‘Cartel of the Suns’ to facilitate the entry and exit of illegal drugs.”¹⁷²

When the INCB report was made public, one of the members of the board clarified that the sources from which they had obtained the information, which had enabled them to make their statements in such manner, were “reliable and verified.” Specifically, based on the data obtained from said sources, they said that “there is a clear problem of transit in Venezuela and the potential infiltration of an informal network in the security systems,” as reported by the INCB. Similarly, the same official revealed that the matter was dealt with the seriousness and discretion that the case demanded, and that they “have also alerted the States involved or affected by this issue **and what we discuss with the States is confidential cooperation.**”¹⁷⁵ This alert was sent also to the Venezuelan State, since “there was a meeting with Venezuela in Vienna

and the INCB is keeping that meeting confidential because it is only of interest to the States and our institution.”¹⁷⁶

Other especially sensitive areas in Venezuela have also been under the scrutiny of international monitoring agencies, for example, **gold mining**. Investigations carried out by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime have determined that between 86 and 91% of gold production in Venezuela is illegal¹⁷⁷ and takes place in conditions that create serious and irreversible environmental damage and in the midst or as a cause of human rights violations to population groups related to mining activities, especially indigenous groups that have historically inhabited in the region, under working conditions that could very well be described as modern slavery.¹⁷⁸

The importance in terms of volume of illegally mined gold in Venezuela can only be grasped by placing the issue into context, using comparison parameters developed with available official figures. For example, the Swiss Customs Office reported that between 2012 and 2014 slightly more than 27 tonnes of gold entered that country from Venezuela.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, between 2000 and 2010, formal gold production in the country reached 100 tonnes.¹⁸⁰ But while formal production gradually declined, to the point that by 2014 the state-owned company in charge of the gold business, Minerven, recorded less than a tonne, informal gold production in the same period reached nearly 10 tonnes, most of which was smuggled out of the country.¹⁸¹ One can only imagine the “profitability” of such an illegal activity.

170 The International Narcotics Control Board is an agency attached to the United Nations, established on the basis of the agreements reached in the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and responsible for monitoring the implementation of the international drug control treaties. Of its 13 members, three are chosen by the World Health Organisation and the remaining 10 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

171 News ONU. “Portal de noticias de la ONU reseña vínculos del Cártel de los Soles con el narcotráfico en Latinoamérica,” in ALBERTONEWS. February 29, 2020. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Q9TBTL>. Accessed: February 12, 2020.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid. Emphasis added by the author.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid. Emphasis added by the author.

176 Ibid.

177 Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime. *Organised Crime and Illegally Mined Gold in Latin America*. Geneva: Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, 2016. p. 8.

178 Ibid. p. 36

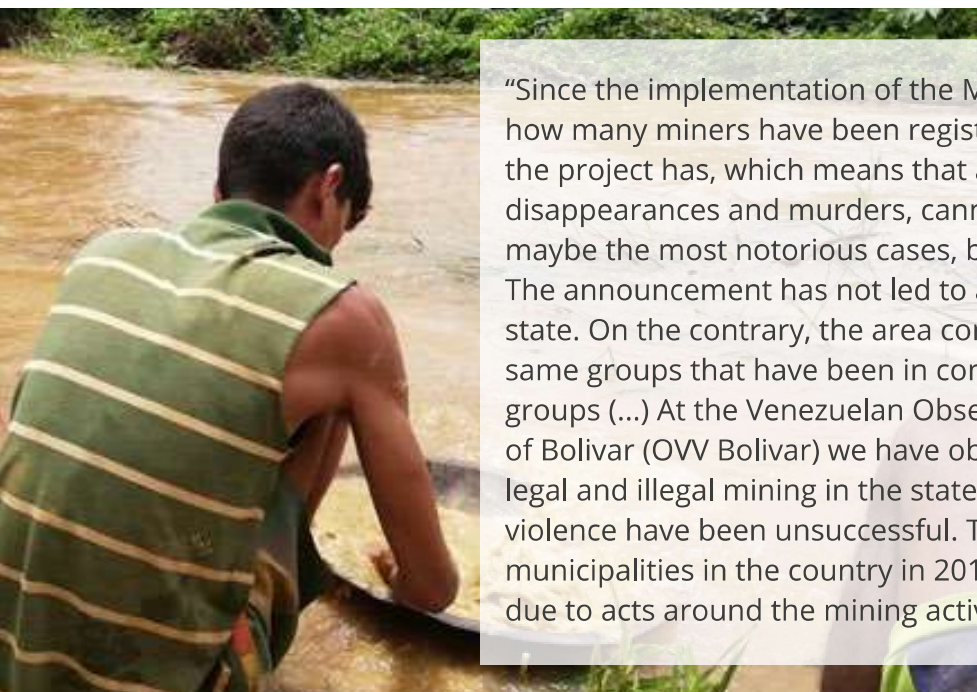
179 Ibid. p. 21

180 Ibid. p. 16

181 Ibid.

Noteworthy is that anomalies such as those described above in relation to gold mining in Venezuela occur in the officially named National Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arc,¹⁸² because the area, as per decree No. 2,248 dated February 24, 2016, must have “a protection subsystem for peace, which protects the people, infrastructure, operational areas, activities and other aspects and resources of the Zone.”¹⁸³ The responsibility for this protection subsystem was assigned primarily to the Armed Forces which, according to the provisions of the aforementioned decree, “will have the responsibility to safeguard, protect and maintain the harmonious continuity of the operations and activities of the Strategic Industries located in the National Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arch,”¹⁸⁴ for which “it will develop, together with the Organised People’s Power, an Integral Security and Defence Plan and will install, through the National Mining Reservation, the corresponding units under the relevant Regional Command in the area.”¹⁸⁵

Military company Camimpeg played vital role in mining in the area, which is part of one of the so-called Special Economic Military Zones—implemented back in 2013, and more recently defined by law as “the geographical space where potentialities, general and special conditions are identified to carry out endogenous, sustainable and productive activities directed by the Bolivarian National Armed Force.”¹⁸⁶ The logical conclusion is that there has been at least a great deal of incompetence or a great deal of omission. On this point, noteworthy is that by 2018, according to the research carried out by the so-called “Platform against the Mining Arc,” the United States Government was already studying the possibility of imposing sanctions on Camimpeg, and other related foreign companies.¹⁸⁷ In any case, multiple alerts have been raised in relation to the current situation in the south of the country, as expressed by the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV) through the Regional Observatory in Bolívar:



“Since the implementation of the Mining Arc Plan, we still do not know how many miners have been registered and how many gold deposits the project has, which means that acts of violence in the area, such as disappearances and murders, cannot be officially documented, except maybe the most notorious cases, based on their gruesome nature (...) The announcement has not led to any changes in the south of Bolívar state. On the contrary, the area continues to be controlled by the same groups that have been in control for more than 15 years: armed groups (...) At the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence in the State of Bolívar (OVV Bolívar) we have observed that the multiple plans on legal and illegal mining in the state and their security policies to curb violence have been unsuccessful. The upshot is that the most violent municipalities in the country in 2018 were El Callao and Roscio, mainly due to acts around the mining activity.”¹⁸⁸

182 The Orinoco Mining Arc National Strategic Development Zone, known in the media as the Mining Arc, covers an area of nearly 112,000 square kilometres, distributed mainly in the state of Bolívar and to a lesser extent in the states of Amazonas and Delta Amacuro. The potential for exploitation of the area is estimated at US\$100 billion based on the minerals available there: bauxite, kaolin, coltan, copper, diamonds, dolomite, iron, gold, the so-called rare earth elements, etc.

183 Decree No. 2,248, creating the “Orinoco Mining Arc” National Strategic Development Zone. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 40.855. February 24, 2016.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Constitutional Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces. Official Gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, No. 6.508 Extraordinary. Jan. 30, 2020.

187 Andrea Pacheco, “CAMIMPEG: las Fuerzas Armadas y el Arco Minero del Orinoco. Proceso de ideologización de las FANB,” in *Desarmando al Arco Minero. El A.M.O. como visión de proyecto nacional. Venezuela: Plataforma contra el Arco Minero del Orinoco / Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Latinoamericana*, bulletin No. 2, August 2018, p. 49.

188 Venezuelan Observatory on Violence / Bolívar Regional Observatory. *Recientes políticas gubernamentales no generan cambios en relación a la violencia en el sur del estado Bolívar*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/33ft2C7> Accessed: March 14, 2020.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The consolidation of the “Chavista” ideological project as a constituted power brought about the progressive construction of a political system that can effectively be classified as a **garrison state**, because, on the one hand, inspired by the conception of an internal enemy, it appealed to the excessive, ruthless and openly illegal use of force by government authorities, in order to curb the advance of political opposition and to confront popular discontent in demonstrations and protests. On the other hand, it provided the material conditions for a significant portion of the military to become a **privileged portion of the wealthiest socioeconomic group in society**, taking advantage of the benefits derived from the management of core areas of the state and government. This also set in motion the process that led to the expansion of a booming business empire controlled by the military. This context provides many of the explanations as to why, throughout the last two decades of Venezuelan history, members of the Armed Forces have been involved in human rights violations and/or have been accused of being involved in acts of corruption.
2. The issue was exacerbated by the fact that the regime disregarded the obligation of transparency and accountability in its management. In consequence, it was very lenient in the face of the abovementioned abnormalities, which became a recurrent behaviour that served as a mechanism to ensure loyalty of its followers. This in turn translated into a solid support that worked towards the objective of ensuring the temporary permanence of their model of domination, despite the profound political and economic crisis the country was experiencing. Once again, the cross-cutting issue was always is the use of oil income used as a pivot for the consolidation of their political project, in this case, a militaristic and authoritarian regime.

A woman's face is seen through the vertical bars of a prison cell. She is wearing a patterned shirt and a dark cap with the word 'PLEX' on it. Her expression is somber.

DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF CORRUPTION AND ORGANISED CRIME ON WOMEN IN VENEZUELA



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

This chapter of the research was not only a challenge given the lack of data, but also a common obstacle that we have had to overcome for more than a decade in Venezuela. It is a contribution to settle an outstanding debt on the visibility of the differentiated impact of the issue of corruption and organised crime on women. We will then try to explain the impact of this phenomenon on the social fabric, human rights and the daily lives of the key victims.

According to the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), corruption can lead to direct, indirect or remote human rights violations.

Direct violations are those caused deliberately by an act of corruption as a means of violating a right, while **indirect violations** are when the act of corruption is not carried out with the purpose of violating a right, but is a necessary condition for the right to be violated. **Remote violations** are produced when the case of corruption has no link or causal connection with the violation of the fundamental right. Corruption is only one factor among many others. “For example, when claims of possible corruption during an election challenge the accuracy of the final result, social tensions and protests may arise that may be suppressed with violence.” (CIEDH 2009:32)

While it is an important perspective, we will not discuss here whether one gender is more likely than the other to commit or encourage acts of corruption, given that women do not currently participate on an equal footing with men in all areas of public life, including politics, access to public office or other government positions, as revealed by the Map of Women in Politics: 2019, created by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women.¹ Therefore, although some studies suggest that women commit fewer acts

of corruption and crime than men, this is based on available data without assessing the structural constraints that women face in holding such positions. It should be noted, however, that of the more than 300 senior government officials who have been sanctioned by the European Union and the United States, about 9 per cent are women.

In any case, however, it can be argued that corruption, like gender-based violence, is an obstacle to achieving Goal 5 of sustainable development, which promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment, which are necessary elements for strengthening democratic governance, social development and economic growth, among other purposes (Transparency International, 2007). Corruption and its effects cannot therefore be understood in gender-neutral terms. Consequently, an effective strategy to combat it—in addition to complying with classic premises such as public management based on transparency and accountability or the promotion of values in the civil service, fostering the rule of law, among others—implies structural reforms aimed at reversing social, economic and gender-based vulnerability factors in society. As the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP) states, “the effects of corruption on women transcend their limited access to social services and public goods. Considering that women endure multiple forms of discrimination, they suffer more repression in societies dominated by corruption.” (ICHRP:63)

¹ Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/es/digital-library/publications/2019/03/women-in-politics-2019-map>

WOMEN IN VENEZUELA: VICTIMS OF CORRUPTION

The most common definitions of corruption refer to the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain, but the definition is usually flexible enough to cover any conduct involving abuse of power. Notwithstanding this characterisation, it is usually affirmed that the motive for corruption is exclusively linked to an economic benefit, which implies serious limitations as it excludes the corrupt behaviour such as demanding acts of a sexual nature as part of abuse of said power. Also, for instance, when a case of bribery of a police officer is defined as an isolated act, the interpretation is biased, especially when as a result of the bribery a business is allowed to continue operating, even when there is clear evidence of women victims of human

trafficking, and is not sanctioned as part of a criminal network, insofar as it facilitates or favours the exploitation of these persons. These circumstances have a tremendously differentiated impact on women as victims of corruption, including indigenous women, women of African descent, women with disabilities, women in prison and women with diverse sexualities.

Most studies that measure the impact of corruption do not disaggregate data by gender, making the analysis more difficult. However, some general points are made: women are much more dependent on public services and subsidies provided by the government than men.

Based on the premise that the livelihood of the population living below the poverty line depends directly on government services and subsidies, women not only outnumber men among those living in this condition, but their proportion has increased over time, from 108 women for every 100 men in 1997 to 117 women for every 100 men in 2012, according to the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on the Millennium Development Goals for 2015.

The interruption, malfunctioning or rationing of public services such as water, gas, electricity,² transport, food, education or health care directly affects the daily tasks of women in their households. Considering that, based



- ² According to the "National Hospital Survey" conducted by Médicos por la Salud, by the end of 2018 and early 2019, several fatalities were reported due to blackouts or power outages and shortage of supplies. A total of 1557 people reportedly died due to lack of supplies in hospitals and 79 died due to electrical outages (ENH 2019)
- ³ The gender-based division of tasks, based on a system of shared beliefs about what men and women should do in general, or based on the characteristics of masculinity and femininity developed by men (Heredia, 2004:79). The latest report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Sustainable Development Goals (2018) states that, according to data collected in 90 countries between 2000 and 2016, women spent approximately three times more time on unpaid household work than men.

on traditional gender roles, women have historically been responsible for attending to the family's basic needs³ such as preparing food, cleaning, taking children to school or caring for the sick, including visiting relatives in prison. If the provision of essential goods and services is entrusted through irregular procedures to companies that do not meet the requirements for providing such services with the highest possible quality, the daily lives of women are directly affected.

In particular, the irregular supply of potable water, electricity and domestic gas services has immediate and gender-differentiated effects, as women are primarily responsible for collecting water, queuing for gas or cooking with firewood (Convite, 2019:4) or other types of fuel. "A study in 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa found that women spend a combined total of at least 16 million hours per day collecting water, men 6 million hours, and children 4 million hours. This task leaves less time for women to engage in other activities such as attending school or participating in the labour market." (UN 2018:14) Furthermore, it points out that at present, one billion people, i.e. 13% of the world's population, live without electricity permanently, especially in rural areas, and three billion still use inefficient stoves and polluting fuels, which seriously affects their health and well-being, particularly for women and children, as they spend the most of their time at home.

