

Violence-torn Venezuela creates phone 'panic button'

January 19 2014



People use smartphones in Caracas, April 27, 2010

A free app for certain smartphones that works as a "panic button" in emergencies has launched in Venezuela, one of the world's most violent countries, a lawmaker said Saturday.

The "pocket police" app "allows people to notify their families in real-time of emergencies, without collapsing the Venezuelan security

system," explained Ricardo Sanchez, a member of the National Assembly's Domestic Policy Committee.

"You can add up to three contacts, with emails and phone numbers, who will receive the message with your geo-referenced location in case of an emergency," he said.

According to the lawmaker, sending the message—a text or email—just requires touching a button on screen.

It could also help police in kidnapping and murder cases, he said, since the information "can help provide details on the last location of the person."

The application, which was developed by Sanchez along with a team of computer experts from two Venezuela universities—is only available on Blackberry devices currently.

Sanchez said he hopes to make improvements based on suggestions from the Venezuela science and technology ministry and local municipalities.

Venezuela's homicide rate according to NGOs is 79 per 100,000 people, the highest in the world—though the government figure is lower, at 39 per 100,000.

In 2013, the Venezuelan Violence Monitor NGO counted more than 24,000 deaths.

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Citation: Violence-torn Venezuela creates phone 'panic button' (2014, January 19) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-violence-torn-venezuela-panic-button.html>

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