Cuba Arrests 17 Over 'Trafficking' for Russia's War in Ukraine

By [AFP](#)

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A police vehicle in Havana, Cuba. **Yamil Lage / AFP**

Seventeen people have been arrested in Cuba over suspected links to an alleged Russian trafficking network recruiting men for Moscow's war effort, the interior ministry said Thursday.

The Cuban government said Monday it was working to dismantle a "trafficking network that operates from Russia to incorporate Cuban citizens living there, and even some from Cuba, into the military forces involved in military operations in Ukraine."

Cesar Rodriguez, who is heading the investigation, said on national television Thursday that "17 people have been arrested so far," without giving their nationalities.

He said one person was suspected of being an "organizer of these activities" while two others were suspected recruiters.

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The Attorney General's Office said judicial authorities were considering charges of "human trafficking, mercenary [recruitment and] hostile acts in a foreign state," which could carry sentences of up to 30 years in jail, life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said Monday that the government was "acting with the full force of the law" against trafficking operations.

The father of two young men recruited by the alleged ring appeared on state television, saying that one of his sons left Cuba in July while the other is still on the island and is being investigated.

Last week, Miami's America TeVe newspaper published what it described as testimonies from two teenagers who said they had been tricked into working alongside the Russian army on construction sites in Ukraine.

Another Cuban man told the media outlet that he had signed up with Moscow's armed forces hoping to legalize his status in Russia.

Moscow and Havana have boosted their mutual relations recently, with Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel meeting his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow at the end of last year.

The Cuban government has categorically denied any complicity with Russia in the alleged trafficking.

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