In Venezuela, 39% of the heads of household⁴

are women, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (2011 Census)—and even though this number may be questionable since it is constructed from self-awareness surveys about the person who usually has the highest income or has a job,⁵—which shows that 4 out of 10 households are single-parent households, since Venezuelan homes headed by women are generally single-parent homes and these women, in addition to providing the largest portion of income to the household, must take on the tasks of caring for dependents (children, the elderly, the sick or the disabled).

In this context, food supply also has a direct impact on the health, well-being, household economy and employment sustainability of women, much more so than for men, especially because, as the Complex Humanitarian Emergency peaked, Venezuelan women spent an average of 8 to 14 hours a week in long queues to buy food at regulated prices⁶ or to receive care for their dependents in a health care centre. Thus, getting or keeping a formal job becomes a secondary priority, thus widening the gender gaps and leaving women in a much more vulnerable position.

Women are paid less than men for work of equal value,⁷ and thus, women are much more financially impacted when they are asked an illegal fee—e.g. extortion—in exchange for receiving a service or good they should get for an affordable price. For example, if a woman is asked for a "backhander" in exchange for a bag

⁴ The "head of household" is a traditional statement made at the beginning of a census or household survey to help link different members of the household with one of its members.

⁵ This self-assessment in single-woman households is clear, but in homes where women live with their partner "they are less likely to declare themselves as 'heads of household'. Therefore, we must look twice at the statistics before 'assuming' radical changes in certain societal models," as explained by Camila Mella, a sociologist at the University of Chile <https://www.latercera.com/noticia/hogares-encabezados-mujeres-se-duplican-25-anos/>

⁶ Avesa, Mujeres e Línea, CEPAZ y FREYA (2017) Mujeres al Límite, el peso de la emergencia humanitaria: Vulneración de derechos humanos de las mujeres en Venezuela. In: El Impulso (July 3, 2016) Se maltrata la calidad de vida de mujeres en colas de Venezuela <https://www.elimpulso.com/2016/07/03/se-maltrata-calidad-de-vida-de-mujeres-en-colas-de-venezuela/>

⁷ "Data from 45 countries indicate that gender inequality in relation to income still prevails: in 89% of these countries, men's hourly wages are higher than women's, with an average wage difference of 12.5%." (UN 2018:8)

of food, the impact on her economy is two-fold because she will have to dispose of the little money she earns—due to wage inequality—to pay a bribe to be able to access the food provided by the government through the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP)⁸ to families with lower purchasing power at affordable prices. **This form of corruption not only affects her because she is a woman and because she is poor, but it also fosters a parallel market, which excludes those who do not have the means to pay these bribes.** The inconsistency, insufficiency, irregularity and discretion in the distribution in this food programme may help to explain the large number of women who are forced to **exchange sex for food**,⁹ as one more effect of the differentiated impact of corruption on women.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet discussed this issue in her report on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on July 5, 2019 (A/HRC/41/18) in the following terms: **“In addition to spending more than 10 hours a day searching for food, some of them have been forced to resort to exchanging sex for food.”**

SO NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE HUNGRY?

*The message from Supreme Court Justice Carmen Zuleta de Merchán via Twitter was iconic, as she reacted to Bachelet’s report: “Bachelet’s report emphasises women in order to victimise them sentimentally, as advised by the illustrated patriarchal discourse. Women in Venezuela are masters of their own destiny and **when they choose to prostitute themselves (as elsewhere in the world) it is because they are whores.**”¹⁰*

Another context where corruption affects women—including trans women—in situations of sexual exploitation, are the cases in which **the law enforcement officers abuse their authority and take advantage of the lack of oversight on their duties**, which has been historically exerted by municipal or state authorities,¹¹ and **demand sexual favours or payments of a portion of these women’s income in exchange for not arresting them.**

But such a situation is not exclusive to Venezuela. According to Musembi, the risk that prostituted persons will fall victim to corrupt behaviour is exacerbated by the low probability that they will challenge the actions of officials, due to the social stigma attached to them, and she then cites the example of prostitution in Azerbaijan: Despite being a legal activity in that country, it carries a social stigma, as prostituted persons are vulnerable to police abuse and feel obliged to pay bribes to avoid forced and illegal medical examinations, since according to the Law (used as a control instrument) the police can initiate an investigation if any of them is accused of spreading sexually transmitted infections. However, it is common for officers to abuse their power and bully victims with the threat of initiating a legal procedure, which is intimidating enough to fall victim to corrupt behaviour. (Transparency International 2007: 159).

⁸ These are paradoxically managed mostly by women, which on the one hand allows them to raise awareness of their worth, but, by failing to question or challenge their gender roles, they reinforce the notion of their role as caregivers of the entire community (EDF 2018)

⁹ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Para. 14. See also: Mendoza Post (01-06-2019) *Prostitutas de Venezuela ofrecen sexo por comida*, and Agencia Carabobeña de Noticias (01-06-2019) *Prostitutas de Caracas ahora cambian sexo por comida*

¹⁰ @zuletamarchan (06-07-2019) <https://twitter.com/zuletamarchan/status/1147532303347920899?s=20>

¹¹ For example, in 1924, the state of Aragua enacted the first Regulation on Prostitution, which established in Article 4 that the Civil Registrar of the District must instruct law enforcement officers and agents to visit houses of prostitution in order to 1) Notify them of the obligation to attend the venereological dispensary to be examined by a doctor and to be provided with a health certificate. (2) Require them to produce a health certificate every day; and (3) arrest those who have not obtained the certificate or have failed to renew it, and bring them to the police station. Any woman (because the regulations basically makes specific reference to them) who was caught by the police *or by a private individual* without this certificate could be arrested and remain in detention for a period of 8 days, and reoffenders could be expelled from the city. Since then, the police have remained as the competent authority to verify the health situation of persons engaged in prostitution, with all the abuses that this entails.

In addition, human rights violations, mainly of women and girls, are common due to corruption with the involvement of public officials in **human trafficking networks**.¹² This occurs, for example, when authorised personnel who allow or facilitate the exit from or entry into the country of persons without checking their documents, identity, age or necessary controls based on the authority invested in them. Or when they carry out selective inspections on farms or businesses where they observe the presence of persons working in unhealthy and exploitative conditions, without safety provisions, and demand an undue payment in exchange for turning a blind eye to such an aberration.¹³

The latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the Sustainable Development Goals states that, from 2012 to 2014 globally, more than 570 different flows of human trafficking were identified, affecting all regions; many flows involved mobilisation from low-income to higher-income countries (UN 2018:12). Considering that trafficking in persons is a highly lucrative crime, associated with organised crime, which victimises mostly women and girls at an increasingly young age, its criminal prosecution faces several obstacles. On the one hand, there are the interests of the large capitals invested in this crime, the officials involved and that are part of the system that is supposed to fight it, and the very obstacles that women face in accessing justice that discourage them from going through the judicial process.¹⁴

This form of corruption is particularly damaging to women because, in addition to the devastating consequences that the crime itself may have on them, the involvement of these agents has the implicit message that, regardless of whether they are within or outside the reach of their traffickers, no one will believe their story because law enforcement officers themselves ensure the continuity of the crime with complete impunity.

According to non-governmental organisation Éxodo, in 2018, for the first time, the Venezuelan Public Prosecutor's Ministry presented figures on the results of the fight against human trafficking, stating that there were **99 people indicted and 71 accused of this crime** to date. The statements were released by the General Prosecutor himself upon announcing the capture of 28 people (15 women and 13 men), who were part of a network engaged in recruiting people for sexual exploitation in the form of pornography.¹⁵

However, as Éxodo points out, the figure is difficult to compare since Tarek Williams Saab took over as General Prosecutor illegally on August 3, 2017, and the data disclosed are for his first year in office, which would end in August 2018, while aspects relating to routes and modus operandi of the trafficking networks, or the way victims are targeted, remain somewhat anecdotal. There is no articulated policy for dealing with this crime, which is evident in the treatment of the alleged "shipwrecks" between the town of Guiria and

¹² Trafficking in persons is a form of slavery in which human beings are degraded to the status of objects, traded in trade chains, smuggled into or out of the country and then, at the final destination, subjected to exploitative conditions or other illegal purposes (Fundación Esperanza).

¹³ According to a study carried out in 2006 by Linares for the Women's Association for Reciprocal Welfare (AMBAR) called *Characterisation of the problem of child sexual exploitation in the Chacao Municipality*, "Their relationship with the police is not very positive, they do not feel protected, but threatened by extortion; they see the police as an obstacle to the fulfilment of their activities." The study was carried out by measuring the impact on the population between 13-17 years of age.

¹⁴ See In Sight Crime (24-10-2018) *Aumentan casos de migrantes venezolanos víctimas de trata en Colombia*

¹⁵ President's office (12-09-2018) *Ministerio Público ha imputado a 99 personas por delito de trata de personas*

¹⁶ Tal Cual (26-12-2019) 2019 cierra con casi cien desaparecidos que zarparon hacia Trinidad y Tobago y Curazao

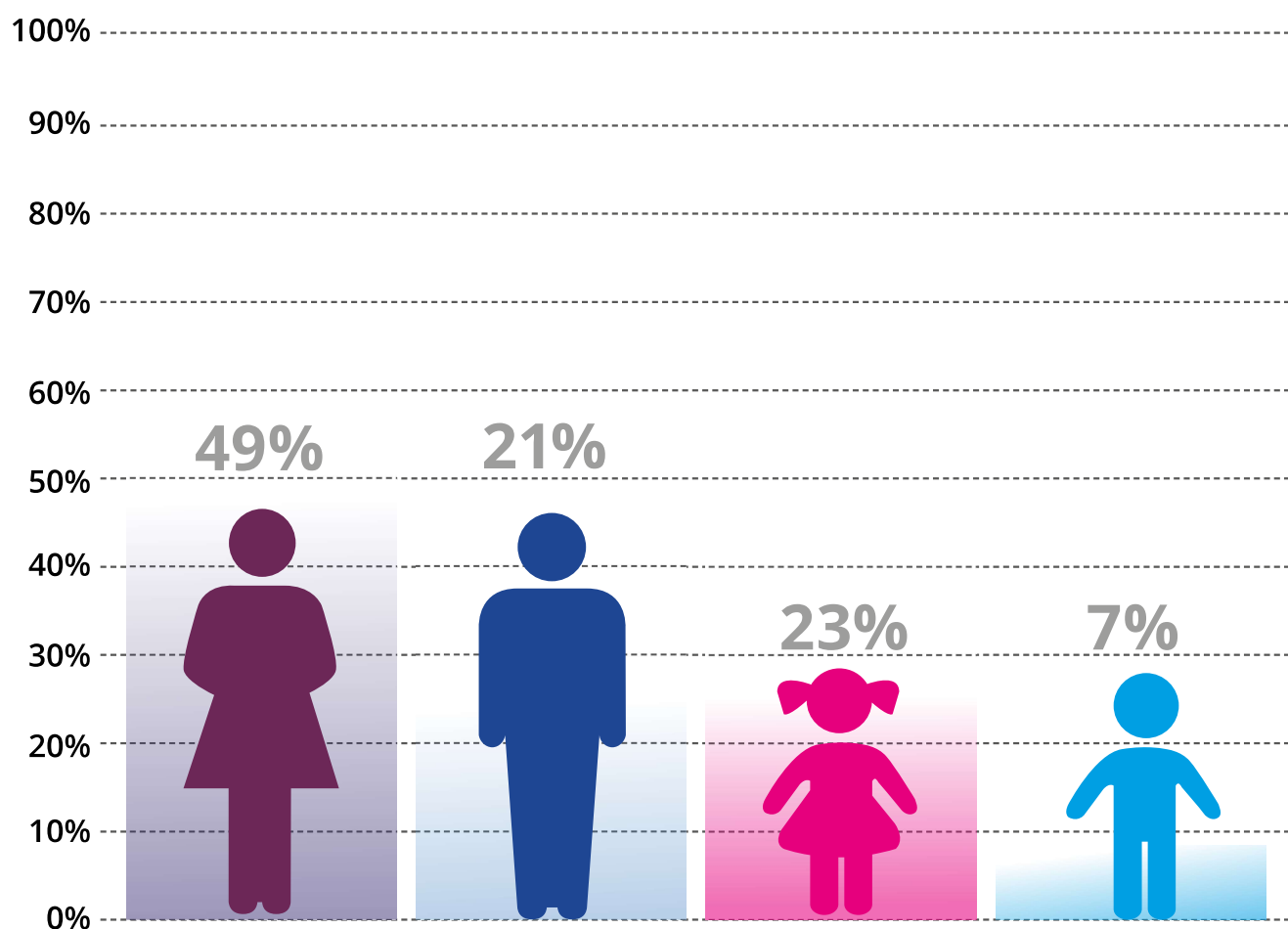
Trinidad and Tobago, and La Vela de Coro and Curaçao, which affect hundreds of people whose whereabouts are unknown.¹⁶

The crime of trafficking in persons is a phenomenon that affects females disproportionately, but it has different consequences for the most excluded women, such as indigenous women, women migrants, women with disabilities or sexually diverse

women, and it is clearly driven by demands of those who pay by sex (mostly men). In the mining area of the state of Bolívar in Venezuela, “indigenous girls and young women are enslaved from a very early age, since the sexual preference of the miners favours the very young” (CECODAP, 2018: 45)

DETECTED VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, BY SEX

Shares of detected victims of trafficking in persons globally, by age group and sex, 2016 (or most recent)



Source: Elaboración de datos nacionales por la UNODC

INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN CRIME

Regarding Venezuela's prisons, as in other areas of research, the lack of updated data is a common difficulty. The most recent study conducted by the Higher Prison Council, before it was rebranded as the Ministry of Prison Affairs, was the *Sociodemographic Diagnosis of the Prison Population in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2010-2011*, which reflected a nationwide prison population of 39,694 (35,935 men and 3,759 women). Unfortunately, the study does not provide data on the distribution by gender and type of crime, as previous analyses did, but experts say that the cases of corruption, in all its forms combined, totals only 500 cases. Impunity is rampant in these non-violent crimes and sends an ominous message of disregard for the law and disrespect for public property. (Rosales 2012: 65-74)

One parameter that helped make the diagnosis possible was the fact that **women in prison are much more likely than men to be victims of robbery, theft, extortion and sexual abuse during their imprisonment.** (See Tables 1 and 2) With regard to the crimes they commit, an earlier diagnosis for 2005 revealed that 64% of women in prison were paying sentence for drug-related crimes. Another study indicates that by 2010, 90% of the women held in the country's main female prison, the National Institute for Women's Guidance (INOF), were in prison for drug-related crimes (Rosales 2010: 9).

