

Mexican Government Asks Vigilantes to End Activities

Mexico City, January 14 (RHC)— Mexico's government has urged vigilantes to quit their armed struggle against a drug cartel in violence-plagued western towns, saying federal forces would handle security.

Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong made the appeal on Monday after emergency talks were held in the Michoacan state capital, Morelia.

The emergency meeting came a day after the seizure of the city Nueva Italia by self-defense forces fighting the Knights Templar drug cartel.

However, Eastnislao Beltran, a vigilante leader in Nueva Italia, said members of the self-defense forces were not ready to lay down their weapons.

"We can't abandon our weapons because the moment that we do, organized crime will come after us and our families," said Beltran.

The security crisis comes eight months after President Enrique Pena Nieto deployed thousands of troops and federal police to Michoacan State; however, the forces have failed to curb the drug violence, which has claimed about 80,000 lives in Mexico since 2007.

The growing civilian defense movement began last year in Michoacan in a bid to clear the area of the Knight Templar cartel members.

Towns formed the vigilante groups, arguing that local police were unable to stop the cartel's murders, kidnappings and extortion rackets.

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