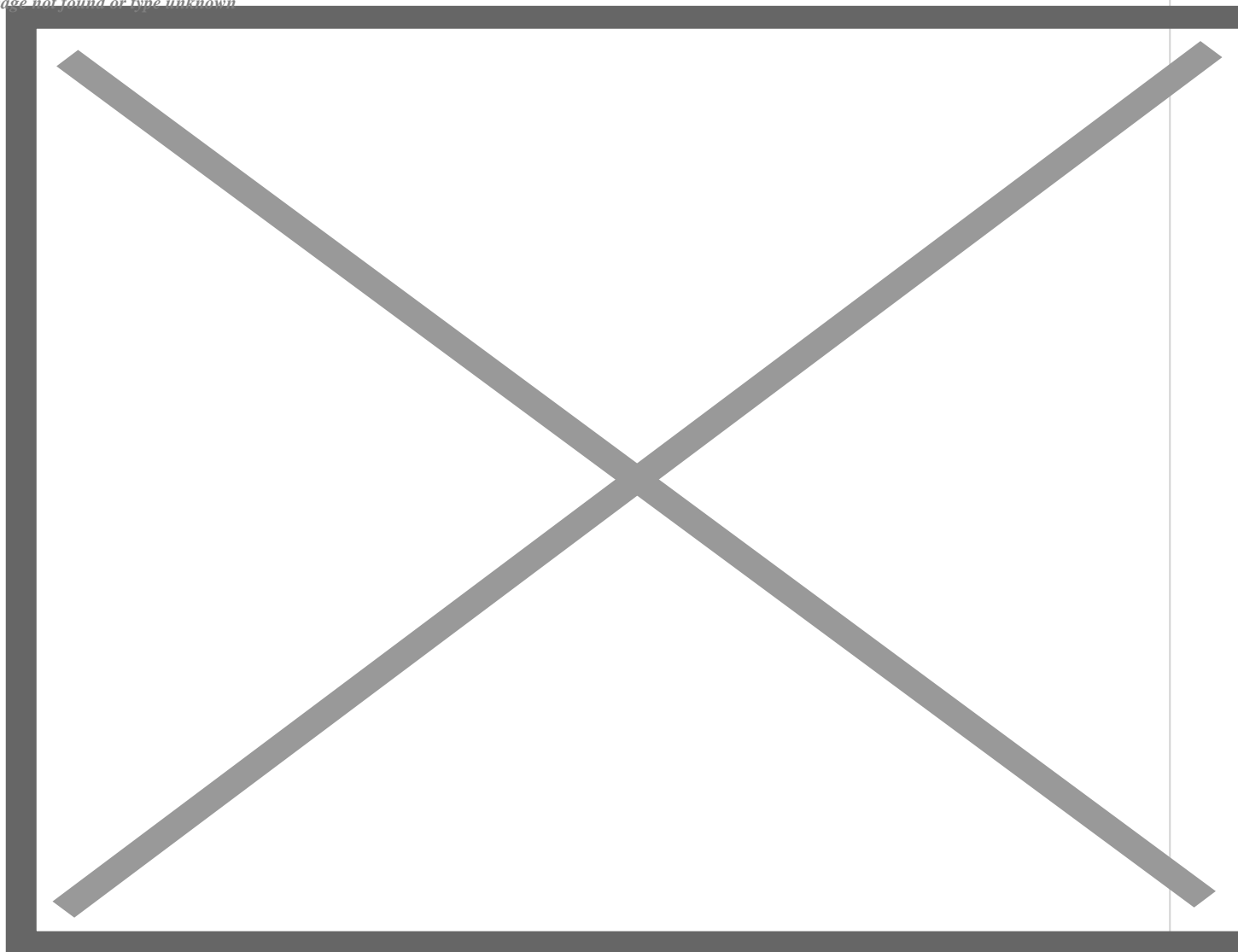


Recruitment of Venezuelan minors by Colombian irregular groups denounced

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Venezuelan Admiral Remigio Ceballos

Caracas, April 10 (RHC)-- The chief of staff of the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (Ceofanb) of Venezuela, Admiral Remigio Ceballos, has denounced the recruitment of Venezuelan minors by Colombian irregular armed groups.

"They kidnap the families' children, they recruit them," said Ceballos, in statements to teleSUR correspondent Madelein García, when addressing the issue of armed gangs operating in the common border area.

Inhabitants of the community of La Victoria in the state of Apure, confirmed to the journalist that there has been the recruitment of minors by Colombian irregular groups which are being expelled by the FANB.

They said that the youngsters are manipulated and many of them are not allowed to leave when they try to do so, added García. Admiral Remigio Ceballos emphasized that Venezuelan troops "maintain control" in Apure state.

He assured that the Venezuelan Army remains active "attending to the population returning to their homes, thoroughly checking the area and making arrests of those suspected of collaborating with the irregular groups", which have been confronting the military forces since March 21.

Ceballos said that these operations will continue until "calm returns" and peace can be restored in this state bordering Colombia, scene of hostilities for more than two weeks, which so far have left almost twenty dead on both sides.

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