

Killings of Colombia ex-FARC fighters continue



A FARC banner beside a Colombian national flag at Pondoresh reintegracion camp, La Guajira

Bogota, January 18 (RHC)-- The killings of former rebel fighters in Colombia continue, with more murdered over the weekend.

Since demobilising in 2017, former rebel fighter Manuel Antonio Gonzalez has faced numerous death threats and lost his son in a bloody murder. Part of the now-defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia (FARC) rebel group, who signed a peace deal with the government of Juan Manuel Santos in 2016, Gonzalez, 54, lives in worry, not only for his own life but for the thousands of other former fighters who signed up to the agreement alongside him.

The FARC handed more than 7,000 weapons to a UN peace mission in 2017, ending a five-decade-long conflict that left 260,000 dead. Since the deal, 253 former fighters have been killed, according to numbers compiled by the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ).

The current right-wing government of President Ivan Duque Marquez – which came to power in 2018 – has unsuccessfully fought to change the peace deal’s lenient punishments for former FARC fighters.

Tatiana Pradas, researcher at Bogota-based think-tank Ideas for Peace Foundation (FIP), says when the FARC left rural areas four years ago, the government failed to take control and put security measures in place.

“There are many areas facing very complex security issues, with disputes between various armed groups, some of them well-known, like the ELN (National Liberation Army), others are dissident groups, and others which are much more informal with drug trafficking structures, and other groups that even operate without names, that perhaps don’t have any political ties, but more related to illegal activities,” she told reporters.

“It makes it really difficult to attribute a killing of an ex-combatant to just one specific group.” A government official rejected claims there was little impunity for the killings of former FARC members saying 50.2 percent of the 291 cases being investigated have “suspected” perpetrators.

Emilio Archilla, the presidential adviser for stabilisation and consolidation, said prosecution delays are because the cases “are very complicated.” He said the military is constantly fighting criminal elements the government claims is responsible for the deaths of the former fighters, but was unable to name specific groups.

However, there have been at least three isolated cases of former fighters being killed on the grounds of reintegration camps, according to FIP. The camps differ nationwide in their security protocols. Some have police and army forces based on site or nearby, while others have less protection.

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