



ARGOS

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY
ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

ARGOS EXPRESSES ITS CONCERN FOR THE LIFE AND INTEGRITY OF MIGRANTS TRANSITING THROUGH THE DARIEN IN PANAMA

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Argos - International Observatory for Migration and Human Rights expresses its concern for the life and integrity of migrants transiting through the Darien between the borders of Colombia and Panama.

The so-called “Darien Gap” is a 266 km border corridor between Colombia and Panama, in the middle of a virgin jungle of 575,000 hectares and without land communication routes, which has become the passage of thousands of migrants trying to get from South America to the United States.

According to official data from Panama’s National Migration Service, 57 % of the migrant population in transit is of Haitian origin, 22 % from Africa, 17 % from Asia and 4 % from South America. The diversity of languages of the different populations makes communication difficult among the people in transit through this difficult route, many of them confined for years after having been victims of document theft.

It has been estimated that more than 46,500 migrants have undertaken this journey in the last four years; however, between January and April of this year, when the borders were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the migratory wave reached the figure of 17,000 extra-regional immigrants, which according to official figures from the Panamanian authorities quadruples the arrivals in relation to the same previous period. This vertiginous increase in the midst of the pandemic is an alarming situation for the authorities of neighboring nations, as well as for the international community and humanitarian organizations.

Migrants transiting through the Darien are frequently assaulted, recruited by cartels or criminal gangs, victims of sexual violence, and countless deaths have been reported –people have even been buried along the route—as well as disappearances. Likewise, a large number of children have been documented on this route in the last four years, many of whom are unaccompanied.

In light of this, and in view of the situations described above:

- We demand the Government of Panama to guarantee and **implement immediate and effective measures** to protect the rights to life, personal integrity and non-discrimination of the entire migrant population transiting through the Darien, and especially of children and adolescents, regardless of their migratory status.
- We urge the various States of the region, multilateral agencies and humanitarian organizations to develop an agenda for emergency attention to the population in transit or confined in the so-called Darien Gap.
- We urge the development of studies and statistics that give a clear and precise account of the situation of precariousness and abandonment, which is experienced by the various migrant populations in this inhospitable and unsuitable region for human movement.
- We urge the Organization of American States to conduct a visit *in situ* and issue a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in the zone.