



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

BOLIVIA

27 NOVEMBER 2009

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Bolivia has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 20 November 2009. It was issued on 27 November 2009.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy.
- iii For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Bolivia is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service
UK Border Agency
Block B, Whitgift Centre
15 Wellesley Road
Croydon CR9 1AT
United Kingdom

Email: cois@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- vii The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency to make recommendations to him about the content of the UKBA's country of origin information material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on UKBA's COI Reports, COI Key Documents and other country of origin information material. Information about the IAGCI's work can be found on the Chief Inspector's website at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>

- viii In the course of its work, the IAGCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. A list of the COI Reports and other documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI or the Advisory Panel on Country Information (the independent organisation which monitored UKBA's COI material from September 2003 to October 2008) is available at <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>
- ix Please note: it is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Group relates to countries designated or proposed for designation to the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Group's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information contact details:

Office of the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency
4th floor, 8-10 Great George Street,
London, SW1P 3AE

Email: chiefinspectorukba@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

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1. Background information on Bolivia

Full Country Name: Plurinational State of Bolivia

Area: 1.28 million sq km (425,000 sq miles)

Population: 9,775,246 (July 2009 est.) (US State Department (USSD) Background Note, September 2009) [2c]

Constitutional Capital: Sucre (population: 292,080 (2004 est.))

Administrative Capital: La Paz (population 800, 385 (2004 est.)) (USSD Background Note, September 2009) [2c]

People: Quechua 30%, Mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) 30%, Aymara 25%, white 15% (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook, 11 November 2009) [10]

Languages: Under the new Constitution, all 36 Indigenous languages are official as well as Spanish

Religion(s): Roman Catholic (95%), Protestant (Evangelical Methodist)

Currency: Boliviano

Major Political Parties: Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS); PODEMOS (Poder Democratico Social)

Government: Democracy with elections held every 5 years. The 1964 constitution (revised in 1994 and 2004) provides for an executive and a legislature consisting of a 27-member Senate and 130-member Chamber of Deputies.

Head of State: Juan Evo Morales Ayma

Foreign Minister: David Choquehuanca

Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: Bolivia holds membership of the UN; WTO; G-11; G77; Organisation of American States (OAS); Andean Community (CAN); Latin American Integration Association (ALADI); Rio Group; MERCOSUR (associate membership); Inter-American Developmental Bank (IADB); IMF, IMF, UNASUR (Union of South American Nations). (All from Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile, 27 April 2009, unless stated) [4]

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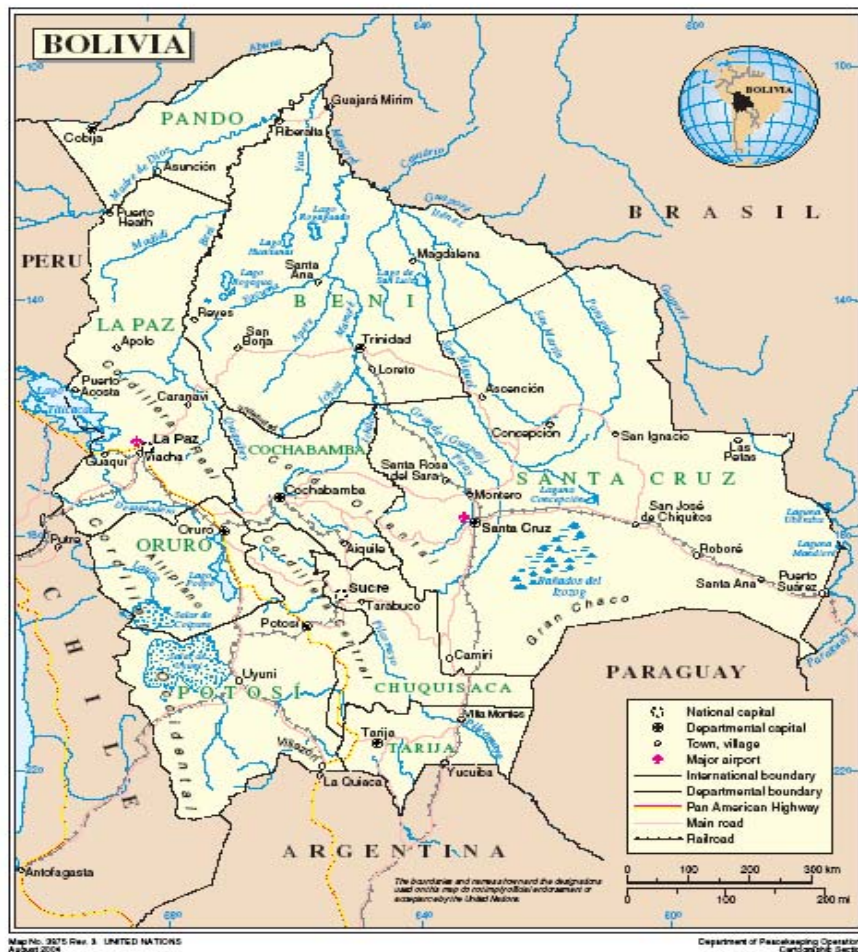
GEOGRAPHY

