



Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE VENEZUELA-COLOMBIA BORDER SITUATION

Colombia has been ravaged by more than 50 years of a civil conflict that has presented security concerns for Venezuela along our shared border. The effects of this war, including drug trafficking, paramilitary violence and the second highest number of displaced persons in the world, have spilled over throughout the hemisphere, leading the U.S. to appoint a special envoy to the peace process in 2015. Venezuela has played a crucial role under both presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in seeking a solution to the conflict, including helping to negotiate the release of captives and supporting the peace talks.

However, Venezuela has been forced to take extraordinary constitutional measures by closing a partial section of our border in order to protect our citizens. Serious threats to our national and economic security have risen in the past few years, including the incursion of paramilitary violence, drug-trafficking and the proliferation of illicit commercial practices such as contraband of subsidized gasoline, food, medicine, and other basic products, as well as currency manipulation schemes that affect the economic conditions of the population. Despite these problems, Venezuela remains committed to supporting peace and ensuring the wellbeing and human rights of refugees, migrants and citizens alike. On September 4, Venezuela ordered a partial opening of the section of the border it had closed in order to facilitate legal commerce, and to permit students and workers to cross.

Threats to Economic and Citizen Security: Paramilitary violence

The latest incident that spurred the extraordinary measures was an attack on 3 members of the Venezuelan Armed Forces and 1 civilian while conducting an anti-contraband operation in the border city of San Antonio del Táchira. Unfortunately, this has not been the only case of Colombian paramilitary violence in Venezuela during the last several months, but rather part of a build up that includes cases as grave as the assassination of Congressman Robert Serra, a member of Venezuela's National Assembly, and many others.

Contraband

Smuggling and contraband have become lucrative criminal activities along the Venezuela-Colombia border region, particularly with regards to gasoline and food, medicine and basic products that are subsidized in Venezuela. For instance, oil smugglers can obtain a 3,000% profit by transferring gas illegally from Venezuela to Colombia. In Cúcuta, Colombia, 5 gallons of gasoline cost 14,000 bolívares, while in Venezuela the cost is no more than 3 bolívares. Other basic and household products like corn flour used to make the traditional arepas cost 650 bolívares in Colombia compared to 19 in Venezuela. This is what is known as "extraction contraband".

- At least 30% of Venezuela's food imports are smuggled out of the country.
- Around 40% of Venezuela's goods in general are smuggled out.

- 80% of products sold in Cúcuta, Colombia, are smuggled from Venezuela.
- The partial border closing is saving Venezuela over 260,000 gallons of gas a day.
- Venezuela loses at least \$2 billion a year from contraband.

Currency manipulation

These practices seek to undermine the value of the Venezuelan bolívar. Persons with Venezuelan bank notes of 100 bolívares can sell these bills at currency exchange counters in Colombia for 140 bolívares each and return to Venezuela with 40% percent profit for each 100 bolívares bill sold. In Cúcuta, more than 1,000 exchange centers contribute to the de facto devaluation of the Venezuelan bolívar.

Measures taken by the Venezuelan government

President Maduro announced a "state of exception" in two areas in the border region. The Venezuelan government has repeatedly called upon our Colombian counterparts to develop a shared strategy for the border zone and make it "a Bolivarian area of cooperation", as President Maduro has described it.

The state of exception has enabled Venezuelan police and security forces to:

- Arrest at least 32 alleged paramilitaries;
- Dismantle a prostitution brothel where minors were being sexually exploited;
- Discover and raid a house used for the production of explosives;
- Discover a mass grave with 13 corpses;
- Discover and raid underground dungeons presumably used for stashing kidnap victims;
- Seize 385 tons of hoarded, subsidized food during the first five days of operations; and
- Curtail the illicit diversion of thousands of tons of food, thousands of barrels of gasoline and other subsidized commodities that had been routinely transported illegally across the border into Colombian frontier towns.

Colombians in Venezuela: A history of peace and integration

There are 5.7 million Colombian citizens living in Venezuela who have been included in our social programs, including free education and healthcare, and subsidized food and housing. It is estimated that an average of 150,000 Colombians migrate to Venezuela annually in search of a better life. The United Nations Human Rights Council has recognized Venezuela's humane treatment of refugees, acknowledging our global leadership by allowing refugees to benefit from our social programs and by not having refugee camps, thus easing the assimilation process into Venezuelan society.

President Nicolas Maduro believes we can build a new border of peace, productivity, unity and respect, within a legal framework.