TABLE NO. 1. CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST THE PRISON POPULATION

While serving sentence in this penitentiary, have you been victim of any of the following crimes?								
Crime	Injuries	Robbery	Theft	Extortion	Sexual abuse	Corruption	Other	N/C
Total	1440	340	232	224	16	55	105	595
%	4%	0,9%	0,6%	0,6%	0	0,2%	0,3%	1,6%

Source: Penitentiary Council

TABLE NO. 2. CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST FEMALE PRISON POPULATION

While serving sentence in this penitentiary, have you been victim of any of the following crimes?								
Crime	Injuries	Robbery	Theft	Extortion	Sexual abuse	Corruption	Other	N/C
Total	172	125	71	29	9	8	41	8
%	4,5%	3,3%	1,9%	0,8%	0,2%	0,2%	1,1%	0,2%

Source: Penitentiary Council

Non-governmental organisation Una Ventana a la Libertad (UVL) presented the most recent and specific study on the situation of women in prisons, where it reports that women make up approximately 6% of the total prison population in Venezuela and the main reasons why they end up in prisons are the **trafficking or sale of illegal drugs and extortion**, which confirms the positions of some experts expressed years ago. Several studies reveal that the majority of women who join illegal drug business do so at the lowest level, as “mules” or as small-scale micro- traffickers, **with no leadership role in the marketing process**. A report by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) recognises that an average 70% of women prisoners in the Americas—many of them heads of households—are in prison for non-violent, petty drug trafficking crimes, which in most cases are a **direct result of poverty and lack of other opportunities and/or women who have suffered violence and coercion from their partners or other men**. (CICAD: 2013).

A study carried out by *Transparencia Venezuela* on the processes of investigation of Grand Corruption conducted by different bodies—public prosecutors’ offices, parliaments and courts—in at least 20 countries, established the participation of 44 women in more than 20 cases of multi-million-dollar embezzlement of public funds. These investigations into cases involving women include the contracts of PDVSA Services LTD, PDVSA funds in Andorra, the Morodo file—the former Spanish ambassador with business with PDVSA—, money laundering through contracts signed by Roberto Rincon (Operation Maraca), processes referring to frauds with trust funds of the Venezuelan state-owned oil company—the case of the Vignati brothers, the Levy case, or money laundering by Colombian businessman Álex Saab—, the file against former Vice Minister of Energy Nervis Villalobos, and the Duro Felguera company, the case of the former nurse of Hugo Chávez, the case of businessman Samark López (drug trafficking), among others.¹⁷

¹⁷ Al menos 20 países investigan 50 casos de corrupción con dinero de Venezuela

WOMEN AND CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS



Although interviews were conducted with renowned experts in this field for this study, none of them made a particular reference to a predominant participation of women in organised crime groups, as leaders or heads of these gangs. Women's participation in criminal organisations generally goes unnoticed, since “the crimes in which female participation has increased are mainly minor crimes” (Alva 2018:42), while organised crime is quite conservative and tends to favour traditional gender roles.

These roles give women secondary—yet no less important—duties. These include the transmission of the criminal code (identity of the members of the criminal organisation), they are guarantors of the male reputation, and they are objects of exchange in marriage alliances

with criminal purposes. They also play a very important role in logistic tasks such as hiding drugs, weapons, transmitting messages or using their homes for meetings. (Sansó-Rubert Pascual, 2010).

Women who climb to positions of actual leadership in the criminal organisations face serious limitations. Academic research indicates that their authority is often questioned and challenged. Some authors suggest that women exercise a “delegated or subrogated power” generally derived from a sentimental or family relationship, or in times of crisis for the organisation, due to resignation or arrest of male members. (Principato and Dino, 1997: 68-69; Gayraud, 2007: 310)

Of the 7,196 Interpol Red Notices, i.e. arrest warrants issued by Interpol worldwide, nearly 10 per cent are issued against women. This means there are 710 warrants against women, of which 196 are wanted for terrorism, 51 for murder, 40 for fraud, 13 for drug-related offences, 10 for theft or robbery, 8 for sexual exploitation offences, and 3 for corruption. Based on the principle of innocence, not all of them have faced criminal prosecution but they have been issued an international arrest warrant.

In an interview conducted on February 13, 2020, with retired commissioner of the Scientific, Criminal, and Forensic Investigation Corps (CICPC) Odalis Caldera, she pointed out that the role of women in organised crime in Venezuela has changed in the last 8 years. “Before, women used to cook the food for the entire group, were used as decoys, or pretended to be a partner of the criminal in order to commit the offence,” said Caldera.

The world of drugs continues to be the area where women are significantly involved as “mules,” transporting drugs in their bodies. But today we see women handling weapons and in the prostitution business, not only at the borders, but in major cities, also recruiting girls for sexual exploitation.

On the other hand, women who are subject to exclusion suffer different forms of discrimination, which lead them to seek alternative livelihoods in an attempt to overcome the structural inequalities¹⁸ imposed by the patriarchal system. Mechanisms that reinforce gender stereotypes include:

1 TROPHY WIVES

Women's bodies and sexuality have historically been valued by the dominant culture as an indicator of status and power, in the sense that being “accompanied” by a beautiful and exuberant woman is synonymous with being successful. Furthermore, being the companion, or better still, the partner of a man with certain power “guarantees” access to goods and services, to which women have limited access because of unequal power structures, more so when gender discrimination is combined with ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic or health condition, disability or legal status.

Based on the context, men with power can come in different forms. He can be the owner of the company, the supervisor, the foreman, the landowner, a police commander, the head of a criminal gang, the prison warden, a *pran*; examples abound depending on who exercises the power in the local context. Testimonials from some interviews point out:

“It's not by chance that our teenagers are increasingly involved in violent acts, because somehow, making inroads into crime feeds their masculinity as men. They become

attractive to some women based on the stereotyped image of the ideal man,” says Magdymar León, director of the Venezuelan Association for Alternative Sex Education (Avesa).

That is why very often young women “have children of thugs, because they can give them a **status in the community**,” says the psychologist. León describes three types of reasons for teenage pregnancy: girls who were forced to have sex with criminals, girls who become pregnant in consensual relationships and with an emotional bond, and those who wish to improve their status in their community: “He didn't force me, I wanted to have a child with him.” (teenage mother)

The women who have powerful men as partners boast that by having such a partner by their side, they can have protection, food security and respect in the community. Young women are clear that if their partners are criminals they will probably not live very long, but having their protection while it lasts could very well be worth their while, so they use pregnancy as a way to create a bond that transcends time.

“My life by his side was a party every day. Food, drink and drugs for everyone. (...) I didn't feel powerful because my boyfriend **was a hit man, although I won't deny it, it was appealing that we received special treatment in the clubs and in the stadiums when we went to watch games.** Having a hit man as a boyfriend is like having a VIP card. The attention you get is out of this

¹⁸ Patriarchy is a system of customs, norms, codes and beliefs strongly rooted in a society that determines the social relations between men and women, characterised by the hierarchical dominance of the former in the private sphere as well as in all social contexts: school, church, the media, the arts, language and culture. It exercises its greatest control when it permeates institutions, laws and, in short, our ways of viewing the world.

world, so to speak. There were times when we had a lot of money, but other times no money or weapons could enter the war zone—as we called Ciudad Victoria—because all the access points were blocked by the government.

At first you're scared, of course, but then you like it, and especially someone like me, who needed all kinds of attention. I fell easily into that whirlpool of extravagance and violence. Even though nothing was worthwhile, **what I really liked was doing boyfriend-girlfriend stuff with him.**

The story, even though it is told by a young Mexican girlfriend of a hit man who is part of the Zetas Cartel, is not very different from the situation of a partner of any criminal. And there still a **great risk in the mere fact of being related to a criminal**, because girlfriends, mothers or daughters are seen by enemy gangs as opportunities for revenge of scores,¹⁹ since an attack on them sends a clear message to the leader of the criminal gang, seriously undermining his morale and that of the group, as it represents a serious offense (hitting him where it hurts the most) and that can be paid back in similar fashion.

2 WOMEN IN ILLEGAL MINING

According to *Transparencia Venezuela's report Deadly Gold*,²⁰ the number of women who migrate to the south of the country to work in illegal mining is increasing every day, despite the risks of violence and death that this implies.²¹

The lives and health of these women are endangered, due to diseases typically related to these activities, such as malaria and mercury contamination, but also due to the presence of armed groups in the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO), where murder is the main cause of violent deaths in the area due to conflicts over control of the territory.²² A large number of the clashes have taken place in the vicinity of the indigenous communities themselves, displacing and instilling fear among residents. According to a formal report filed in October 2013 by the Medewadi Foundation and published in *El Correo del Caroní*, at that time there were more than 500 Sanemas living in conditions of destitution and hunger, forced by illegal miners to carry heavy loads or work long hours against their will, on top of being dispossessed of their ancestral territories by the mining gangs.

This situation has a disproportionate impact on women, since mining settlements promote the proliferation of brothels and thus, a higher demand for women and teenage girls for sexual exploitation.²³ The Organisation of Amazonian Women Wanaaleru (OMAW) also pointed out that “the sale of food is controlled and managed by the mining workers themselves” (AVESA 2019)

¹⁹ Tenemos Noticias (22-04-2019) Hallan los cadáveres de dos mujeres con varios tiros en la cara <https://tenemosnoticias.com/noticia/varios-mujeres-cadveres-tiros-682645/1348248>

²⁰ Deadly Gold report <http://transparencia.org.ve/oromortal/>

²¹ The miners, as well as the rest of the people who make a living at the mines, must also submit to the rules of the gang, which copies structures similar to those of the Armed Forces and control with an iron fist every step taken inside a mine. They set up a **violence stoplight** to punish those who fail to follow their rules. For the first offence, the penalty is a beating, if a second offence is committed, a limb is mutilated, and for the third offence the punishment is death by dismemberment. (TV)

²² *El Nacional* (16-10-2018) Masacre en minas de Tumeremo dejó aproximadamente 16 muertos y 6 heridos, http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/sucesos/masacre-minas-tumeremo-dejo-aproximada-mente-muertos-heridos_255935, BBC (15-03-2016) Lo que se sabe de la supuesta masacre de 28 mineros en Venezuela https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2016/03/160307_venezuela_mineros_tumeremo_dp

²³ In an interview with Cecodap, Jaqueline Fernández, referring to the prostitution of girls and adolescents, said: “In Vista al Sol, a densely populated parish of San Felix, teenage—and younger—girls simply leave their homes to go to the mines to work in prostitution. Their families dismiss it as nothing out of the ordinary, and even support it because it is a way of bringing home some money” (2018: 44)

which is compounded by the serious political and socioeconomic facing the country and exacerbates sexual exploitation, especially of teenage girls and sometimes younger girls, in order to have access to food.

The *OMAW* reports that the people in charge of managing the mines “buy women as if they were any object or supply, in order to increase their profits in the business. Most of the women bought are young girls and teenagers who are raped, abused and forced to engage in criminal activities by the military, miners or armed groups. At the same time, the girls and teenagers who are forced into becoming a mere token of exchange in sexual trade or for the purchase of slaves are bought and sold for gold (between 5 and 10 grams), the younger, the more expensive, because older women are in smaller demand, and therefore, produce less money.” (Amnesty, 2019)

Despite the high risks involved,²⁴ thousands of men and women are desperate to make money in the midst of the economic crisis, and so they take their picks, shovels and trays and go to the mines, in what has been described as a return to 19th-century extractivism that sweeps away the advances of decent work in the world of labour. (TV 2019)

3 RECRUITERS

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which is responsible for monitoring all crimes under the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime,²⁵ has been

documenting in its various reports since 2004 the increasing presence of women among the people paying prison sentences for the crime of human trafficking, but also as victims, mainly involved in sexual exploitation.

Qualitative studies show that women trafficker²⁶ are particularly active in the recruitment phase of human trafficking, since it is a crime that targets an exponentially greater number of women than men, as women are used as **bait to recruit other women**, taking advantage of the relationship of trust and empathy they usually build among themselves (GTEMV 2019: 2). It is not uncommon for previous victims of trafficking to become recruiters, as they are forced to become involved in the chain of crime as a result of blackmail and unequal power relations, as they are usually the most vulnerable link,²⁷ as the UNODC report warns: “As a matter of capacity, developing countries can only punish the lower ranks of the trafficking network, resulting in imprisonment of those who normally control or recruit the victims, the so-called ‘madams’ in some contexts of sexual exploitation.” (2018: 35)

For NGO Éxodo, it is important to emphasise that “an interesting characteristic of this crime is that—in the chain of activities or stages where it is developed—women play a fundamental role, i.e. every day it becomes evident that they are entrusted with the role of recruiters, since they seem more trustworthy to potential victims—who are more likely to accept if another woman is making the proposal—and they are most exposed in the entire chain of the network.” (Éxodo 2019: 47)

²⁴ El Estímulo (14-07-2017) El arriesgado viaje por tierra para llegar a la frontera con Brasil, Available at: <http://elestimulo.com/blog/los-riesgos-que-implican-cruzar-en-autobus-la-frontera-a-brasil/>

²⁵ United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime Palermo, Republic of Italy, December 15, 2000, published in Official Gazette No. 37.357 of January 4, 2002

²⁶ Trafficker is the term that defines the perpetrator of the crime of trafficking, often confused with smuggler because of its semantic similarity of the terms, especially in (“trafficking in persons” or “human trafficking”). This confusion is due to the fact that most of the texts that began to develop the concept were written in English and at some point both terms ended up being used interchangeably; however, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants refer to different situations and crimes, and thus, it is important to use the terms correctly. (Exodus 2019: 15). (Éxodo 2019: 15)

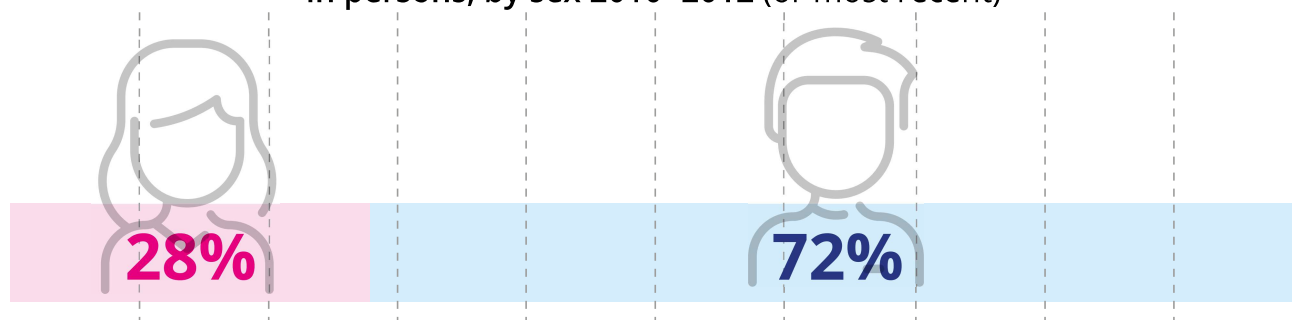
²⁷ Efecto Cocuyo (30-07-2019) Silencio de las víctimas contribuye a la falta de cifras sobre la trata, advierte Éxodo Venezuela <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/silencio-de-las-victimas-contribuye-a-la-falta-de-cifras-sobre-la-trata-advierte-exodo-venezuela/>

The NGO, however, clarifies that criminal networks often ask victims to recruit a friend or acquaintance as a condition to set them free. While this may seem a despicable act, it does not make the first victim a criminal, because the victim is at this point virtually defenceless. The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women (girls) and children, recommends States parties:

