

Petro apologizes for paramilitary genocide in Colombia



Colombian President Gustavo Petro (L) embraces a relative of victims of far-right violence, Nov. 30, 2022. | Photo: Twitter/ @petrogustavo

Bogota, December 2 (RHC)-- On behalf of the Colombian State, President Gustavo Petro apologized to the victims for the massacres committed by paramilitaries in La Granja and El Aro and described them as genocides in which the State took part either by action or omission.

"On behalf of the Colombian State, I ask the victims for forgiveness. The Colombian State recognizes that the people killed were not enemies of anyone. They were humble and hard-working people who were killed for no reason... The State was present at their deaths and was complicit of the murders," he said.

These statements occurred during an event that took place at the Museum of Memory, where Colombians recalled the massacres that occurred in the villages of La Granja (1996) and El Aro (1997), in the department of Antioquia.

The Colombian State "killed its own citizens," Petro said, recalling that the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (ICHR) blamed the Colombian State in 2006 for those killings and required it to investigate the

facts to find and prosecute those responsible.

Petro also regretted that public recognition of what happened took more than 16 years to arrive.

However, he promised to do everything possible so that the Colombian State compensates the victims of the violence committed by the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) paramilitary militias, which operated when former President Alvaro Uribe was the governor of Antioquia.

"Our courts were not capable of judging the murderers... We must tell the world that the Colombian State was by action or omission a murderous State... What happened in Colombia was a genocide that must be judged," Petro said.

Maria Victoria Fallon, the director of the Interdisciplinary Group for Human Rights (GIDH), pointed out that the public request for forgiveness is not only a legal commitment but also an ethical duty, especially with regard to those girls and boys who saw their parents die. "For 16 years we have asked ourselves: What did it cost a president to recognize the responsibility of the State and ask for forgiveness? What did it cost Alvaro Uribe, the president who was notified of the 2006 ICHR sentence, to recognize the responsibility and ask forgiveness from the victims?" she said.

According to investigations, the Aro massacre was perpetrated by some 200 paramilitaries who spent a week torturing and raping men and women who lived in the area.

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