

Report Reveals Peruvian Police Force Harbored a Death Squad



Lima, August 24 (RHC)-- Until as recently as last year, Peru's national police force harbored a "death squad" that is responsible for the extrajudicial killings of at least 20 people over a four-year period, even, at times offering sworn officers bounties to kill criminal suspects, according to an official government investigation of systemic police misconduct.

In an executive summary, the Interior Ministry's report found "serious indications" that both high-ranking and low-level officers of the national police force "falsified intelligence information" to misrepresent at least six cases involving some 20 slayings as the justified result of confrontations with armed suspects.

In fact, they were summary executions, carried out by police, according to a summary of the report by Vice Minister of Internal Order Ruben Vargas. The report did not disclose the identities of the officers suspected of participating in the death squad, but Vargas did reveal that the operation was headed by a police colonel who was subsequently promoted to general.

Local media revealed the scandal over three weeks ago after department whistleblowers brought the allegations to light, prompting an investigation. The new report will now be handed over to prosecutors specialized in organized crime to open a case.

Minister of Interior Carlos Basombrio, newly-appointed under President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and inaugurated at the end of July, claimed that the evidence suggests that a group of high-ranking police officials who moved between divisions are responsible for running the death squad, and that no single police force unit itself is compromised.

Authorities also revealed that several of the officers involved in the scandal were decorated for their so-called “distinguished” achievements within the force last year. A months-long internal police investigation already found that at least two officers were promoted during the period in which they are suspected of participating in the death squad. The Investigator General intervened in the internal probe and took over the investigation over three weeks ago.

Local media report that the death squad, allegedly made up of nearly 100 officers across four units of the national police force, is suspected of carrying out the murders of 27 Peruvian civilians between 2011 and 2015 in the cities of Lima, Ica, and Chiclayo.

Media previously suggested that the 27 victims were common criminals, but the new report found that 11 victims “didn’t even have a criminal record or a warrant to justify them being identified as targets of police interventions,” according to the Interior Ministry.

The confirmation of the extrajudicial killings by the police recalls a dark history of death squads run by state security forces in the South American country that were aimed at wiping out armed left-wing guerrilla movements particularly under the reign of jailed former dictator Alberto Fujimori.

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