*To refrain from arresting, prosecuting or punishing victims of trafficking based on violations of migration laws or **illegal activities in which they have been involved as a direct consequence of their situation as trafficked persons**, including rape and offences related to prostitution, minor offences and irregular entry or permanence in the host country.²⁸*

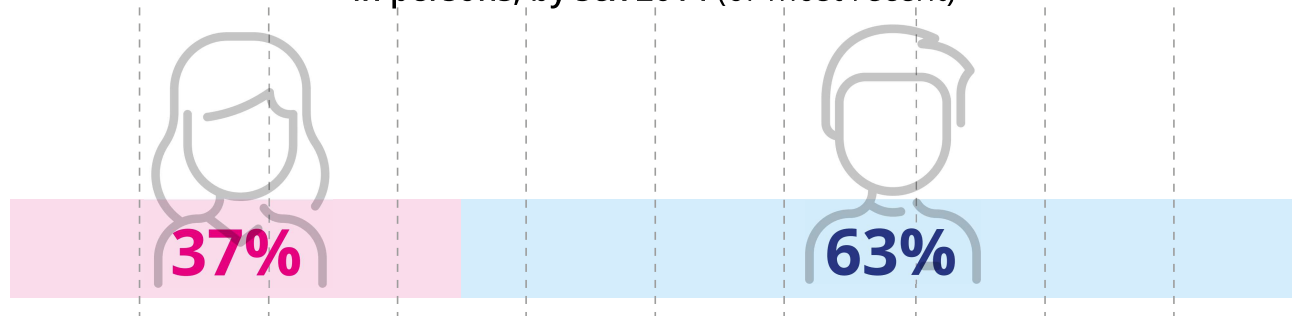
PERSONS CONVICTED FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING, BY SEX

Shares of persons convicted of trafficked in persons, by sex 2010 -2012 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014

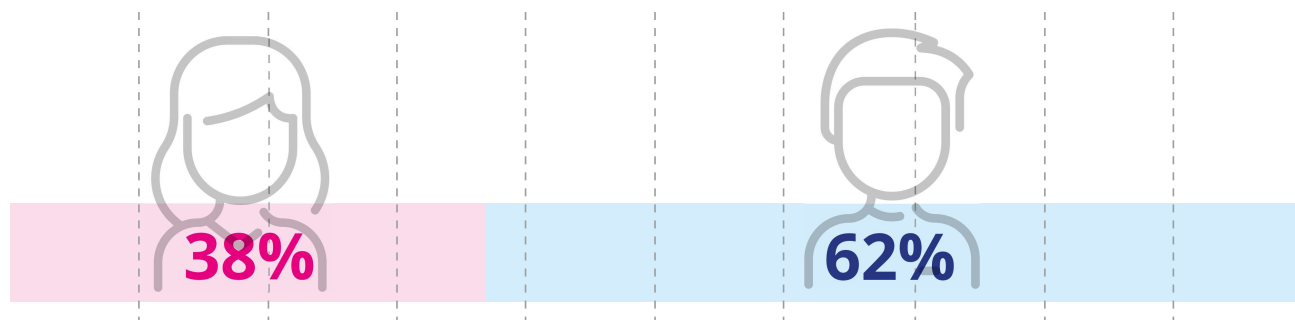
Shares of persons convicted of trafficked in persons, by sex 2014 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014

²⁸ Report A/HRC/32/41, presented in the 32nd period of sessions of the Human Rights Council, dated May 3, 2016; para. 64.h in: <https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2016/10561.pdf>

Shares of persons convicted of trafficked in persons, by sex 2016 (or most recent)



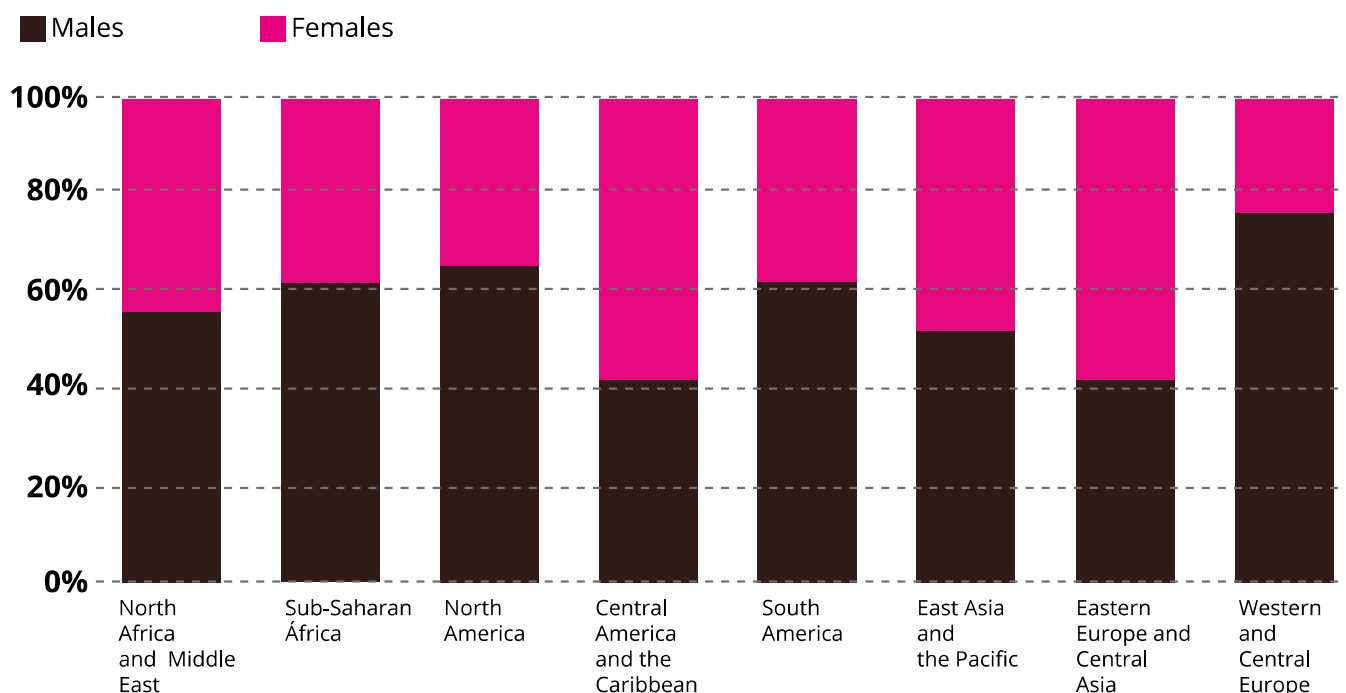
Source: UNODC elaboration of national data. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018

According to disaggregated data from the 2018 report, the regions with the largest number of female offenders detected are in the Eastern European and Central Asian blocs, as well as Central America and the Caribbean. The share of women prosecuted in this sub-region was about 36% by 2016 (in 7 countries) while the share of women convicted was about 58% (5 countries),

twenty percentage points higher than the world average according to these data. Latin American countries with higher shares of female offenders include most notably Honduras, where twice as many women as men were sentenced for this crime, and Mexico, with almost half. (UNODC 2018: 37)

Share of women convicted

Share of persons convicted of trafficking in persons by sex and subregion, 2016 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data

THE LIFE OF WOMEN BEHIND BARS

Although men are predominantly involved in most crimes, as in other areas of Venezuelan society, the consequences of imprisonment impact women and families differently. A phrase taken from the life story of a woman in prison in the LVU report expresses this reality very candidly: *“A man goes to prison and we women go to visit him. A woman goes to prison and the family forgets about her.”*

Sentencing women to prison results in separation from their families (especially when the woman was the main breadwinner), imprisonment with their babies or being abandoned by their loved ones; the reasons for this abandonment range from the family being physically or economically unable to travel to the prison²⁹ or the stigma this creates for the family. Sometimes this leads to feelings of isolation in women, who sometimes choose not to tell her family that she has been sent to prison out of shame, or refuses to see any visitors because of the conditions of penitentiary centres, especially so in the pre-trial detention centres,³⁰ which are fit to hold people for a maximum period of 48 hours, while they are transferred to the courts, and are all overcrowded and with no supply of running water.³¹

This gender-based difference in treatment proves that long-term imprisonment creates not only economic damage to women and

their families, but also serious and far-reaching consequences for society at large, as women must find alternative caregivers for their children, including state-run services and institutions, increasing the risk of their future incarceration as part of the cycle of institutionalisation. (UNODC 2014:27)

Among the women interviewed for the LVU study, the most common story is that many of them imprisoned in the different detention centres *are innocent women who have been accused by their husband or partner, who commit crimes and accuse them, or simply used them in drug trafficking, without their knowledge or voluntary participation.* (UVL 2019: 53).

Venezuelan law allows for legitimate imprisonment, with a prior court order, at two instances: during the criminal proceedings, either preventively, or after the defendant has been convicted in a court of law. They are referred to as “defendants” in the former case, and “convicts” in the latter. When the Accusatory System came into force (1999), the procedure was changed from written and confidential to oral and public. We shall not make an evaluation of the relevance of the reform of the system, as it has been widely discussed by academics, but it is appropriate to establish a relationship between the requirement of oral public trials and the opportunity for corruption in the new system,

²⁹ Either because of the lack of economic means to travel to the prison, since the place of residence of the prisoner and her family is often not taken into account, or because the family that remains in charge of the dependents (children, sick relatives or the elderly) must make up for the economic absence of one more member of the household.

³⁰ This aspect was found in the reports to be of great vulnerability for women in prison when it comes to agreeing to corrupt behaviours by custodial staff, especially acts of a sexual nature.

³¹ HispanoPost visited two precincts of the National Police in Caracas to verify the conditions of the detainees and found that, 60 women were kept in one of the cells, of approximately 4 square metres, who had to take turns standing up so others could sleep on the floor. (03-15-2018) *Hacinadas y olvidadas en calabozos viven las presas en Venezuela* (Women prisoners forgotten in crowded jails), Available at: <http://cms.hispanopost.com/presas-venezolanas-detenidas-en-comisarias-hacinadas-y-olvidadas>

since all parties are inevitably required to be present on the date agreed upon for the hearing, in order to guarantee the impartiality of the judge and to assess the evidence presented. This gives an important power to the staff in charge of transferring defendants to the court, which also has a differentiated impact on women, as reported by the director of NGO Cáritas Los Teques and worker of the National Institute of Women's Guidance (INOF) for *Crónica Uno*³²: “Many women are forced to have sexual relations with police officers in order to be transferred to their court hearings (...) women prisoners are treated like a piece of meat, for themselves or to bargain with others.”

Former judge María Lourdes Afiuni experienced this situation during her imprisonment in the same detention centre.³³ One inmate, who asked not to be identified, described her ordeal in an interview for *Transparencia Venezuela* (15-11-2019), and her story was reproduced in the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner Michel Bachelet after her visit to Venezuela in 2019:

The OHCHR interviewed several women who were detained at the “Helicoide” detention centre, who indicated that there is only one cell assigned to women. This cell was

overcrowded and guarded mainly by men, despite the fact that there are female guards working in the facility. The guards, as well as other inmates, pressured the women to exchange sex for “privileges” and/or protection. A number of women also said that they did not have access to specialised medical care and that, unlike men, they were not always allowed to go out in the yard or to the gymnasium. Women detained for political reasons were often denied visits.

The accusatory, oral and public procedure—which has been in force for more than two decades—pledged to end procedural delays, to minimise the number of people prosecuted at that time and to resort to criminal law as a last resort as part of a comprehensive anti-criminal policy.³⁴ The new approach established the use of pre-trial detention as a last resort, but studies conducted by the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP) for 2008 show that the majority of the prison population in Venezuela is being held in pre-trial detention. (OVP, 2008: 52)

In the case of women, Article 231 *eiusdem* clearly prohibits detention of pregnant women who are in the last 3 months of their pregnancy and of mothers before 6 months after the birth of their children. However, the findings

³² *Crónica Uno* (March 7, 2018) *Mujeres obtienen “privilegios” en cárceles a cambio de trabajos sexuales* <https://cronica.uno/mujeres-obtienen-privilegios-en-carceles-a-cambio-de-trabajos-sexuales/>

³³ *El Mundo* (July 6, 2019) *Comida por sexo en las cárceles de Maduro: el horror documentado del informe Bachelet* <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/07/06/5d1f9f1221e-fa006598b45eb.html>

³⁴ The 2012 reform of the Organic Code of Criminal Procedure specifically states that preventive judicial detention must be ordered by the court at the request of the Public Prosecutor's Office when there is a *reasonable presumption, based on an assessment of the circumstances of the individual case, that there is a flight risk or that the search for the truth in relation to a specific act of investigation is being obstructed*. (Article 236 COPP). Flight risk is a presumption, based on conditions prior to the process established in Article 237 *eiusdem*, in which the flight risk is assessed based on the socio-economic or family situation of the person under investigation, his or her conduct prior to the crime, the magnitude of the act attributed to him or her and the penalty that it entails. It should not be understood as an flexible concept that may be applied in all cases, because, if all persons detained by law enforcement agencies end up in detention, the other entities in the Justice Administration System would end up losing their power, and the Police would ultimately decide the fate of these people, which is also known as the Police State.

of organisations and researchers on this issue (UVL, OVP, Rosales, Olmo) suggest that detention is prioritised as the only measure to link them to the proceeding, despite the fact that the crimes they commit are usually not violent crimes. In other words, upon a correct evaluation of flight risk, an alternative measure should be taken. The issue seems to be a trend, because in many Latin American countries, the share of women in pre-trial detention is equivalent to, or greater than, the number of women convicted. (UN, 2014: 4)

1.- WOMEN AND PRISONS: NO SEXUAL OR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Access to drinking water in the majority of detention centres is not regular, in some cases there is no water supply by pipe, but by tankers, which gives rise to potential corruption by those who control the distribution of this human right, just as those who control the access of visitors, food, medicines, transfers to their hearings, thus curtailing access to justice and recognition of their rights, which particularly affects poor, rural, indigenous or disabled women across all instances of the system. (UVL 2019: 22)

According to LVU, pregnant women in detention are an example of the violation of international and national provisions on human rights not only of women but also of the unborn child, “despite the fact that motherhood is one of the most deeply rooted features that reinforces the identity of women, their right to health during pregnancy or, when their children are born and then live with them until they are three years old, is not respected in the majority of centres where women are detained, to be tried and serve their sentences.” (2019: 5)

Taking into account that women in detention in Venezuela are prohibited from having conjugal visits, unlike men, many of them become pregnant during their imprisonment,



which is a flagrant sign of the presence of corrupt or violent behaviour by male custody staff, or by men who are somehow linked to the prison system, and for whom these women are seen as objects of trade or tools for strategic alliances.

This sort of forced chastity that exerts control over the bodies and sexuality of women is very much linked to the fact that female penitentiaries in the region had been initially administered by nuns, who have traditionally treated the people they host based on creating habits of order, discipline, upholding their morals with the help of religion—because sin, morality and crime are intertwined—teaching them stereotyped tasks such as knitting, sewing, embroidery, cooking, etc. (Antony, 2000). Above all, it is a matter of teaching rules for living together based on mutual respect, duties and obligations (schedules, hygiene, cleanliness of the place where they live), rules

of conduct and discipline. In other words, they force them to continue being stereotypical women. (Aniyar 2002: 338).

