The rise of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Latin America and the Caribbean is a major concern with effects extending far beyond the fishing industry. IUU fishing itself has detrimental effects on the livelihoods of licit fishers, coastline ecosystems, and fish stocks. Beyond this, the industry also has ties to food insecurity, human trafficking, forced labor, and drug and weapons smuggling. IUU fishing is a hindrance both to small-scale fishing communities, which are a keystone sector of many regional economies (some 2.3 million people work in fisheries in the region), and regional governments themselves, which have been caught largely flat-footed in their response to the illegal fleets looming on their coastlines.

IUU fishing encompasses a range of illicit activities, including foreign vessels fishing in another country’s territorial waters, violation of international conservation laws or tracking requirements, and failure to report catches to proper authorities. Perpetrators vary widely, ranging from small artisanal boats with just a few crew members to massive distant water fleets (DWF), which are often authorized vessels that underreport their catches. Combating IUU activity has been recognized as a strategic priority by various national, regional, and international authorities including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the U.S Coast Guard, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, to name a few. U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) collaborates with the navies and law enforcement of several countries in the Western Hemisphere to combat IUU fishing.

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