

# *Bolivia Welcomes Home Nine Officials Detained in Chile Since March*

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La Paz, June 29 (RHC)-- Bolivia has welcomed home the nine officials detained by Chile in a dispute which threatened to escalate tensions between the neighboring countries. The men were reunited with their families at the border early on Wednesday morning. The transfer had been agreed after months of legal negotiations.

Bolivian President Evo Morales, who strongly condemned their detention and called for their release, met with the men later. The Minister of the Presidency, Rene Martinez confirmed that the Bolivian Government had complied with all of the formalities required by the Chilean judiciary to secure their detainees' release after they were held in Chile for more than 100 days.

The Bolivian government says the two military and seven officials of the National Customs will be decorated for services to the country. Bolivia insisted that the detention of the nine men was "unjust and arbitrary."

They were detained on 19th March and accused by Chile of smuggling, theft with intimidation and illegal possession of weapons. Bolivia rejected the claims, insisting that Chilean police crossed into its territory

and detained the officers while they were performing a regular operation against smuggling.

Last week, a court in northern Chile fined the detainees nearly \$50,000 and ordered their expulsion from the country. The money was paid on Tuesday, securing their release.

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