On the other hand, the figure of women *pranes* has been identified by Huggings in three prisons in Venezuela: the main headquarters of the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigation Corps in Mérida, the Cabimas penitentiary in Zulia and the female annex of the Tocarón prison in the state of Aragua. These female prisons charge the “*causa*” to guarantee their security, control everyday life in prison and even to hold parties.³⁵ This type of activity always takes place with the consent of the personnel controlling the detention centre. Therefore, the payment covers up a corrupt conduct that affects mostly women because they (as mothers, wives, sisters) must change their lives to the largest extent to meet the economic needs (payment of protection fees, food, cleaning), as well as emotional and psychological needs (conjugal or regular visits) of prisoners. In this connection, the fact

that the system does not guarantee the basic needs of persons in detention means that women’s workload doubles in order to meet those needs, and that they must devote most of their time and economic resources to pay these fees (Mundaray, undated).

2.- “PUNTERAS”

En contraposición, a los hombres privados de In contrast to men in prison, who are guaranteed the right to conjugal visits, even from persons other than their wife or concubine,³⁶ several cases of sexual exploitation networks have come to light, which, with the consent of custodial staff, bring women into prisons, who sometimes spend the night, despite the risks to their personal safety.

These women are also subject to violence during searches, which for some are perceived as abuse, since “your privacy is being violated. In some cases, we might even speak of post-traumatic stress. The consequences vary, they can be repeated memories of the event, cognitive alterations such as poor concentration, memory failures or even denial,” as explained by psychologist Yusmari Brito. As a result, new opportunities for corruption arise,³⁷ as some inmates receive certain privileges inside the prison by paying the *pran*, who in turn pays to the personnel controlling access to the prison the first visitors to enter “*punteras*” are the inmates’ partners, who organise the queue and are searched violently by the custody personnel.

³⁵ Insight Crime (2019) *En las cárceles de Venezuela las mujeres también son pranes* Available at: <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/en-las-carceles-de-venezuela-las-mujeres-tambien-son-pranes/>

³⁶ Reportero 24 (18-10-2013) *Cárceles: Fui la mujer de seis pranes en Sabaneta*: <https://www.reportero24.com/2013/10/18/carceles-%C2%93fui-la-mujer-de-de-seis-pranes-en-sabaneta/>

³⁷ Reportero 24 (24-04-2012) *Cárceles: los pranes pagan para tener pernctas*: <https://www.reportero24.com/2012/04/24/carceles-los-pranes-pagan-para-tener-pernctas/>

CONCLUSIONS

1. E1. Understanding that corrupt behaviour also includes conducts such as **demanding acts of a sexual nature as part of abuse of power**, calls for broadening our vision—with a gender-based perspective—to less conservative ways of understanding the issue of corruption and its differentiated effects on women.
2. Women's greater dependence on public services requires a **public policy approach** that prioritises this sector, as well as in the **proper distribution of goods and services, thus avoiding the exchange of sex** for food or other goods or services as another effect of the differentiated impact of corruption on women.
3. For the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, corruption networks interact with organised crime for mutual benefit, as reciprocal facilitators or even in direct involvement or promotion of criminal acts, and are intertwined in such a way that they have sequestered the state. In this case, we refer to criminal corrupt networks where **women bear the brunt both as victims or perpetrators**.
4. Although men are predominantly involved in most crimes, as in other areas of Venezuelan society, the **consequences of imprisonment impact women and families differently**. A phrase taken from the life story of a woman in prison in the LVU report expresses this reality very candidly: "A man goes to prison and we women go to visit him. A woman goes to prison and the family forgets about her."
5. According to the United Nations Secretary General in his last Report on Sustainable Development Goals published in 2018, from 2012 to 2014, more than 570 different flows of human trafficking were identified worldwide, affecting all regions; many flows involved the mobilisation from low income countries to higher income countries, and with the increase of Venezuelan migration worldwide, this number has most likely increased.
6. The crime of human trafficking is a phenomenon that affects women disproportionately, it is driven primarily by the demands of those who pay for sex (mostly men). In Venezuela, in the border regions, in the mining areas, and to a lesser extent in the cities, due to the economic depression, **girls and young women are in great demand and fall prey easily to their predators**.
7. Female criminals in Venezuela are primarily involved in drug trafficking and extortion.



Crime, security agencies and human rights



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

Human rights are the guidelines for human coexistence and they are fundamentally based on the principles of freedom and equality. There are violations of human rights everywhere in the world: torture, abuse, unfair trials, murders by police forces, massacres committed by criminal gangs and restrictions on freedoms.

Often—too often perhaps—the violation of fundamental guarantees is perpetrated by two extremes that seem to converge sometimes, i.e. organised crime and the law enforcement agencies, public order and national defence.

In the following chapter, we will analyse the specific situation of prisoners in Venezuelan prisons and the violation of their most elementary guarantees by law enforcement agencies, with special emphasis on the actions of the Special Action Forces (FAES), a commando group of Venezuela's Bolivarian National Police (PNB).

DEGRADATION IN VENEZUELAN PRISONS AND JAILS

Venezuela's prisons have become veritable hells on earth, where the fundamental rights of the prison population are massively violated. Reality shows that the spectre of death hangs permanently over the inmate population at Venezuelan prisons. According to the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP), since the self-proclaimed Bolivarian Revolution came to power, more than **7,000 inmates have died violently inside the prisons**, as shown in the following table:

Table No. 3. Inmates killed, 1999-2018

Year	Number of inmates killed
1.999	390
2.000	338
2.001	300
2.002	244
2.003	250
2.004	402
2.005	408
2.006	412
2.007	498
2.008	422
2.009	366
2.010	476
2.011	560
2.012	591
2.013	506
2.014	309
2.015	109
2.016	173
2.017	143
2.018	291
TOTAL	7,188

Source: OVP

The number of inmates killed in prisons could be even higher than the number reported by the NGOs, since the discovery in 2017 of a common grave inside the San Juan de los Morros Penitentiary in Guárico, with 15 sets of human bones buried inside,¹ suggests this might be a common practice inside the prisons to hide the remains of murdered prisoners.

Over the past 20 years, thousands of prisoners have also been injured, many seriously, with mutilation or other serious wounds. Diseases, such as HIV, tuberculosis and scabies, are also common inside prisons, with little or no medical care.

¹ <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/03/13/encuentran-14-cuerpos-en-fosa-masiva-en-carcel-de-venezuela/>

Professionalisation in the management of prisons was never implemented. According to OVP director Humberto Prado, out of 2,200 experts in penitentiary services graduated from the former National University of Penitentiary Studies, only five work at the Ministry of the People's Power for Penitentiary Services (MPPSP), headed by Iris Varela.²

Overcrowding is one of the most serious problems of the current prison system.

According to analyses carried out by the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP), there are around 46,700 inmates³ in Venezuelan prisons, and there is only infrastructure to accommodate just over 20,000, which shows overcrowding of over 120%.

Much of this situation is due to an inexplicable policy of the Ministry of Penitentiary Services, which has been closing down prisons—such as La Planta, Los Teques, Sabaneta, Coro, San Juan de Los Morros, among others—without building others to replace them. The absurdity has come to such an extent, that there are no formal penitentiary centres in Venezuela's capital city, only police department jails.

Overcrowding is not the same in all prisons, but there are some penitentiaries where this problem is more serious, such as the Aragua Penitentiary, commonly known as Tocarón, the Hombre Nuevo, Hombre Libertador Penitentiary, or Tocuyito Prison, in the state of Carabobo, and the José Antonio Anzoátegui Judicial Prison in Barcelona, popularly known as the Puente Ayala Prison. This circumstance, together with other determining factors such as the absence of authority in the premises, has enabled travesties such as the power exercised by the so-called “*pranes*” to

control certain areas of the prisons, subjecting the prison population to permanent extortion.

Keeping inmates in reduced spaces gives rise to all sorts of problems within the prisons. One of them is that it prevents proper sorting of the prisoners. The upshot is that an inmate who is currently prosecuted for petty theft may be sharing the same spaces with prisoners charged with homicide. Similarly, overcrowding makes it impossible for prison facilities to have appropriate spaces for sports, work and study, which may facilitate the subsequent social reintegration of prisoners.

There is also procedural delays, which is a problem caused by a malfunctioning judicial system that has worsened over the years. Today, 63% of the inmates are awaiting or in trial, and only 37% have received a final sentence, according to figures from the Venezuelan Prison Observatory. The majority of the prison population is immersed in Kafkaesque trials that violate the most elementary principles of due process.

² <https://oveprisons.com/un-recluso-muerto-diario-en-8-anos-de-gestion-de-iris-valera/>

³ <https://oveprisiones.com/un-recluso-muerto-diario-en-8-anos-de-gestion-de-iris-valera/>

The outrageous circumstances of the prison system have prompted the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to keep currently nine Venezuelan prisons under provisional measures, which are not being observed by the Nicolás Maduro regime. In addition, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), in her report on Venezuela in July 2019, noted that “the conditions of detention of a significant number of inmates do not comply with minimum international standards for the humane treatment of prisoners and often constitute ill-treatment.”⁴

The OHCHR refers mainly to Venezuela’s failure to comply with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Mandela Rules, which contain a series of provisions designed to guarantee the basic conditions of detention for the respect of the fundamental rights of detainees.

Another source of concern that has been taking place recently is the process of ideologisation of prisoners by the ruling party, to the point that the Minister of Prison Services, Iris Varela, has stated—in July 2019—that she has 45,000 prisoners at her disposal in case a foreign invasion.⁵ This is the same argument that was expressed when humanitarian aid was attempted to be brought from Colombia and a group of uniformed inmates was stationed on the Tienditas bridge as a form of intimidation.⁶

In Venezuela, there are virtually no policies for post-prison treatment, and therefore, there is no support or follow-up by the government for prisoners who are released and have difficulties

in finding a productive activity with which they can support themselves. A large part of society, tired of being victims of crime, shows no interest in what happens to inmates in that prison hell, but we must understand that, as long as these places continue to violate basic guarantees, and there are no conditions to facilitate social reintegration, the number of reoffenders will remain very high and the streets will never be safe.

In police jails or preventive detention centres, there is currently a **parallel prison system**, which has been set up by decision of the Ministry for Prison Services. This irregular situation leads, year after year, to deaths from internal violence or violence by law enforcement officers against detainees and vice versa, as there are “*pranes*” and firearms, including grenades, in these police jails. In 2019 alone, UVPL reported 119 prisoners killed in these facilities, most of them due to violence of some kind.

4 <https://www.derechos.org/ve/actualidad/informe-acnudh-las-condiciones-de-las-detenciones-de-un-numero-significativo-de-personas-privadas-de-libertad-no-cumplen-las-reglas-internacionales-minimas-sobre-tratamiento-humano-de-los-as-reclu>

5 <https://talcualdigital.com/iris-varela-si-nos-amenazan-con-5-000-marines-nosotros-tenemos-a-45-000-presos/>

6 <https://www.notimerica.com/sociedad/noticia-maduro-traslada-presos-tienditas-frontera-colombia-bloquear-entrada-ayuda-humanitaria-20190214151806.html>
<https://unaventanaalalibertad.org/prensa-uvl/una-ventana-a-la-libertad-presento-informe-semestral-2019/>

An important number of the worst massacres in recent years have taken place in these facilities, including the 2018 massacre at the Carabobo Police detention centre, in which 66 inmates and two visitors were burned and shot.⁷ Another notable example took place in 2017 in the jails of the state of Amazonas, where 39 inmates were killed,⁸ and in 2019, in the police precinct of the state of Portuguesa, in Acarigua, which resulted in 30 inmates killed.⁹

Water shortages aggravate sanitation conditions. **Many lose their lives due to starvation**, since the municipalities and state governments do not sufficient budget to feed prisoners who really are not supposed to remain in these facilities for more than 48 hours.

The National Assembly, elected in 2015, was well aware of this serious situation, and enacted in 2018 the Jail Law, which has not been implemented due to the pettiness of Nicolas Maduro's regime. This legal instrument included, among other issues, a transitory provision that obliged the MPPSP to transfer, within a period of 180 days, all detainees held in police cells to formal prisons, after the statutory 48-hour period had lapsed.

Prisons and jails in Venezuela have become a veritable hell on earth. This situation has become a ticking time bomb that must be defused when the current political reality changes and there is the will to do so.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS

The 2018 report of the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV) stated that in that year **7,523 violent deaths** occurred in Venezuela at the hands of law enforcement agencies. Therefore, one conclusion is that one out of every three violent deaths in Venezuela is caused by the actions of the police and the military. Most were in fact extrajudicial executions disguised as "resistance to authority" or "confrontations" in an attempt to legitimise them. This represents an alarming level of fatalities caused by law enforcement, unparalleled in the region.

This situation has also been confirmed by NGO *Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas de la Violencia*—COFAVIC—(Committee of Relatives of Victims of Violence), when director Liliana Ortega stated that they have counted **9,563 cases of extrajudicial executions between 2012 and 2018**, of which 3,684 took place between 2017 and 2018. Twenty-nine per cent of these executions were carried out by Bolivarian National Police (PNB) officers. Of this percentage, 69% occurred in operations launched by the Special Action Forces (FAES) of this organisation.¹⁰

From 2015 onwards, most of the extrajudicial executions took place in the framework of the so-called Operation People's Liberation (PLO). Since mid-2017, the National Police FAES has taken the lead and has recently been identified as the cause of most violent deaths.

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43578892>

⁸ https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/08/17/america/1502928466_891622.html

⁹ <https://efectocucuyo.com/sucesos/30-reos-muertos-y-26-heridos-deja-motin-en-comisaria-en-acarigua-segun-ovp/>

¹⁰ Talcualdigital.com. 18 de junio de 2019.

This is the only security “plan” that is applied openly or secretly in Venezuela today, which has been pointed out as the cause of most violent deaths, and has become a powerful machine of constant human rights violations.

Who are generally the victims of extrajudicial executions in the country? In this regard, COFAVIC has reported:

“Figures show that young people living in resource-poor neighbourhoods are the main victims of abuses by the law enforcement agencies. From January to June 2016, of the total number of cases reported by COFAVIC, 81% of the victims are under 25 years of age and 99% are young men.”¹¹

Data show that the executions carried out by the police and military forces in the country target mainly young men, most of them dark-skinned, who live in the most deprived areas of Venezuela. Paradoxically, one of the supposed tenets of “Chavismo” has been to improve the living conditions of the poorest.

The 2019 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, shows the modus operandi used by the Special Action Forces (FAES) on a regular basis: “They arrive in black SVUs with no license plates and block access points in the area. They dress in black, with no personal identification, wearing balaclavas covering their faces. They also carry long weapons. The families of the victims described how the FAES broke into their homes, seized their belongings and used gender-based violence against women and girls, including

forced nudity. FAES separate young men from the others before shooting them.”¹²

Bachelet’s report also indicates that witnesses reported how the FAES manipulated the crime scene and tampered with the evidence. They reportedly planted weapons, drugs and fired their guns against the walls or into the air to suggest a confrontation and demonstrate that the victim allegedly “resisted authority.”

