

Venezuela filed a complaint regarding an act of piracy against one of its oil tankers

written by Yván Gil
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On December 22, 2025, the Venezuelan National Assembly passed a law

criminalizing acts of piracy in international waters.

Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Yván Gil, filed this complaint with the UN Security Council, accusing the United States of a "serious act involving the use of force, hijacking and piracy" in international waters in the Caribbean.

I have the honor to address you, on behalf of the people and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and on my own behalf, to formally denounce a grave act of use of force, hijacking and piracy sponsored and committed by the United States of America, on 10 December 2025, in international waters of the Caribbean, against a private vessel engaged in lawful international trade transporting Venezuelan oil, whose crew members were kidnapped and, to date, remain missing.

That day, United States military units forcibly boarded a private vessel on the high seas, subdued and kidnapped its crew and illegally seized a shipment of Venezuelan oil being carried as part of a regular and legitimate commercial operation in full compliance with international law.

This is an act of State piracy, carried out through the use of military force and constituting a blatant theft of assets that do not belong to the United States of America but form part of the lawful international trade of a State Member of the United Nations.

It is not an isolated act but part of a sustained policy of coercion and aggression against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, characterized by the long-standing application of unlawful and illegitimate unilateral coercive measures, which are now resulting in an even more serious practice, namely, that of maritime piracy committed directly by a State as a means of forcible seizure on the high seas. That practice, regardless of who carries it out, is expressly prohibited under international law.

In article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, piracy is defined as any illegal acts of violence, detention or depredation committed on the high seas against a ship, its crew or its property by a private actor. In this case, the fact that it is the military force of a State that carries out those same acts classified as piracy merely aggravates the hostile action, sounding an alarm that shakes the very foundations of the multilateral system.

The legal regime of the high seas protects the freedom of navigation and lawful international trade, principles that have been flagrantly violated in this case. Furthermore, under Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations, the use of force in international relations is categorically prohibited. It is the exclusive responsibility of the Security Council, in accordance with Articles 39 and 42 of the Charter, to determine the existence of threats to the peace and, if necessary, to authorize coercive measures. In the situation that we are denouncing, there is no authorization from the Security Council that could justify the violent boarding of a private vessel in international waters, the kidnapping of its crew or the theft of its cargo.

The Security Council itself has repeatedly condemned piracy and armed robbery against ships and has taken firm action against those practices when they have threatened the safety of navigation and international trade. The Council has clearly determined that piracy is a threat to international peace and security and has even developed a special doctrine on the matter through the establishment of an exceptional legal umbrella, as evidenced by resolutions 1816 (2008), 1838 (2008), 1846 (2008), 1851 (2008), 2015 (2011), 2184 (2014) and 2634 (2022).

Likewise, the International Maritime Organization, within the framework of its constitutive Convention and the resolutions of its Assembly, condemns piracy and armed robbery against ships and promotes international cooperation to prevent, repress and punish those acts, as they constitute a direct threat to maritime security

and international trade.

The coherence of the multilateral system requires that the same principles and the same condemnation applied by the Security Council to piracy in other regions of the world now be applied to piracy committed by a State through the direct use of its military force. Tolerating or normalizing that type of conduct would amount to legitimizing chaos in international maritime navigation, which is totally incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations, the law of the sea and the core mandate of the Security Council.

In light of the above, the Government of Venezuela demands that the Government of the United States of America:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release the kidnapped crew.
2. Immediately return the Venezuelan oil illegally seized on the high seas.
3. Immediately end any act of force against or interference in the lawful trade of Venezuelan oil.

Venezuela also respectfully urges the Security Council to:

- Publicly condemn this act of State-sponsored piracy, the illegitimate use of military force against a private vessel and the theft of a cargo resulting from lawful international trade.
- Act in accordance with its primary responsibilities to preserve the safety of navigation and international trade, which are gravely threatened by this precedent.
- Prevent practices equivalent to piracy from becoming established as a means of economic and political coercion between States.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela respectfully requests the Security Council to reaffirm, in writing, that it has not adopted any decision, resolution or measure authorizing action against Venezuela or against the international trade of its oil.

Venezuela will continue to exercise its sovereign and inalienable right to engage in the legitimate trade of its resources and to demand that no lawful operation be subject to theft, hijacking or acts of piracy, regardless of its origin.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela respectfully requests that this communication be circulated as a document of the Security Council and brought to the attention of all Member States.