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile on Bolivia, updated 27 April 2009, noted that:

“Bolivia is land-locked in Central South America, bordered by Peru (900km) and Chile (861km) to the west, Brazil (3,400km) to the north and east and Paraguay (750km) and Argentina (832km) to the south. Straddled by the Andes, it is a land of gaunt mountains, cold desolate plateaux and semi-tropical lowlands in an area the size of Spain and France together. Bolivia shares control of Lake Titicaca, the world’s highest navigable lake (elevation 3,805m), with Peru. Sucre, in the south of the country, is the legal capital. The political capital and centre of government is La Paz, situated to the west, which at 3,640m is the highest capital city in the world.” [4]

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MAP



United Nations Cartographic Section, Map of Bolivia [19]
<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/bolivia.pdf>

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RECENT HISTORY

Freedom House's, *Freedom in the World 2009*, Country Report on Bolivia (Freedom House Report 2009), released 16 July 2009, stated that "After achieving independence from Spain in 1825, the Republic of Bolivia endured recurrent instability and military rule. However, the armed forces, responsible for more than 180 coups in 157 years, have refrained from political intervention since 1982." [1a]

Freedom House further noted:

“Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, a wealthy U.S.-educated businessman, was elected president in 1993. During his first term in office, he initiated a sweeping privatization program and stepped up eradication of the country's illegal coca production, measures that provoked widespread public protests and a decline in his popularity. Former dictator turned democrat Hugo Banzer Suarez succeeded Sanchez de Lozada following the 1997 presidential election and further militarized drug eradication, but the terminally ill Banzer resigned in 2001, and vice president Jorge Quiroga finished the remaining year of Banzer's term.

“No candidate in the June 2002 presidential election won a majority of the popular vote, and under Bolivia's constitution, members of the National Congress were tasked with deciding the outcome. They selected Sanchez de Lozada, who had received a small plurality of votes, over Evo Morales, a confrontational indigenous leader of the country's coca growers. Morales had gained prominence by capitalizing on the unpopularity of U.S.-sponsored antidrug efforts among Bolivia's majority indigenous population, many of whom speak Spanish as a second language and use the coca leaf for traditional cultural and medical purposes.” [1a]

The Freedom House Report 2009 continued that:

“In 2003, Bolivian indigenous groups, workers, students, and coca growers rebelled against the planned construction of a \$5 billion pipeline for the export of Bolivian natural gas via longtime rival Chile to the United States and Mexico. The mass protests against Sanchez de Lozada were aggravated by resentment over the failure of nearly two decades of democratic reform and economic restructuring to improve the lot of the indigenous majority in a country where over 60 percent of the population lived in poverty. Sanchez de Lozada ordered harsh repression of the protests, leading to demands for his resignation. In October, after at least 120 deaths stemming from the crackdown, Sanchez de Lozada resigned and fled to the United States.” [1a]

The BBC News Country Profile for Bolivia, updated 20 August 2009, noted that:

“Socialist leader Evo Morales, a figurehead for Bolivia's coca farmers, won presidential elections in December 2005, the first indigenous Bolivian to do so... His victory was decisive; he surpassed the figure needed to take office without the need for a vote in Congress. Much of his support came from Bolivia's indigenous majority. A few months later, in June 2006, he claimed victory in elections for a new assembly which was given the task of rewriting the constitution.