Another source of grave concern described in the UN report is that the authorities (referring to the Maduro regime) may be using the FAES and other law enforcement agencies as a **tool to instil fear in the population and maintain social control**. In addition, the OHCHR documented the cases of six men executed by the FAES in retaliation for their role in anti-government protests in 2019. These extrajudicial executions took place during illegal house raids after the demonstrations.

Maduro’s sinister extermination groups, as described in the UN report, are allegedly acting not only against regular citizens, but also against anyone who is perceived to be a demonstrator or dissident. This was the case, for example, with the dictatorships of Pinochet, Trujillo, Videla and so many other Latin American tyrants.

At the end of this report, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recommends that the Nicolás Maduro regime “dissolve the FAES and establish an impartial and independent national mechanism, with the support of the international community, to investigate extrajudicial executions carried out in the course of security operations, ensure that the culprits are held accountable, and the victims are compensated.” This recommendation was not accepted by a regime that has made extrajudicial executions practically its only citizen security policy.¹³

11 COFAVIC. “Procedimientos de seguridad ciudadana ejecutados por el Estado venezolano están incurriendo en crímenes de lesa humanidad.” 9 de diciembre 2016.

12 <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/07/31/5d40868f21efa007358b465c.html>

13 <https://runrun.es/monitor-de-victimas/397946/las-faes-mataron-a-1-231-personas-en-2019-y-sufrieron-dos-bajas/>

Far from abiding by Bachelet's recommendations, days after the publication of this report, Nicolas Maduro gave his full support to the FAES. The following are six cases of human rights violations committed by this group, which is attached to the Bolivarian National Police (PNB). In these cases, identities have been concealed and locations changed to avoid reprisals:

1 Four family members executed by the FAES

A mother narrates one of the four murders committed against her relatives. They were all killed on different occasions by FAES groups.

This woman has had to visit the morgue on four different occasions to make arrangements to retrieve the bodies of one of her sons, two nephews and a son-in-law, who were killed in raids by the police agency.

While running this painful errand with her sister-in-law, mother of his nephew **AAA**, she reflected on what had been happening to her family. She was convinced that all this ordeal they have lived through is due to the fact that, from the beginning, they did not report the incidents. She said that **AAA** disappeared on January 28, 2020, between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. He was accompanied by his brother-in-law, **BBB**.

Since both disappeared, the family decided to go to the Public Prosecutor's Office to report the incident. There they were recommended to visit hospitals and police precincts, but they decided to go to the morgue, as they learned that **AAA's** body had already been taken there.

After some time trying to find information about what happened, they learned that the young man was killed by a FAES commission in a wooded area, on the road that leads to a neighbourhood we will call "Unnamed."

That morning he was taken from an alley in the neighbourhood. The 24-year-old victim was a worker, unemployed at the time, and making arrangements to go to work in Colombia. He lived in the "Que Vida Tan Dura" neighbourhood with his partner and two children.

The family later learned that **BBB** was not killed by the FAES. The woman said that they were unable to execute him because when one of the officials handcuffed him, and in the middle of the scuffle, the handcuffs left grooves in his wrists. When they were about to kill him, the head of the commission noticed the marks and hit the policeman who put the handcuffs on him. If he was killed, it would have been evident that he had been handcuffed.

They had no choice but to arrest him and transfer him to a Bolivarian National Police (BNP) precinct. The mother said that the police planted 150 grams of cocaine on her nephew to keep him there, and that they were extorting the family for US\$100.

She said that initially her nephew and brother-in-law were approached by a FAES group while they were walking down the neighbourhood. The police were apparently looking for the murderers of an athlete, they stopped them to check their identity cards and let them go through down the stairs, but then other officers of the same agency decided to arrest them. Their fate was sealed.



2 Murdered in front his two children

One mother reported that FAES officers came into her home one morning in late 2017 and shot her son in the chest. It was 8:00 a.m. At that time, she was not at the scene, because she had gone to work—neither was her partner, who works as a bodyguard.

Since then, this mother has been fighting for justice for the death of the second of her three children, whom we will call **CCC**, a 25-year-old high school graduate.

He says that after separating from his wife, **CCC** took care of their two children, ages 5 and 3. He was an electrician, but since the children were on vacation spend all this time taking care of them and could not work. When the children went to preschool, their grandmother on their mother's side would take them early in the morning and then pick them up in the afternoon. This allowed **CCC** to do some work.

That day, **CCC** was smoking a cigarette on the balcony, at the back of the precarious two-story house. He suddenly saw a group of FAES officers coming down the stairs in the alley where they lived, and as soon as they saw him they asked him to step outside. As he refused to comply with the order, the police burst into the house. They were dressed in civilian clothes and wore bulletproof vests.

At this time, **CCC** had gone to the bedroom where the children were. The cops did not care about them and started beating up their dad.

His mother found out what was going on in her house because some of her neighbours called her and told her to come back to the house, as they heard gunshots and the children were screaming and crying. By the time she arrived, her son's body had been taken away and she was not allowed into her house.



CCC was shot in the chest, just outside the first bedroom on the first floor. The police locked the youngest child in the last bedroom and kept him watching TV at a loud volume, while they asked the 5-year-old about his father's gun, and then was taken to the upper floor.

The boy led them to his grandmother's room and pointed to a wardrobe, because he thought they were asking about the gun owned by his grandmother's partner, the bodyguard.

The body was taken out wrapped in a sheet and dragged down the stairs. Now his mother not only suffers the loss of her son, but also sees in pain how what happened seriously affected her oldest grandson. The boy only talks about guns and gunshots from the moment he wakes up. He says he has dreams about it. "He hears noises and thinks they are gunshots," his grandmother explains.

That day, an FAES group had killed four men, allegedly involved in the kidnapping of the wife of a National Guard colonel, who had been abducted the night before as she was driving her car. In the morning, there were clashes between the police and the alleged kidnappers, in two neighbourhoods of the city. Two men were killed in a house in one neighbourhood and two women were killed in another house in the "Sálvese quien pueda" neighbourhood, which is far from **CCC's** house.

She does not understand how her son was linked to the kidnapping, because he was at home taking care of the children. “It was impossible for him to leave the house to get involved in that, because he could not have left his children alone,” explains the mother.

The FAES pointed to CCC as the fifth person involved in the kidnapping of the colonel’s wife.

To get rid of the evidence, the police broke the wall of the corridor on the ground floor of the house in order to remove one of the bullets they shot and thus pretend there was a gunfight inside the house. They planted a short gun, a rifle and a grenade on the victim. At the top of the metal door on the balcony, there is a hole left by another bullet.

This mother thanks God because the file on her son’s death reached the Public Prosecutor’s Office and she celebrates that it is now being handled by another prosecutor. The case reached this stage a year after the incident.

The mother said that when she saw the photographs of her son’s body, she noticed that he had a burn along his right arm. She would like to know what caused that injury.

The woman is convinced that time is playing against her, making it more and more difficult to get justice for her son.

3 Killed “by mistake”

This mother cannot hold back her tears every time she has to speak about or show pictures of her 20-year-old son, DDD, who was shot in the chest by a FAES group.

She recounts that one morning in early 2017, officers of this branch of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) came at the door of her two-story house, located in

an alley that we will call “Mala Leche,” in a given sector of city.

The police officers told her that it was an operation requested by the community and ordered by the government. In response, she asked them to show her a search warrant, which did not exist.

She decided to open the gate before the police forced it or broke it.

As the police walked into the house, they started off by asking who lived on the ground and second floors. At that time, the only boy of her three children was still sleeping, but when he woke up and heard noises, not knowing who was in the house, the boy asked, “what’s all the ruckus?” Then the officials burst into the room and ordered the boy to get dressed.

Meanwhile, two female police officers entered the mother’s room and asked her to go with them, where there is now a Bolivarian National Police (BNP) headquarters. Before leaving the house, the police drew up a document stating that nothing had been found in the house and that nothing had been taken.



This mother was put into a Jeep patrol and was made to believe that a similar unit would transfer her son to the same police station. But she began to suspect that something was wrong because the Jeep where **DDD** was supposed to be transferred “broke down.” It was not true that **DDD** was taken to police station to testify.



realised that the young man was not a criminal, they openly told her, “Well, we’ll go to jail, then.”

The person who fired the shot that took the young man’s life has been identified and there is an arrest warrant against him, but he has not been

arrested. He apparently still is an active officer.

Since no statement was taken and her son did not make it to the police station, she decided to go back home, but the officers who were still inside her house did not let her in. First they told her that her son was giving a statement at the police, at another station. Then they told her that the young man was at another location used by law enforcement.

Three days after her son’s death, she left her home and then sold it. She doesn’t want to hear anything about that house, which is now under renovation.

“My son was my partner. He was loving and helpful,” she explained in tears.

When asked about why they stayed in the house they replied: “We have to protect the scene here.” After a few hours, there were more than 200 uniformed police officers in the alley, and when members of the community asked about **DDD**, the police shouted back, “Get out of here!”

People in the community where he lived collected more than 500 signatures, a document that was sealed by the communal council and submitted to the Public Prosecutor’s Office. “They only bring sorrow to our homes,” she said, referring to the FAES.

The last time this mother saw her son he was sitting on his bed, on the ground floor. She later learned that he was murdered on the stairs leading up to the second floor of her own home.

As in almost all the raids by the FAES, they took two plasma TVs, two cable top boxes, clothes belonging to mother and son, and two mobile phones.

“They destroyed my life and my daughters’.” She recalled that a group from the Public Prosecutor’s Office went to her house to re-create the events and found a bullet shot into the wall.

This mother said that when they realised that the young man’s death had been a mistake, they gave her back the two TVs and the mobile phones. They kept **DDD’s** cable box. She said the FAES officials even took her make-up.

She presumes that someone around the area had her son killed just because he liked to listen to loud music.

DDD was getting his high school diploma to take later a university course. In the meantime, he was helping her mother, who was in the construction business, selling bread and other products.

The file on **DDD’s** death is currently in a Control Court. The judge has been changed three times. She remembers that when the murderers

4 Killed while coming back from his 25th birthday party

This young man's mother wants to change the prosecutor who is handling the file on the death of her 25-year-old son **EEE**, which was killed by FAES officers between 5:00 and 5:30 a.m. on a September day.

EEE was shot in the heart as he walked up the stairs to his mother-in-law's house, where his wife was waiting. He was returning from celebrating his 25th birthday. A friend had taken him to the neighbourhood on his motorcycle and he was running up the stairs when the police intercepted him.

That morning when **EEE** was killed, officers charged their phones in the home of a neighbour of the victim's mother-in-law, according to some area residents.

The prosecutor handling the case told the victim's mother that she cannot charge these police officers with her son's death because the young man had two case files open against him. One case was for theft, committed at the house of an alleged National Police officer who lived in the same neighbourhood, and another for premeditated murder.

The mother refutes these accusations and claims that at the time of the alleged theft, her son, who was a barber, was in a barber shop where he worked from Tuesday to Saturday for three years. As for the murder, she assures her son was at home that day.

Recently the mother returned to the District Attorney's office and now the case on the theft has disappeared from the file.

EEE's mother claims that there are witnesses, but they are afraid to speak out.

EEE was an only child and father of three children, aged 9, 6 and 3. His busiest days were Friday and Saturday, when he could work until midnight or

1:00 a.m. Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursdays he used to come back home at around 5:00 p.m.

EEE's mother claims that the prosecutor handling the case refuses to give her a copy of the file and said that she does not have the right to ask for one. That is one of the reasons why she wants another prosecutor to continue the investigation.

The prosecutor has also refused to accept the letters with more than 1,500 signatures from neighbours, as well as from the representatives of four communal councils, which attest to the good behaviour of the murdered young man.

"My son has never been in prison, or wanted by courts or the police. There were no arrest warrants against him or criminal record. My son had no enemies," she explained.

"They planted a gun on him, laid him on top of a water tank and forced him to shoot after he was wounded."

EEE was alive when he was taken to a nearby hospital, but they didn't allow anyone to come anywhere near him until he passed away, and that is when the police left the site, the mother said.

He arrived at the hospital naked and shoeless. They tore his identity card and threw away all his belongings, his mother reported.

"Yet another unlawful procedure was FAES officers transferred him to the hospital and the file says that it was the CICPC," she added.



5 Produce vendor killed

At 6:00 a.m. on a November day, FFF was walking down the stairs in one of the many poor neighbourhoods in the country to go to work in a market with his father.

At that time, CICPC and FAES groups were deploying an operation throughout the area. Some neighbours claim that the police were wearing hoods.

FFF was one of the detainees, but none of his family members knew that he had been taken away. However, as he did not come to work, his father he decided to call one of his daughters to ask if the young man was at home.

Since no one knew about his whereabouts, his father decided to go to the neighbourhood where the boy lived, but the police had blocked access. So he decided to go to the police station, but they said FFF was not detained in any station.

Later in the afternoon, distress and concern took hold of everyone and the journey began. First they went to one of the stations of the Scientific Criminal and Forensic Investigation Corps (CICPC) where officers suggested that they go to the local hospital "because the three guys we killed are there."

When they went to this hospital, they were told that the bodies were already in the morgue. But none of those bodies were 29-year-old FFF.

Then the family was informed that in the afternoon of the same day there was another

shooting. When they returned to the hospital, they were told that the young man was indeed there. The mother did not want to see the bodies, because she still had hopes to find him alive.

At the hospital, an official warned them that a police chief had arrived and ordered the bodies to be taken to the morgue. That is where the family was finally able to find him.

Nobody knows the exact place where he was killed. He was arrested at 6:00 a.m. and according to the information provided to the family he was killed at 3:00 p.m., shot in the chest. "That's what they say," said the mother.

Coincidentally, on the day of the raid in the neighbourhood, the police burned down a house owned by a Colombian national who was abroad and had left his home in the care of FFF's wife.

The mother recalled that on the day her son was killed, the man was carrying money to buy merchandise, which did not turn up. "The only thing they gave us was his identity card. They didn't give us his clothes, his shoes or his debit cards," she added.

She does not know whether it was CICPC or FAES officers who killed her son, because they were all wearing hoods, as she was told by witnesses. "My son was never in prison, was never wanted by the police, he had no issues with law enforcement," she explained.

After FFF's death, the family learned that when he was arrested he was put into a patrol car and his face was covered. His brother-in-law was also arrested, but neither of them realised who was beside him, because both their faces were covered. The brother-in-law was released later.

The victim was the father of four children, ages 11, 9, 7 and 3.



6 Asking to let her children testify on her husband's death

It was early in the morning. **G**GG, his wife and her three children were still sleeping when the noise woke them up, in a poor neighbourhood like any other, in an area like many others.

The wife got up to see what was going on and peeked through one of the openings in a sheet of zinc on one of the walls of the house. She noticed that a group of police officers walking towards the house.

Seconds later the door was kicked in. It was the sixth house that hood-wearing cops had raided searching for some men. They didn't find any of them in the previous houses.

Recounting the incident, the lady recalled that her husband, 22-year-old **G**GG, went to bed the night before with some discomfort because he had tonsillitis.

