

# *Paraguay to Impose Stiff Penalties Against Police Corruption*

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Montevideo, January 20 (RHC-Xinhua) -- Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes has called for stiff penalties against police officials accused of stealing confiscated cocaine, a top official said Monday.

"We discussed the seriousness of the situation in depth with President Cartes and we have clear orders to impose stiff penalties that will serve as an example to dissuade others," Interior Minister Francisco de Vargas told a local radio station in the capital Asuncion.

The 252 kg of cocaine, seized on Jan. 11, was confirmed stolen on Saturday from the police headquarters in the department of Amambay.

According to Paraguayan media, three deputy police officials who were on duty at the time of the theft have been arrested, but have so far refused to make any statements. One of the senior police officials implicated has been on the force for some 17 years.

They may have been paid from 100,000 to 250,000 U.S. dollars "to transfer the cocaine from the police headquarters to a car," news website Paraguay.com said.

Cartes has acknowledged drug trafficking as a "serious" problem in Paraguay and pledged to fight the scourge, especially following the Oct. 16 assassination of journalist Pablo Medina, who covered the drug trade for daily ABC Color and spotlighted the collusion between drug traffickers and local officials in the eastern department of Canindeyu, a major marijuana production center.

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