

Security Message for U.S. Citizens:

Virtual Kidnappings

The Embassy wishes to alert U.S. citizens residing and traveling in Paraguay to a rise in “virtual kidnapping” extortion schemes, as discussed in our [Country Specific Information for Paraguay](#). These schemes typically involve an individual or criminal organization who contacts a victim via telephone and demands payment for the return of a “kidnapped” family member or friend. While no actual kidnapping has taken place, the callers often use co-conspirators to convince their victims of the legitimacy of the threat. For example, a caller might attempt to convince a victim that his daughter was kidnapped by having a young female scream for help in the background during the call. Over the past several years, the region, to include Paraguay, has seen an increase in virtual kidnapping reports.

Callers, sometimes representing themselves as members of a drug cartel or corrupt law enforcement, will typically provide the victim with specific instructions, usually involving a ransom payment, to ensure the safe “return” of the allegedly kidnapped individual. Most schemes use various techniques to instill a sense of fear, panic, and urgency in an effort to rush the victim into making a hasty decision. Instructions usually require the ransom payment be made immediately and typically by wire transfer. These schemes involve varying amounts of ransom demands, which often decrease at the first indication of resistance.

Callers will often go to great lengths to engage victims in ongoing conversations to prevent them from verifying the status and location of the “kidnapped” individuals. Callers will often make their victims believe they are being watched and were personally targeted.

To avoid becoming a victim of this extortion scheme, look for the following possible indicators:

- Calls do not come from the kidnapped victim’s phone.
- Callers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone.
- Callers prevent you from calling or locating the “kidnapped” victim.

If you receive a phone call from someone who demands payment of a ransom for a kidnapped victim, we recommend the following:

- Stay calm.
- Slow the situation down.
- Avoid sharing information about you or your family during the call.
- Listen carefully to the voice of the kidnapped victim.
- Attempt to call or determine the location of the “kidnapped” victim.
- Request to speak to the victim.
- Ask questions only the victim would know.

- Request the kidnapped victim call back from his/her cell phone.

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Paraguay enroll in the [State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates and makes it easier for the U.S. embassy or nearest U.S. consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you don't have internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Regularly monitor the State Department's [website](#), where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the [Country Specific Information for Paraguay](#). For additional information, refer to "A Safe Trip Abroad" on the State Department's website.

Contact the U.S. embassy or consulate for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call [1-888-407-4747](tel:1-888-407-4747) toll-free from within the United States and Canada, or [1-202-501-4444](tel:1-202-501-4444) from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

The U.S. Embassy in Asuncion is located at 1776 Mariscal Lopez Avenue.

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