It all happened very fast. The police burst into the bedrooms. The three children were in one and the couple was in the other. **G**GG was taken to the front door of the house, where he was beaten. The oldest boy, an 11-year-old, asked why

they were beating him up and one of the police officer replied that it was a regular procedure and ordered him to turn his face away, while the detainee remained in the place guarded by three other police officers.

The woman was in one of the bedrooms where several officers were looking for firearms, which they did not find, while the children were guarded by two other officers.

As **G**GG was in his underwear, his wife brought a shirt, a pair of shorts and a pair of sandals, and that was when one of the hooded men said ironically to the woman: "You can also comb his hair if you want."

While the police was still raiding house, another group of police officers was about to take the wife to a National Police station so she could give a statement.

On the way, the police officers asked her if her husband had a job, and she answered that he worked loading food boxes. They also asked whether the man was a thief and whether he owned a gun. She was also kicked.

After a driving for a while, they let her out and left her stranded, without any money. There was no formal police interrogation at any station. She was stranded for three hours until someone was kind enough to give her a ride to another part of town on his motorcycle, after she told him what had happened to her. She waited for a while and then a man took her home on his four-wheel-drive vehicle, which he uses to transport passengers.

When she arrived, the FAES officers were still there, inside her humble house with zinc sheets and a dirt floor. The first thing the police chief told him was, "You didn't tell me your husband was in a gang."



By that time, she still hadn't been told that her husband was dead. So she went to a friend's house, who was watching her three children. The woman told her that there had been a shooting, that two men were injured and were being taken to a hospital.

When she came back home, she asked one of the police officers about her husband, and he replied, "Your husband was a crook." She asked the police chief for her cell phone and the money she had in her purse and they just handed her the phone.

When she insisted, the cop told her to look for him at the hospital. There, she found out that her husband was dead. He was shot in the chest. She also found out that a gun had been planted on him.

The couple's home was practically ransacked according to the widow's account. The police took the food, the children's school uniforms, school supplies, shoes, a camera, perfumes, the deceased's clothes, the refrigerator's surge protector, even the sanitary napkins.

The case file on this event is in the hands of the Prosecutor's Office, and the widow is fighting to get the head of that office to summon her children to testify, as they witnessed what happened and heard everything that happened inside the house.

She admitted that **GGG** was under parole. He was required to report to court every month. He had served a sentence for possession of illegal substances. "There's no death penalty here," she said, referring to what happened to her husband.

These stories are commonplace in many neighbourhoods across Venezuela.



**A PROPOSAL
TO DISMANTLE
ORGANISED CRIME
IN VENEZUELA**



Embajada Británica
Caracas



TRANSPARENCIA
VENEZUELA

The proposal for change prepared in a previous study,¹ based on the analysis of Organised Crime and Corruption in Venezuelan Borders, lays the groundwork for this new project that includes a national perspective of the problem. Thus, this proposal is a complementary adaptation of the approach to this problem that was started in 2019.

The possibility of achieving a real reduction in organised crime, corruption and the elimination of human rights violations, which take place in all their forms in Venezuela, will require decisive and coordinated action with international organisations with expertise in these issues and with the governments of the bordering countries.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE IN VENEZUELA

The proposal for change is based on *reducing organised crime and corruption in Venezuela to a minimum, applying formal and informal tools that guarantee the rule of law, the end of impunity and respect for human rights*. This is the main objective of the action against organised crime, corruption and the violation of human rights in the country.

Strategic guidelines

In order to move forward towards this goal, the following strategic guidelines and a set of initiatives should be implemented in case the current political context continues, but also when a change takes place in Venezuela's political circumstances.



¹ SCOPE STUDY ON CORRUPTION AND OTHER FORMS OF ORGANISED CRIME CAUSING INSTABILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN BORDER AREAS OF VENEZUELA, Transparencia Venezuela, 2019



Guidelines to fight organised crime and corruption



Source: Authors

We followed the methodology used in 2019 to prepare the strategic initiatives and the activities related to each of them, which allows us to classify them according to their priority and level of difficulty, as set out in the table below:



Criteria to classify the initiatives

PRIORITY	DIFFICULTY
I - Immediate	H - High
S - Short term (6 months)	M - Medium
M - Medium term (1+ year)	L - Low

Source: Authors

1. Breaking the links between politics, civil service and criminals

In 2019, this strategic line was developed with the aim of ending impunity. On this occasion they are treated separately, as they are related but distinct issues.

The identification of the 9 organised crime rings and the updating of the situation in the regions

changes the entire outlook, as the links between politics, civil service and criminals can be seen more clearly.

The relationship between these crime rings, political leaders and government officials allows for the design of specific public policies to confront each of them, because their nature is different. In this sense, the following initiatives and actions are proposed:

Initiatives for breaking the links between politics, civil service and criminals

Strategic Initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Dissemination of information about magnitude and consequences of actions of organised crime groups in Venezuela, in order to raise awareness in society	1. Designing a communications plan to disseminate the information about the situation of organised crime in Venezuela	IL	IL
	2. Producing communications tools in the form of documents, videos and audios	IL	IL
	3. Holding meetings with NGOs that are part of the Anti-corruption Coalition to disseminate the information	IL	IL
	4. Defining and implementing mechanisms to ensure the safety of researchers and communicators	IM	IM
	5. Establishing a control and follow-up mechanisms for implementation of the Communications Plan	IL	IL
Monitoring and updating of information of the behaviour of crime rings in Venezuela, criminal activities in the regions and their relations with other stakeholders	1. Updating the information about new actions of crime rings	IL	IL
	2. Updating the information on new criminal activities in the states under study	IL	IL
	3. Including the states of Amazonas, Guárico, Miranda and the Capital District in the analysis on the situation of regional crime	IL	IL
Reducing forms of control applied by government (monopoly, discretionary and opaque) on public institutions at the borders	1. Identifying forms of control	IL	IL
	2. Formalising complaints on forms of control	SM	SM
	3. Devising a plan to reduce forms of control (monopoly, discretionary and opaque)	SM	SM
	4. Implementing a plan to reduce forms of control (monopoly, discretionary and opaque)		MH
	5. Establishing a control and follow-up mechanisms for implementation of the plan to reduce forms of control (monopoly, discretionary and opaque)		ML
	6. Normalising cross-border trade and holding business meetings to stimulate this export route		MH

Priority

I Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Medium term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High
M Medium
L Low

Source: Authors

2. Ending impunity

There are four causes of impunity in Venezuela favouring organised crime and corruption:

- The lack of independence of the public authorities.
- The occupation of public agencies and territories by organised crime and corrupt agents.
- Lack of punishment for crimes and acts of corruption
- Complicity of public officials with criminal acts and corruption

The initiatives proposed below are aimed at implementing a number of actions to help end impunity.



Ending impunity

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Separation of public powers to ensure an unbiased, autonomous Executive Branch	1. Devising a strategy for separation of powers in the Venezuelan State, based on the existing legal framework	IL	IL
	2. Formalising the separation of public powers set forth in the National Constitution		SM
Creating a parliamentary office for identification and review of existing and new laws necessary to avoid impunity and corruption	1. Creating the Parliamentary Office against Impunity and Corruption	SM	SM
	2. Presenting to the National Assembly the concept for the Parliamentary Office against Impunity and Corruption	SL	SL
	3. Approval of the Parliamentary Office against Impunity and Corruption by the National Assembly	MM	MM
Ending the occupation of Venezuelan territory by illegal groups	1. Identifying territories that must be controlled by the State, as well as illegal groups operating in these areas, and defining a set of initial ideas to fight them	IL	IL
	2. Defining a strategy to be implemented by the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Justice and Peace and international specialised agencies, to recover the territories controlled by illegal groups, prioritising the states of Bolívar Amazonas, Apure, Barinas, Táchira, Guárico, Miranda and Zulia, and the Capital District		SL
	3. Implementing a strategy aimed at taking back control of territories taken by illegal groups, prioritising the states Bolívar, Amazonas, Apure, Barinas, Táchira, Guárico, Miranda and Zulia, and the Capital District		MH
	4. Setting up a situation room to monitor operations defined as part of the strategy to take back control of territories taken by illegal groups, prioritising the states of Bolívar, Amazonas, Apure, Barinas, Táchira and Zulia.		ML

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Taking back control of prisons	1. Devising a plan to take back control of prisons	IL	IL
	2. Implementing the plan to control prisons	IL	IL
	3. Establishing a control and monitoring mechanism to implement the plan to take back control of prisons	IL	IL
Construction of maximum security prisons for the most dangerous criminals, including prison gang leaders and their lieutenants	1. Designing and prioritising the construction of maximum security prisons	SM	SM
	2. Opening a tender for the construction of maximum security prisons		SL
	3. Starting the construction of maximum security prisons		MM
Reinforcing protocols y custody measures for war weapons for the defence of the nation to prevent them from ending up in the hands of organised crime groups	1. Reviewing necessary protocols and measures	IL	IL
	2. Designing a plan to implement measures necessary for the custody of weapons and the application of new protocols	IL	IL
	3. Executing the plan to implement the necessary measures for the custody of weapons and the implementation of new protocols		SL
Strengthening the Navy's custody of the nation's river areas to prevent and combat drug trafficking and smuggling	1. Identifying river areas used for smuggling and drug trafficking	IL	IL
	2. Drawing up a plan to protect river areas	IL	IL
	3. Implementing the plan to protect river areas		SH
Identifying the alleged leaders of organised crime organisations in Venezuela, according to judicial sources	1. Identifying gang leaders with arrest warrants	IL	IL
	2. Arrests to be made by authorities		SH
Effective implementation of the Act regulating the use of mobile telephones and the internet inside prisons	1. Enforcing the act regulating the use of mobile telephones and the internet inside prisons		IL
	2. Procuring equipment to block mobile phone signals through public tenders		IL
	3. Designing the installation plan for mobile phone signal blocking equipment	IL	IL
	4. Execute the plan to install the mobile signal blocking equipment		SL
	5. Monitoring enforcement of the law		IL

Priority

I Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High
M Medium
L Low

Source: Authors

3. Eliminating incentives and business opportunities for organised crime.

In the study completed in the first quarter of 2019, Organised Crime and Corruption at Venezuelan Borders, two major generators of corruption were identified as very attractive to organised crime: exchange control and price controls. These two public policies have been most appealing for illegal businesses. In the year 2020, this situation has changed, because, although there are price controls in place, they have not been applied since mid-2019. Regarding exchange control, the official and the parallel (black market) dollar exchange rates are practically the same, as the government has closed this gap in recent years. But these policies do exist, so their formal elimination must be demanded, as they hang as a proverbial sword of Damocles over the economy, which could trigger their effects at any time.

The petrol subsidy remains a harmful public policy. Until May 2020, petrol was sold at only **US\$ 0.001**, which continued to represent a huge incentive for smuggling, mainly to Colombia, Brazil and Caribbean islands. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic production dynamics changed, prompting shortages, not only of this fuel, but also of cooking gas and diesel. The effects are yet to be seen, especially after petrol—imported from Iran—began to be sold at US\$ 0.50 per litre in early June 2020, leaving the subsidy for specific sectors such as transport.

Another incentive that should be considered as an enabler of criminal actions is the overall dismantling of public institutions and law enforcement agencies, an issue that we have addressed in the guideline on institutional robustness in this study.

Given these considerations, the initiatives proposed in the study carried out in 2019 are maintained.

Initiatives to eliminate incentives and opportunities

Initiatives Strategic	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Rethinking petrol subsidy	1. Designing a new policy of petrol subsidies and prices based on production costs and international prices.	IL	IL
	2. Designing a communication plan to disseminate the new policy on petrol subsidies and prices.	IL	IL
	3. Implementing the communication plan to disseminate the new policy on petrol subsidies and prices.		SL
	4. Applying the new policy on petrol subsidies and prices.		SH
Removal of exchange control	1. Designing a plan to remove the exchange control.	IL	IL
	2. Implementing the plan to remove the exchange control.		SH
	3. Monitoring and following up implementation of the plan to remove the exchange control.		SL
Removal of price controls	1. Designing a plan to remove price controls	IL	IL
	2. Implementing the plan to remove price controls.		SM
	3. Monitoring and following up implementation of the plan to remove price controls.		SL

Source: Authors

Priority

I Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High
M Medium
L Low

4. Institutional Robustness

As has already been pointed out, one of the most important incentives that enable illegal activities is the dismantling of public institutions and the fact that some of them have been infiltrated by criminal organisations, which we have called in this study a “holding of corruption.” The growing presence of illegal groups is directly proportional to the structural weakness of the Venezuelan judicial system.

This situation is compounded by the cooperation or co-existence of law enforcement agencies with illegal groups of organised crime and Colombian guerrillas. In the 2019 study *Organised Crime and Corruption at Venezuelan Borders*, three areas of action were suggested to restore the standing of Venezuelan public institutions:

- a) Laws that need to be reformed.
- b) Institutional strengthening.
- c.) Law enforcement and oversight bodies

In addition to these areas of action, we are adding the **strengthening of relations with bordering countries and with agencies specialised in the fight against organised crime**, which was included in the laws to be reformed and approved, but given its importance, we suggest treating this issue separately and adding other international agencies specialised in the fight against organised crime.

