

# *Venezuela to Close Border with Colombia at Night to Combat Smuggling*

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Caracas, August 11 (Xinhua-RHC) -- The Venezuelan government has decided to close its border with Colombia at night beginning Monday, in a series of new measures to fight food and fuel smuggling, authorities said on Saturday.

Vladimir Padrino Lopez, head of the Operational Command of the Venezuelan Armed Forces, said the border will be sealed from 10 p.m. local time until 5 a.m. the next day.

Heavy traffic load and cargo will also be prohibited every day after 6 p.m. local time, he said, adding that these measures apply to the entire border of 2200 kilometers between the two Latin American countries.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Madura and his Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos agreed on the border closure when they met on August 1st to discuss measures to fight smuggling which has affected both countries economically, officials said.

Moreover, Lopez said that a Binational Command Center of Smuggling Control will be established, with two office locations -- one in Cucuta, Colombia, and another in the Venezuelan state of Tachira.

Venezuelan authorities have said that around 40 percent of the food in Venezuela, plus 100,000 barrels of oil, are smuggled by " mafias" across the border to Colombia where the products are sold more expensively, equivalent to losses of 3.7 billion U.S. dollars per year.

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