

# *Venezuela slams U.S. secretary of state and Colombian president over false claim Washington helped Colombia achieve independence*

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Caracas, January 4 (RHC)-- The Venezuelan government has condemned the position of Colombian President Ivan Duque and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, "whose governments intend to subjugate and violate the sovereignty and self-determination of the Venezuelan people."

"It is a historical aberration the subordination of the current government of Colombia to U.S. interests, to the point of attempting to twist the heroic Bolivarian feat and instead thanking the United States for its supposed collaboration with the Colombian independence forces 200 years ago," the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

Duque and Pompeo met for about 40 minutes at the Guest House in Cartagena, Colombia, where the Colombian president expressed his gratitude for the assistance provided by the U.S. government for the "emancipation of Colombia," stating that "the support of the founding fathers of the United States was crucial to achieve our independence."

In the statement, the Venezuelan government indicated that "the anti-Venezuelan rhetoric that the Colombian president and the U.S. secretary have shown clearly intends to distract the public attention from the resounding failure of the U.S. anti-drug policy in Colombia, as well as the lamentable state of the peace process and the irrepressible violence in the neighboring country."

Colombia has seen a rise in paramilitary violence over the past few years following the peace agreement between the Colombian government of Juan Santos and the former leftist guerrilla FARC. The power vacuum created by the demonization of the FARC has led to more paramilitary violence that has claimed the lives of hundreds of social leaders in the country as well as the lives of former FARC militants.

Social movement and human rights organizations have repeatedly accused both the Santos and Duque governments of failing to curb the power of paramilitaries in the country and also dragging their feet on the total implementation of the peace process which includes protections for social leaders and former militants.

Far-right Duque himself has connections to paramilitary groups, and his mentor former President Alvaro Uribe has also been implicated in several cases that involve right-wing paramilitary violence.

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