

Mastermind of Venezuelan Lawmaker's Assassination Caught in Colombia



Cacarcas, November 8 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The ringleader of the group that killed Venezuelan legislator Robert Serra and his aide has been apprehended in Colombia, Venezuela's interior minister said Friday.

"I confirm the capture of 'El Colombia' in Cartagena," Carmen Melendez told reporters, adding that authorities were already working "to bring back this gentleman from Colombia ... so justice can be done in the case of Robert Serra."

Leiva Padilla Mendoza, alias "El Colombiano, was the person who masterminded the murders of Serra, a ruling-party lawmaker, and aide Maria Herrera, the interior minister said.

Serra and Herrera were slain the night of October 1st at the lawmaker's home in Caracas. Only one of the six men authorities say invaded Serra's home remains at large, Melendez said.

The double-murder was ordered by right-wing paramilitaries based in neighboring Colombia and the killers were paid \$500,000, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said two weeks ago.

Authorities have charged a total of 14 people in connection with the crime, Attorney General Luisa Ortega said, while Maduro has disclosed that the conspirators include at least two police officers.

According to reports, Leiva Padilla Mendoza, alias “El Colombiano” was detained on Wednesday during an operation by National Criminal Investigation Department (Dijin) in Cartagena, in the north of the country. Mendoza was arrested in broad daylight in the center of city. At the time of apprehension, he was accompanied by his girlfriend.

“El Colombiano” or “Colombia” has been issued a “red notice” by Interpol, which is the closest instrument to an international arrest warrant in use today. According to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, the individual has been operating under false identities to evade the authorities.

Another suspect in the case has been identified as Farinez Palomino, or “El Emme”, who together with Mendoza and six other man allegedly broke into the house of Serra and assassinated the congressman and his partner.

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