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Panama: Police & U.S. Troops Implement Sweeps To Confiscate Weapons

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 9 at dawn, police supported by US troops swept through three Panama City neighborhoods, confiscating firearms and drugs. Vice President Ricardo Arias Calderon, who is also the justice minister, said 333 people were arrested during the sweep, and that suspected drug dealers, illegal aliens and assorted criminals were taken to Federal Judicial Police headquarters, which was surrounded by US armored cars. US Southern Command spokesperson William Ormsbee said about 260 US soldiers were deployed "in support of the Panamanian police." About 400 Panamanian police participated in the operation. Arias said the troops cordoned off the neighborhoods of Curundu, Viejo Veranillo and Brooklincito near the Panama Canal with barbed wire barricades. Two hovering helicopters located people attempting to escape. Police and US soldiers in battle fatigues followed up, backed by armored personnel carriers, combed the area house to house, Arias said. He added that there were no casualties. According to a report by Prensa Latina, 736 persons were arrested. Interior Deputy Minister Ramon Lima, cited by Prensa Latina, confirmed the operation, and reported that two shotguns and a variety of handguns were confiscated. There was no mention of drug seizures. Vice President Arias Calderon announced that similar surprise operations are planned for other areas of the city. (Basic data from AP, 03/09/90; Prensa Latina, 03/10/90)

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