All the initiatives suggested in 2019 to address this problem are maintained, and we are adding others related to the findings of this investigation, mainly those related to the existence of 9 major organised crime rings in Venezuela. The following are the 2019 initiatives and those proposed this year:

Initiatives for Institutional Robustness

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Strengthening relations with bordering countries and with specialised agencies in the fight against organised crime	1. Identifying procedures in force to deal with crime in border regions.	IL	IL
	2. Identifying legal or institutional constraints to establishing institutional cooperation agreements in bordering countries	IB	IB
	3. Redefining and reactivating cooperation agreements between the foreign ministries of the bordering countries: Colombia, Brazil, Curaçao, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana.		MM
	4. Establishing cooperation agreements between prosecutor's offices and investigation agencies in bordering countries: Colombia, Brazil, Curacao, Aruba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana.		MM
	5. Establishing an alliance with UNODC, FBI, British Police, DEA, Europol, Eurojust, CEPOL and specialised agencies against organised crime.		SM

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Laws to be reformed and approved: A daunting task	1. Identifying and verifying the required reforms in the following laws and regulations: Law on Drugs, Law against Corruption, Law on Smuggling, Law against Organised Crime and Financing of Terrorism, Law on Policing and the Bolivarian National Police, Law on the Statute of the Police Force, Law on the Armed Forces, Customs Law, Decree creating the Orinoco Mining Arc, Law on Migration, Law on Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence, Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure.	IL	IL
	2. Drafting new laws or regulations.	ML	ML
	3. Enacting new bills		MM
	4. Redesigning regulations that govern law enforcement and national defence organisations	ML	ML
	5. Drafting the following new laws: Transparency and Access to Public Information Act, Open Data Act, Whistle-blower Protection Act, Effective Cooperator/Protected Witnesses Act, Rewarded Reporting Act, Repentance Act, Asset Recovery Act, Statute of Limitation Act, Lobbying Act, and Accountability of Officials/related individuals Act.	IL	IL
	6. Drafting new bills.	ML	ML
	7. Enacting new laws.		MM
Strengthening institutions	1. Reviewing the roles of mayors and governors and their links with other public institutions.	IL	IL
	2. Preparing a proposal on the roles of mayors and governors and their links with other public institutions.	IL	IL
	3. Designing a heterodox mechanism of anti-corruption and anti-impunity justice.	IL	IL
	4. Implementing a heterodox mechanism of anti-corruption and anti-impunity		MM
	5. Reviewing the roles of SEBIN, Seniat, FANB, PNB, CICPC, ONCDOFT, ONA, Courts, Public Ministry, SAIME and exchange operators at the borders.	IL	IL
	6. Preparing a proposal on the roles of SEBIN, SENIAT, FANB, PNB, CICPC, ONCDOFT, ONA, courts, Public Prosecutor, SAIME and exchange operators.	IL	IL
	7. Restoring the autonomy, independence and capacity of the judiciary and other powers.		MH
	9. Promoting greater coordination between existing institutions		SM
	10. Strengthening training and reporting mechanisms		SL
	11. Transforming the governmental model, promoting decentralisation and giving more power and responsibility to local agencies.		MH
	12. Improving socioeconomic condition of officers and improving conditions of civil servant careers		MH
	13. Improving the mechanisms of justice and financial institutions to prevent organised crime organisations from freely moving and using the capital earned from their criminal activities.		MH
	14. Strengthening victim protection systems.		MH

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Law enforcement agency and priority control	1. Assessing the possibility of creating a specialised border security agency.	IL	IL
	2. Creating an agency or other organisational scheme for security specialising in border areas.		MH
	3. Creating a new anti-drug police in Venezuela.		MH
	4. Scrutinising the police and security forces.		MH
	5. Improving the socio-economic status of police officers and creating career paths		MH

Source: Authors

Priority

- I** Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

- H** High
M Medium
L Low

5. Civil society's commitment to change

In the 2019 study, the creation of a **National Transparency and Anti-Corruption Observatory** was proposed as a central initiative to turn civil society into a trigger for confronting organised crime and corruption in Venezuela:

- Creating forums for dialogue and consultation between officials and citizens.
- Exposing the situation of corruption, organised crime and the impact on human rights.
- Following up on the situation, policy design and their implementation; to report cases and abuses; to demand the inclusion and guarantee of human rights, with special attention to the gender perspective.
- Building networks of organisations that provide support at the borders for this purpose.

This proposal was made possible thanks to the support of the British Embassy in Venezuela and the leadership and credibility of Transparencia Venezuela, through the creation of the **Anti-Corruption Coalition**, where a total of **609 civil society organisations, academies, churches, professional associations, trade unions** have joined by the first quarter of 2020, with a presence in **16 states in Venezuela**.

In this sense, the proposals below are based on activities that will strengthen the work of this civil coalition, which is based on the implementation of initiatives on the following issues:

1. Rejecting any act of corruption with a resounding "NO"
2. Ending impunity with the creation of a Special International System of Justice against Grand Corruption
3. Building a National Anti-Corruption Justice System (AJS)
4. Ensuring the separation of public powers
5. Strengthening law enforcement agencies
6. Eliminating incentives for corruption
7. Exposing the action of organised crime and the risks of corruption for Venezuelan migrants
8. Implementing Open Government in Venezuela
9. Renewing the legal and institutional framework
10. Recruiting officials and civil servants according to their ability and free from conflicts of interest and nepotism

11. Demanding administrative oversight agencies to act effectively and fairly in cases of corruption
12. Establishing institutional structures that ensure probity

Therefore, we propose that initiatives to make civil society a driving force in the fight against organised crime and corruption **be channelled through the Anti-Corruption Coalition.**

Initiatives for civil society's commitment to change

Strategic Initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Civil Society's commitment to change	1. Strengthening the Anti-corruption Coalition and its initiatives.	IL	IL
	2. To implement comprehensive social crime prevention programmes through the Anti-Corruption Coalition, aimed primarily at young people, in order to prevent them from joining organised crime organisations.	ML	ML

Priority

- I Immediate
- S Short term (6 months)
- M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

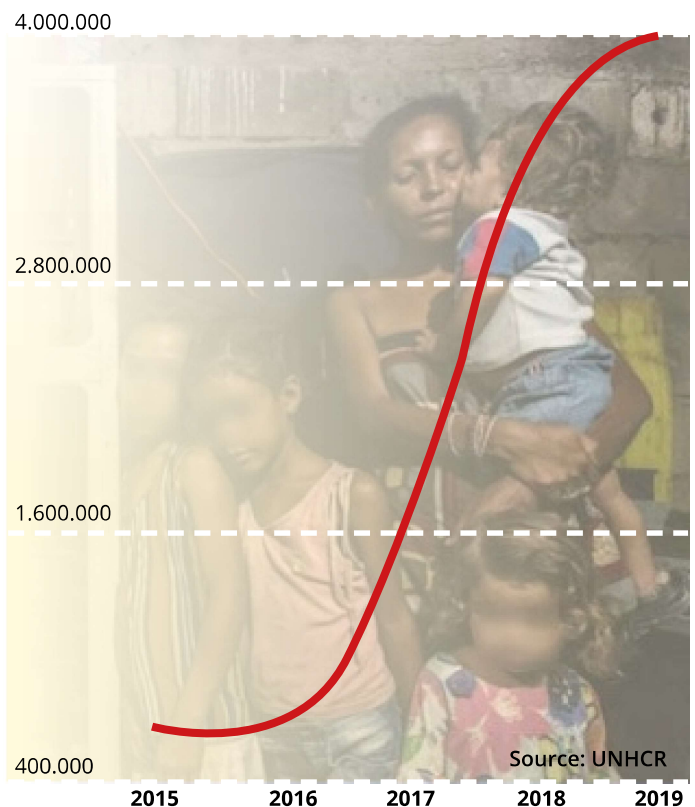
- H High
- M Medium
- L Low

Source: Authors

6. Mitigating forced displacement to other countries

The main focus of the research conducted in 2020 was the border issue, as related to organised crime and corruption. In this sense, the migration phenomenon experienced by Venezuela is an issue that could not be ignored.

Migration of Venezuelans, as a result of the political and economic crisis facing the country, has been on the rise, with more than 4,000,000 migrants and refugees, according to UNHCR.



Given the worsening of Venezuelan migration, we propose to maintain the initiatives outlined in 2019.

Initiatives for civil society's commitment to change

Strategic initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Escenario transición
Mitigating forced displacement to other countries	1. Designing and the implementing dissemination campaign to expose the situation of migration at Venezuelan borders.	IL	IL
	2. Establishing cooperation agreements with bordering countries and others that have been impacted by Venezuelan migration.		SM
	3. Creation of Protection Councils in partnerships with stakeholders in organised civil society.	SM	SM

Priority

I Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High
M Medium
L Low

Source: Authors

7. Addressing gender risks

This research analysed the gender issue in relation to organised crime and corruption, women as victims and perpetrators. The conclusions of this work suggest that corrupt behaviour also involves issues such as women being forced to perform acts of a sexual nature, abuse of power, selling products from social programmes in the black market and poor quality of public services, which affect women to a greater extent heads of households. Trafficking in persons, a crime that disproportionately affects women, was also analysed.

Furthermore, although men play a leading role in most crimes, the consequences of legitimate imprisonment or detainment impact women and families differently. The research established that the main crimes committed by women are drug trafficking and extortion.

We also discussed how girls and young women at the borders, in the mining

areas—and to a lesser extent, in the cities—are in great demand by the men who control and work in the gold mines. This situation is exacerbated by the precarious economic situation that leaves them utterly defenceless.



The following are initiatives to address the situation of women with regard to organised crime, corruption and human rights violations.

Initiatives to address gender risks

Strategic Initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Design and implementation of public policies to reverse the vulnerability factors of women and other historically excluded groups	1. To design an elective strategy to combat corruption, which must include structural reforms aimed at reversing vulnerability factors of women and other historically excluded groups	IL	IL
	2. Implementing an effective strategy to combat corruption that reverses vulnerability factors of women and other historically excluded groups.		MM
	3. Creating or adjusting Protection Councils with specialised handling of cases of trafficking in indigenous girls and adolescents for sexual slavery in mines, or to be taken to other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, or to brothels in Venezuela, as well as special support for women whose children have been killed or enslaved.		MM
	4. Promoting the participation of women in the design of public policies and the inclusion of their needs as an urgent measure, in order to overcome the obstacles that limit the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 5.	IL	IL
	5. Prioritising public policies that address wage inequalities, such as women's access to high-ranking positions.		ML
Addressing Gender Issues at Venezuela's Borders	1. Signing bi-national cooperation agreements between various agencies and entities to address the main migration challenges facing women, young females and girls		SM
	2. Designing protection mechanisms to prevent exploitation at work and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of displaced persons.	MM	IM
	3. Enhancing the capacity, resources and competencies of prosecutors' offices in border regions for gender-based crimes and organised crime and corruption at the borders.		MH
	4. Creating or adapting Protection Councils, with special attention to cases of trafficking in teenage and younger girls.	MM	MM

Strategic Initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Institutional Strengthening and Cooperation to Address Human Trafficking and Sexual Abuse	1. Encouraging the reporting and exposure, through campaigns, of the fact that demanding acts of a sexual nature by a public official is a form of corruption.	IL	IL
	2. Implementing a zero-tolerance policy for the demand of acts of a sexual nature in exchange for benefits, abusing power, whether in public or private institutions		MM
	3. Establish a toll-free hotline for complaints of any illegal conduct by any public official, including custodial staff in detention centres and detention facilities.		SL
	4. Reinforcing international cooperation and coordination strategies at the inter- and intra-institutional level between anti-corruption and anti-trafficking agencies through strategies such as a protocol or operational standards		MH
	5. Developing awareness and training strategies, highlighting the importance of corruption in the criminal chain of trafficking in persons, to encourage reporting within institutions and in society.	SL	SL

Priority

I Immediate

S Short term (6 months)

M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High

M Medium

L Low

Source: Authors

8. Military decolonisation of the public administration

The existing correlation—in terms of causality, support, and effect—between the involvement of members of the Armed Forces in the violation of human rights and their link to acts of corruption, which was caused by the establishment of a model of political domination in Venezuela comparable to a garrison state, is a warning of the urgent need to dismantle this model as a *sine qua non* requirement if we wish to minimise these reprehensible practices.

In this regard, a transition scenario towards re-institutionalisation of Venezuela requires efforts in restoration or effective professionalisation of the military. The historical experience of the last two decades suggests the reasonable conclusion that military professionalism suffers when men and women in uniform take on political roles, and consequently deviate from the key roles defined by the reason for existence of their organisations, which is to defend the territorial integrity of the country based on the strategic guidelines established by a democratically elected civilian sector, which is entrusted with materialising and preserving the great national objectives.

The role of the military does **not include heading ministries or state-owned companies**, or establishing work teams that enable the operation of these agencies. Similarly, it is certainly not the mission of the Armed Forces to support a particular political project or to have its members become militants of such project. The issue is clear: **Political projects of military origin and essence are by definition contrary to democratic values.**

The catch-all discourse on the convenience of the military's active involvement in "national development" must be abandoned, as it has proven to lay the doctrinal and strategic foundation which favours the mechanisms through which members of the Armed Forces step outside their legal and ideal condition as national defence officers. On the contrary, they become ideologues and public policy makers, which neither their responsibility nor their competence, which is one of the reasons why they end up taking over positions of power in the government and state structure. In other words, the process of military colonisation of the public administration as the objective, expression and result of the progressive imposition of a garrison state in Venezuela since 1999, has been achieved.

The recent establishment a sort of military business empire creates a substantial imbalance in terms of capacities and benefits between the armed forces and other bodies of the Venezuelan State, as it requires a sizeable share of the national budget for its operation, which should be allocated in the short and medium term to urgent areas that are lagging behind and should be prioritised, as required in the context of the complex humanitarian emergency decreed by the National Assembly. Similarly, by having its own industrial network, the Armed Forces are able to exert pressure within the Venezuelan government, which are problematic in terms of

the institutional balance required for transition to democracy. Noteworthy also is that—in practice—this network collides with other national entities that have already been entrusted with the mission of covering areas that have been taken over by the military, for example, the oil industry.

It is clear that without restructuring the Venezuelan judicial system, it is impossible to increase its effectiveness in an effort to bring about a drastic reduction of existing impunity. This restructuring process requires, of course, a separation from subordinate ideological considerations that are based on and lead to deviations such as the politicisation of justice, criminalisation of dissent, or acting on the basis of automatic partisan loyalty. Failure to advance this process, it ending and properly punishing the actions described above will be an uphill struggle, especially those regarding the involvement of members of the Armed Forces in the violation of human rights and in acts of corruption, as well as any other criminal acts in general.

This must be coupled with the recognition that corruption and organised crime, like so many other threats to the internal stability of countries such as terrorism, are now transnational in nature. In other words, only with the **combined efforts of various countries can these problems be tackled with a reasonable chance of success.** The Government must therefore take back full control of these areas of joint action, which, of course, include the field of intelligence in its various forms, such as financial intelligence.

However, restructuring the Venezuelan judicial system in order to depoliticise it and increase its effectiveness may be insufficient in cases where certain inconsistencies and/or irregularities in the national fabric are not corrected, in parallel and in a timely manner, which facilitate the circumstances that enable criminal acts,

regardless of their magnitude, and with no consideration for associated ethical values that should prevail if these crimes are to be prevented. One example is the significant price differential in the marketing of such a sensitive product as fuel on both sides of the border between Venezuela and Colombia. In this specific case, which illustrates other similar issues, the conditions of outrageous profitability derived from the black market and petrol smuggling are a focus of attraction, encouraging staff entrusted

with border protection to get involved in the networks that facilitate smuggling. In other words, regardless the existence of an efficient and expeditious judicial system, if these factors that encourage illegal conducts prevail, it will be difficult and will take longer to fight these crimes.

In view of this context, we propose the following initiatives:

Initiatives for military decolonisation of the public administration

Strategic Initiatives	Specific Actions	Continuity	Transition
Military decolonisation of the public administration	1. Promoting the restoration and the ultimate implementation of professionalisation of the military.		MH
	2. To restrict the actions of the military to operational aspects of national defence, and to limit their involvement in areas other than national affairs, which could lead to political activism..		MH
	3. Restoring in legal and practical terms the apolitical, obedient and non-deliberate character of the armed forces, and the prohibition to exercise military authority concurrently with civilian authority.		MH
	4. Reversing the process of economic reconfiguration experienced by the military as necessary, as part of the redefinition of national powers and responsibilities.		MH
	5. Serving military justice strictly in military cases.		IH

Source: Authors

Priority

I Immediate
S Short term (6 months)
M Med. Term (1+ year)

Difficulty

H High
M Medium
L Low

Organised Crime and corruption in Venezuela:

A problem of State

 [TransparenciaVenezuela](#)

 [@NoMasGuiso](#)

 [nomasguiso](#)

 [TransparenciaVenezuela](#)

 [Transparencia Venezuela](#)



Embajada Británica
Caracas

