

URGENT ACTION

ESTABLISH THE WHEREABOUTS OF MISSING MINERS

The bodies of seventeen informal gold miners reported as missing were found by the authorities. The whereabouts of at least four other missing people are still unknown.

The Venezuelan Attorney General announced on 15 March that authorities found the bodies of seventeen people out of the twenty one informal gold miners who the authorities believed were missing since 4 March in the town of Tumeremo, Bolivar State in southeast. According to press reports, relatives of the victims stated that the number of those missing was twenty eight.

The Attorney General also announced that requested pre-trial detention for two alleged perpetrators of the attack.

According to the relatives' statements to the press, they believe their family members were attacked by a gang to gain control of the Atenas mine, where a large seam of gold has recently been discovered. Survivors told the press that the attackers shot the twenty eight informal gold miners reported missing, dismembered their bodies and forced them to load the bodies onto a truck. The survivors stated they received death threats demanding their silence. They also denounced that the attackers were members of the Venezuelan Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and Investigative Police (CICPC).

Journalists have denounced limitations to their work, to contact families and witnesses as well as harassment from law enforcement officers since Tumeremo was taken by the military last 10 March. Press reports indicate previous and frequent denounces from relatives of miners that have gone missing in Bolivar State. Law enforcement officials have been accused of not conducting investigations on these cases.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to take all effective measures available in order to establish the whereabouts of all the remaining people reported missing in the town of Tumeremo;
- Urging the Attorney General to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the events to ensure full identification of recovered bodies and to bring all those responsible to justice;
- Urging the Attorney General to establish a mechanism for safe denounces of missing people in Bolivar State and to ensure full, prompt and impartial investigations on all of them;
- Urging the authorities to allow the press to work without restrictions in Tumeremo area.
- Calling on authorities to ensure the protection of those who survived the reported attack, the relatives of those reported missing and journalist covering the news, according to their wishes.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 APRIL 2016 TO:

Minister of Justice and Interior

Gustavo González López
Ministerio del Poder Popular para
Relaciones Interiores, Justicia y Paz
Av. Urdaneta, Edificio Interior y Justicia
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 506 1558
Email: mijcudecon@gmail.com

Salutation: Señor Ministro/

Dear Minister

Attorney General of the Republic

Dra. Luisa Ortega Díaz
Edificio Sede Principal del Ministerio
Público, Esquinas de Misericordia a Pele
El Ojo Avenida México
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 578 3239
Email: ministeriopublico@mp.gob.ve

Salutation: Dra. Fiscal / Dear Attorney

General

And copies to:

Ombudsman

Tarek William Saab
Defensor del Pueblo
Av. Urdaneta - Frente a El Universal
Centro Financiero Latino, Piso 27
Caracas, Venezuela
Fax: +58 212 507 7025
Email: contacto@defensoria.gob.ve

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR SAMUEL MONACADA, Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1 Cromwell Road SW7 2HW, 020 7584 4206, embavenezuk@venezlon.co.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 53/16. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/3602/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to official estimates, Bolivar State has the second largest gold reserves in the world. Coltan, bauxite and aluminum, among other minerals, are also abundant in the region. Most of the mining, however, is not regularized.

The government has proposed various plans to combat illegal mining over the past decade. In 2014 President Nicolás Maduro's government acknowledged that the regularization of the area was a debt of the country when it launched the Presidential Commission for the Protection, Development and Integral Promotion of Lawful Mining Activity in the Region (Comisión Presidencial para la Protección, el Desarrollo y Promoción Integral de la Actividad Mineral Lícita en la Región), and in January 2016 the Ministry of Oil and Mining announced that they would ensure the armed forces were well equipped to implement the plans to fight the irregularity. However, illegal mining, the rise of armed gangs and the alleged complicity of the armed forces in irregular mining and extortion in the area remains a serious concern.

In 2012 ten members of the armed forces were sentenced to up to five years imprisonment for the killing of six miners in the area known as La Paragua.

According to the local mayor of El Callao municipality, which is one of the 11 that make up Bolivar State, there were 90 murders in 2015, the majority of which were mining related.

Name: 28 informal gold miners

Gender m/f: both

Further Information on UA: 53/16 Index: AMR 53/3646/2016 Venezuela. Date: 15 March 2016