

# Labor leader, military officers escape Venezuelan prison

**Carlos Ortega, the jailed president of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation, escaped along with three military officers from a prison, the attorney general said.**

The Miami Herald  
Aug. 14, 2006

**CARACAS** - A dissident Venezuelan labor leader who was serving a nearly 16-year sentence for leading a crippling oil strike against President Hugo Chávez has escaped from prison, the attorney general said Sunday.

Carlos Ortega, the jailed president of the one million-member Venezuelan Workers Confederation, or CTV, escaped along with three military officers from the Ramo Verde military prison, Attorney General Isaias Rodríguez said on state television.

Rodríguez said the government was ordering troops to secure airports and embassies nationwide to prevent the fugitives from fleeing or seeking asylum at a diplomatic compound.

"This is to prevent . . . one of the most horrible crimes that have been committed against Venezuela from going unpunished -- a crime of conspiracy along with a coup in which one of the leading figures was Carlos Ortega," Rodríguez said.

The possibility that members of the military conspired to help the four escape is being investigated, Rodríguez said.

Ortega, considered a political prisoner by the opposition, was found guilty by a court in December of civil rebellion and instigation to commit illegal acts for his role in the 2002-03 strike that aimed to topple Chávez's government.

The strike virtually shut down oil production and cost Venezuela \$7.5 billion, the government said.

The government has repeatedly linked Ortega to a coup earlier in 2002 that briefly ousted Chávez before a popular uprising helped restore him to power. Ortega was never convicted of any coup-related charges.

The three fugitive military officers are brothers Col. Jesús Farias and Col. Dario Farias and their uncle, Capt. Rafael Farias.

Jesús and Rafael Farias were charged with military rebellion in October 2005.

Dario Farias was arrested in April 2005 after a military standard FAL assault rifle was found hidden in his car's fender.