“The resulting draft constitution accorded more rights to Bolivia's indigenous majority, and more autonomy to the states. It also allowed the president to stand for re-election for a second five-year term in a row. Angry and at times violent demonstrations by opponents, mainly from the well-to-do elite, followed, and four of the country's richest regions declared autonomy in protest. The new charter was finally approved by more than 60% of voters in a referendum in January 2009, although a majority in four out nine provinces voted against it.” [7a]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The USSD Background Note, dated September 2009, stated that:

“A new Bolivian constitution was promulgated February 8, 2009, replacing Bolivia’s 1967 constitution. The 2009 constitution provides for legislative, executive, judicial, and electoral branches of government. It strengthens the executive branch and centralizes political and economic decision-making. It also provides new powers and responsibilities at the departmental, municipal, and regional levels, as well as in newly-created indigenous autonomous areas.” [2c]

On 15 March 2009, BBC News reported that President Evo Morales “... has handed over thousands of hectares of land seized from large-scale owners to indigenous farmers. Mr Morales said the move would encourage people to put country over profit and would end human rights violations against indigenous people. He had accused the previous owners of abusing workers and misusing the land.” [7c]

BBC News reported on 14 April 2009 that President Morales had ended his five-day hunger strike after the Senate passed a new electoral law. The article stated that the constitutional changes would “...allow Mr Morales to run for a second term in office in elections in December [2009].” As well as setting an election date for 6 December 2009, the bill “...reserves seven of the 130 seats in the lower house for minority indigenous groups and extends voting rights to Bolivians living overseas.” Mr Morales started his hunger strike after the opposition-controlled upper house of parliament (Senate) blocked the bill, claiming it would aid his re-election. Opposition politicians criticised the hunger strike and accused Mr Morales of trying to blackmail parliament. [7d]

A planned assassination attempt against President Evo Morales was foiled by Bolivian police after they shot dead those allegedly involved in the plot. The dead men included an Irish citizen and a joint Bolivian, Hungarian and Croatian citizen. President Morales claimed that the men “...belonged to a gang of foreign mercenaries who were helping opposition politicians in the province of Santa Cruz.” (BBC News, 23 April 2009) [7e]

Impunity Watch reported on 19 May 2009 that the trial against former Bolivian president, Sanchez de Lozada, began in his absence, on 18 May 2009. The article noted that “Sanchez de Lozada is being charged along with 11 members of his cabinet members and military command with genocide. The deaths occurred during the antigovernment protests in 2003 that toppled his administration and caused him to flee to the United States...” The report added that although Bolivian prosecutors formally charged Sanchez de Lozada with genocide in 2005, they did not ask the US government to extradite him until 2008. Disagreements over the extradition request have led to Sanchez remaining in the US. Diplomatic disputes have also occurred between Bolivia and Peru after the Peruvian authorities recently granted asylum to three of the 11 cabinet members charged alongside Sanchez de Lozada. The same source noted that “Sanchez de Lozada has repeatedly denied that his forces used violence against the protesters and insists the prosecution is politically motivated.” [6]

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ECONOMY

GDP: US\$13.1 bn (2007)

GDP per head: US\$1,376 (2007)

Annual Growth: 4.8% (2007)

Inflation: 11.7% (2007)

Unemployment: 8.5% (2007)

Major Industries: Natural gas, mining and agriculture

Major trading partners: United States, Japan, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Argentina, EU (FCO Country Profile, 27 April 2009) [4]

Exchange rate: £1 = 11.10 Bolivian Bolivianos (BOB) US\$1= 7.02 BOB (XE.com, accessed 12 October 2009) [23]

On the economy of Bolivia, the FCO Country Profile, dated 27 April 2009, stated that:

“Despite being one of Latin America’s poorest countries Bolivia holds potential, being rich in natural gas and minerals and in agricultural potential. Bolivian macroeconomic figures are strong, with foreign reserves at record levels and a healthy balance of payments surplus, due to high commodity prices over the past few years. GDP growth was 4.6% in 2007, and the foreign debt/GDP ratio is down to 32%. However, these figures have not generated much confidence in the economy. Domestic and foreign investment levels are both low, and there is a worry that the economy is too dependent on primary commodities, natural gas and minerals being Bolivia’s main exports. Global prices for these commodities have fallen considerably due to the global financial crisis, causing problems in Bolivia’s fund for social spending.

