

Brasilia and Addis to team up against cocaine trafficking

One of Africa's leading airport hubs, Addis Ababa has also become a centre for the distribution of cocaine from South America. The number of arrests has risen sharply in recent years, inciting the authorities to take action to deal with the problem.



An Ethiopian Airlines plane at Addis Ababa airport. © Tiksa Negeri/Reuters

Andrei Rodrigues, director general of Brazil's Federal Police, is about to send a mission from the **Diretoria de cooperação internacional** - his force's international cooperation department, headed by **Valdecy Urquiza** - to meet the staff of **Demelash Gebremichael**, Commissioner General of the **Ethiopian Federal Police**. Drug trafficking between the two countries has soared over the last 10 years and now the two police forces want to conclude a bilateral cooperation agreement to enable them to better tackle the problem.

As one of Africa's leading airport hubs, Addis Ababa has become a distribution centre for cocaine from South America. Although Brazil is not itself a producer, it has become the main South American air traffic outlet in Africa. Passengers on **Ethiopia Airlines'** flights between Sao Paulo and Addis are regularly arrested.

Modus operandi

Some 20 Brazilians, most of them women, are currently behind bars at Kaliti Prison in the southern suburbs of Addis. They are serving sentences of up to 10 years. In early 2022, there were only three prisoners. According to our information, the great majority of these prisoners were recruited in Brazil by Nigerians. In Addis, Nigerians also control a large part of the cocaine market under the orders of a mysterious figure called **Izu**.

The modus operandi is always the same. Once they have been recruited, the mules reserve their seat in the aircraft without having any idea of the quantity of cocaine they are to be asked to carry from Sao Paulo to Addis. Before take-off, they are given an Ethiopian SIM card which has already been registered and paid for. Once they arrive at Bole International Airport, they are under orders to call a number to receive instructions regarding the place they are to go to with their luggage. For undertaking this journey, they are promised payments of \$1,000-2,000.

Leading importer

The figures are alarming. Last December, the transport police at Bole arrested 46 suspected drug traffickers people who had flown in from Sao Paulo airport. The number of people arrested increased by 80% between 2021 and 2022. In 2022, 44% of those arrested were Brazilian (40% in 2021) and another 15% were Nigerian (19% in 2021).

On the other side of the Atlantic, too, trafficking through Ethiopia is soaring. According to data from Brazil's Federal Police, which *Africa*

Intelligence has consulted, 384 kg of the 3,260 kg of cocaine seized at Brazilian airports in 2022 was destined for Ethiopia, which was Africa's biggest destination for the drug from Brazil after Mozambique, with 580 kg. The drug is subsequently redistributed throughout Africa by air or land.

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