

MATHEUS & ULLOA

MARITIME LAWYERS

NEWSLETTER VENEZUELA

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NEWS ON PIRACY

Last week, various Venezuelan online news referred to 2017 report from Oceans Beyond Piracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, where it was stated that 71 incidents of piracy/arm robbery, in the region and during that same year, represented an 163% increase over 2016 (27 incidents). It was said that yachts were the most affected types of ships. According to this report other vessels affected were: 16 tankers, 3 bulk carriers, 3 fishing ships, 2 cargo and 1 container. 63 cases happened to be while anchored, and 5 were during steaming.

It was also reported that a representative for OBP, Mrs. Maisie Pigeon, stated that the incidents have been concentrated mainly in Venezuela.

Some people have shown concern with this information, wondering if it is affecting foreign vessels calling Venezuelan ports. In regard to this, it should be said that, according to local news, incidents of this type exist in Venezuela, but are far from being considered piracy incidents as known in other parts of the world. Generally speaking, they are rather incidents of minor robberies at sea, although sometimes involving severe violence. On the other hand, they seem to happen occasionally and mainly affecting fishermen and small fishing boats.

Offenses of this kind have primary taken place in Maracaibo Lake, where a huge activity related to oil production and fishing take place. In this Lake the usual transiting ships are: tankers, general cargo vessels, passenger's boats, tugs and barges, but there are also thousands of small fishing boats operating in this Lake, and the illicit acts have mainly impact these boats. Gangs are usually interested in stealing catches, motors, fishing equipment and/or boats. It has been locally reported that similar activity has also sporadically happened in other marine areas of Venezuela, basically affecting fishing. Cases have been heard involving yachts, but at a minor level.

Up to now, these illegal activities have not had as target sea-going vessels, regardless that some isolated case may have occurred. However, it is always advisable to keep adequate levels of control and vigilance.

Venezuelan fishermen associations have denounced this unlawful activity to the authorities for some years, as this problem is not new. Venezuelan Coastguard is well aware of this situation and has implemented vigilance to provide security to users.