“The government has followed a policy of taking the natural resources back into State control. On 1 May 2006, President Morales announced the nationalisation of the hydrocarbons industry: in reality foreign companies have signed new contracts with the government, giving the government company YPFB control of the resources and increasing the tax take. In 2007 hydrocarbons revenues accounted for 11.3% of the total GDP and the export of gas accounted for nearly half of all Bolivia’s exports.” [4]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

The US Department of State *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008* (USSD Report 2008), dated 25 February 2009, stated for Bolivia that:

“While the government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, there were problems in some areas. The most significant human rights problems were abuses by security forces; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; attacks on the judiciary by the executive branch; threats to civil liberties, including legal rights and press freedom; use of excessive force and other abuses in internal conflicts; corruption and a lack of transparency in government; discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation; trafficking in persons; child labor; forced or coerced labor; and brutal working conditions in the mining sector.” [2a]

Amnesty International’s (AI) *Annual Report 2009*, covering events from January – December 2008, expressed particular concern in Bolivia over freedom of expression and attacks on journalists, discrimination against indigenous peoples, unlawful killings and impunity. The report noted, however, that there were “...some positive developments in the area of economic, social and cultural rights.” [11a]

The Freedom House Report 2009 stated that “The controversy over a proposed new constitution dominated Bolivian politics for a second straight year in 2008, with violence between highly polarized progovernment and opposition groups peaking in September.” [1a]

The same source, reporting on political and civil rights generally, noted that:

- Bolivia is an electoral democracy. The 2005 presidential and congressional elections, the 2006 Constituent Assembly elections, and the 2008 presidential recall referendum, were generally free and fair. Bolivians have the right to organize political parties.
- Corruption and nepotism remained a problem, despite the Government’s attempts to address this;
- Freedom of expression was guaranteed in law but in practice there were limitations. The Government did not restrict internet access and respected academic freedom;
- Freedom of religion was guaranteed in law;
- Although the law provides for the rights of freedom of assembly and association, social protests sometimes turned violent;
- The judiciary was “corrupt, inefficient and inaccessible to many Bolivians” though the Government had “made efforts to improve the administration of justice”. Prison conditions were harsh;
- Freedom of movement was enshrined in law and generally respected in practice; and
- The observance of women’s rights was “problematic”. Women’s political representation had increased but violence against women was widespread. They did not have the same social status of men and the judiciary was ineffective at safeguarding their rights. [1a]

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3. Index to key source documents

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Bolivia, last updated September 2009 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35751.htm
	[4]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Bolivia, last updated 27 April 2009 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/south-america/bolivia?profile=all
	[7a]	BBC News Country Profile: Bolivia, last updated 20 August 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1210487.stm
	[10]	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook Bolivia, last updated 11 November 2009 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bl.html
MAP	[19]	United Nations Cartographic Section, Map of Bolivia. http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/bolivia.pdf
HISTORY	[1a]	Freedom House Freedom in the World 2009: Bolivia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7570
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008, 25 February 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119149.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Bolivia, last updated September 2009 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35751.htm
	[4]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Country Profile: Bolivia, last updated on 27 April 2009 http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/south-america/bolivia?profile=all
	[7a]	BBC News Country Profile: Bolivia, last updated 20 August 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1210487.stm
	[7b]	BBC Timeline: Bolivia, last updated 20 August 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1218814.stm
POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	[1a]	Freedom House Freedom in the World 2009: Bolivia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7570
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008, 25 February 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119149.htm

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<p>HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES:</p> <p>(IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)</p>		

ABUSES BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ARMED FORCES	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008, 25 February 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119149.htm
ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008, 25 February 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119149.htm
CHILDREN	[1a]	Freedom House Freedom in the World 2009: Bolivia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009&country=7570
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2008, 25 February 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119149.htm
	[2d]	United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2009, 16 June 2009 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/123135.htm
	[11a]	Amnesty International, Human Rights Report 2009: Bolivia, 29 May 2009 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/bolivia/report-2009
	[12b]	OHCHR, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Written replies by the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the list of issues (CRC/C/BOL/Q/4) prepared by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in connection with the consideration of the 4th periodic report of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (CRC/C/BOL/4), 6 August 2009 http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4aba262a0.pdf
	[15]	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Global Report 2008: Bolivia http://www.child-soldiers.org/library/global-reports?root_id=159&directory_id=216
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	[30]	United States Department of Labor, 2008 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, Bolivia, (p22), 10 September 2009 http://www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/ocft/PDF/2008OCFTreport.pdf
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	[20]	Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2008 http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008

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	[17b]	Minorities at Risk, Assessment for Lowland Indigenous Peoples in Bolivia, undated http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=14502
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	[1b]	Freedom House, Freedom of the Press 2009: Bolivia, 1 May 2009 http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7570&year=2009
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	[9a]	Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Attacks on the Press in 2008: Bolivia http://cpj.org/2009/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2008-bolivia.php
	[9b]	Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Bolivia documents, accessed 12 October 2009 http://cpj.org/americas/bolivia/
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