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Crosby Girardin

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## Dominican Government Sends Troops to Haitian Border

by Crosby Girón

Category/Department: Dominican Republic

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The Dominican Republic's defense ministry, the Ministerio de Defensa, sent 641 soldiers to secure the Haitian border on Jan. 23 with the aim of preventing "undocumented aliens," specifically undocumented Haitian immigrants, from entering the country.

Defense Minister Rubén Darío Paulino Sem told the local press that the Army had sent 291 soldiers to Dajabón; 150 to Elías Piña; 100 to Jimaní, and another 100 to Pedernales.

According to Paulino Sem, the strategy has worked, because the number of Haitians who've been repatriated as they tried to cross the border has tripled. He added that the Dominican immigration authorities have deported more than 5,000 undocumented immigrants in various provinces "following the necessary proceedings."

The deployment of troops and the statements made by Paulino Sem followed a plea to politicians by Sigfrido Pared Pérez, director of the country's investigation agency, the Departamento Nacional de Investigación (DNI), to prioritize security at the border with Haiti as a key step towards improving national security.

Pared Pérez also said that allocating the necessary resources to develop the economy of the border area should be a key concern and part of the border security strategy. He said it was regrettable that residents of border areas are forced to emigrate to the eastern part of the island in search of better living conditions.

Pared Pérez said that when Dominicans abandon their homes along the border in search of better living conditions elsewhere, they leave behind ghost towns that become attractive destinations for Haitian immigrants who are also seeking a better life ([NotiCen, March 19, 2015](#), [Sept. 10, 2015](#), [June 2, 2016](#)).

### *Securing the border and mass expulsions*

In late December 2017, the defense ministry relaunched Operación Escudo (Operation Shield) along the border to prevent the entry of undocumented immigrants during the New Year celebrations. It is common for thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic without documentation to return to Haiti in December to spend the Christmas holidays with their families and then travel back to the Dominican Republic.

Human smuggling, arms traffic, drug traffic, and the traffic of endangered species is common along the almost 400-km-long Haitian-Dominican border. Dominican authorities have also voiced their concern regarding other border problems, such as timber logging, one of the means used by impoverished Haitian families to make coal, which is then used as cooking fuel.

The government began to use Operación Escudo during the holidays in 2015, and its only concrete results appear to be the number of Haitians deported.

According to the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina, by Jan. 5, members of the Dominican border security corps, the Cuerpo Especializado de Seguridad Fronteriza y Terrestre (CESFRONT), prevented 3,200 Haitians from entering the Dominican Republic. According to CESFRONT, these Haitians didn't have the required visa and in some cases, didn't carry a passport.

CESFRONT representatives told Prensa Latina, "We don't deport people. Our job is to prevent undocumented Haitians and other foreigners who don't have the necessary papers from entering the country."

These detentions have been carried out in various points of the border in joint operations with the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force in regions such as Monte Cristi, Barahona, and Pedernales. Sugar Frugis Martínez, director of CESFRONT, is in charge of Operación Escudo 2018.

In fact, the local press reported that by Jan. 15, CESFRONT and the national immigration bureau, the Dirección General de Migración, had repatriated 14,402 undocumented Haitians who were attempting to cross the border.

In 2017, troops deployed to the border area repatriated 103,454 undocumented immigrants, and the number for this year is expected to be higher.

Miguel Ángel Cid, a specialist on conflict resolution, said the immigration problem is increased by the cynicism of those who take advantage of undocumented immigrants in order to further their own political and economic interests. According to Cid, Haitian immigration does not always have a negative impact in the Dominican economy, and some business sectors benefit, because Haitians are a source of inexpensive labor. He says the agribusiness and construction sectors pay undocumented Haitian workers a pittance and often report undocumented workers to the immigration authorities in order to avoid paying them the wages they owe them.

Those who profit from illegal immigration and trade, Cid said, are part of a structure designed to divert attention from the fact they have a detrimental effect on both countries.

"In both countries, there are interest groups that have wormed their way into power that profit from people trafficking and contraband," he said. "This mafia, disguised in patriotic and nationalist uniforms, has unlimited power and ambition."

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