

# *Venezuelan soldiers kidnapped at the border with Colombia*

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**Venezuelan Minister of Defense, General Vladimir Padrino López, affirms that the country's sovereignty is not negotiable. | Photo: VTV**

Caracas, May 15 (RHC)-- Venezuela's Minister of Defense, General in Chief Vladimir Padrino, denounced this Saturday the kidnapping of eight Venezuelan soldiers during operations being waged in Apure state against Colombian irregular armed groups, and reiterated that national sovereignty is non-negotiable.

In a statement issued from the "Simón Bolívar" press room of the Miraflores Palace, the high-ranking official recalled that since late March, the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), as a sovereign

exercise, has been carrying out the "Bolivarian Shield 2021" operation.

This defense exercise is directed against those "terrorist organizations dedicated to drug trafficking, kidnapping and extortion" -- which "have declared war against the Venezuelan State, the people and our institutions," he said.

He added that these factions "use murderous and cowardly methods such as anti-personnel mines and explosive charges detonated at a distance, which caused the death of military personnel and caused serious injuries to others, some of them with mutilation of limbs and permanent incapacitation."

In addition to denouncing this situation before the international community, multilateral organizations and human rights organizations, Padrino López demanded that the soldiers be freed, "who are illegally being held in captivity." He revealed that "the contacts leading to their prompt release have been established and the Foreign Ministry of the Republic is coordinating with the International Committee of the Red Cross, to serve as liaison in the delivery of our brother combatants."

The high-ranking military officer asserted that Venezuela will spare no effort and will exhaust all possible means to recover them safe and sound.

Likewise, he conveyed "unconditional solidarity and unrestricted support to the families of such brave comrades in arms, who in a gallant and stoic manner continue honoring the sacred oath of defending the homeland", he highlighted.

He reiterated that these criminal groups make use of "the inaction and acquiescence of the Colombian government to develop their transnational crimes", and pointed out that some countries have already expressed deep concern for their violent actions in the Colombian-Venezuelan border and because they can generate regional instability.

The Venezuelan Minister of Defense made it clear that the FANB will not tolerate armed groups outside the law in any part of Venezuela's geography, whose sovereignty is not negotiable, he stressed.

He also ratified the unwavering commitment of the FANB to guarantee the territorial security and sovereignty of the nation and its determination to comply with the instructions issued by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

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