



[La Nación](#) , with comments by NPSGlobal, 29 Aug 2012.

The Bolivian government made yesterday an unusual announcement that caused great alarm, "about two tons of uranium" was found in the garage of a building in La Paz and the material was estimated at five million dollars.

"About two tons of material used for building nuclear weapons," said during a press conference the Bolivian Deputy Minister of the Interior, Jorge Perez, who was responsible for leading the police operation to remove material. Finally, it was reported today that the confiscated cargo would not be uranium but tantalum.

The material was confiscated by agents of an elite group, who arrested four people, - all Bolivian -when were moving the material without security measures from one vehicle to another in jute and nylon bags, said Perez.

The Minister of Government, Carlos Romero, stated "We initially presume, preliminarily, that there is uranium in these solid materials" and released a report stating that the seized material would contain 72.3% of "uranium dioxide".

First it was reported that it would be uranium, which "is used to fuel nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons manufacturing. According to NPSGlobal experts, natural uranium is used in only 20% of the world's reactors and it can not be used, in that status, to manufacture weapons; it must be enriched to 90% of one of its component, uranium 235, and it just can be done in highly sophisticated facilities available only in very few countries in the world. The two tons were "transferred in the open" and it was "radioactive material being manipulating directly,

irresponsibly, risking the lives of the people who were doing its manipulation,” said the deputy minister.

The handling of this material, pointed Perez, like any other that engages public health, requires special protocols and in Bolivia it is forbidden for individuals.

Furthermore, the Deputy Minister explained that in "Bolivia is uranium not produced ", so it was assumed that the charge "would be in transit", possibly to Chile, and from there to Europe. Other comments indicated that the material came from Argentina or Brazil, considered uranium producing countries. The cited NPSGlobal experts indicated that Argentina is not producing uranium at present although Brazil does it.

From NPSGlobal we find this case as extremely doubtful in many aspects. The type of material, its origin, its destination, the precarious way of transportation, the economic value awarded to the material...

Indeed the Minister Romero anticipated that the material would be valued at \$ 50 million dollars, although from NPSGlobal we believe that the figure does not fit with the true value of natural uranium oxide in the international market, which is about \$ 113 per kg. The commander of the group that carried out the operation, Colonel Eddy Torrez, said that the intervention was the result of an investigation that lasted for a month and a half and that they had information that yesterday could take place a sale of uranium.

A source from the case reported that one of the suspected arrested is an engineer surnamed Espinoza, who, according to Perez, claimed that he was only was only safeguarding the depository of uranium which had been left long ago, but gave no details of who is the owner of the cargo.

The officer did not detail where the uranium charge was taken by the police, which lacks the necessary safety equipment for this task.

The authorities and officers involved in the operation, along with some journalists, were for

several minutes near the garage where uranium was seized, until experts advised them to stay away to 50 meters from the place for safety reasons.

However, and despite the danger that involves the exposure to the material, was not specified if the local neighbors were or will be undergo to medical checks.

Concern

By other side, the chair of the state-owned Mining Corporation of Bolivia (COMIBOL), Héctor Córdova, said yesterday in an interview with radio Erbol that “it is concerning and calls attention” this finding by the amount and type of mineral. He also explained that Bolivia does not have the technology to process uranium; despite there is a deposit in the Potosí department, in the southwest of the country.

Local media speculated last year that the governments of Bolivia and Iran would finally reach an agreement to mining uranium, although La Paz refused it firmly.

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