

Colombian president orders soldiers on the streets during nationwide strike



Bogota, November 21 (RHC)-- In response to the nationwide strike that Colombians are carrying out on Thursday, President Ivan Duque increased the number of troops patrolling in urban areas, which generated concern at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

"The Office notes with concern the issuance of several decrees and instructives which could allow mayors and governors to declare curfews and request military support for public order control," the UNCHR representative in Colombia Alberto Brunori said.

Since Monday, citizens have also expressed their surprise and anxiety over the presence of soldiers armed with combat weapons in Bogota, the capital of the country. The government argued that the military presence in the streets does not imply a militarization of the country but "a support" to the Police's everyday tasks.

This excuse, however, has been strongly criticized. "States must limit and condition the use of Military Forces to control internal disturbances as much as possible, since military training, equipment, and perspectives are not adequate to guarantee the protection and control of civilians," Brunori explained.

Since Tuesday human rights defenders have been denounced that the Police raided homes of social leaders in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. So far, according to UNCHR data, 27 raids have been carried out in Bogotá, five in Cali and four in Medellín to homes of activists, offices of social organizations and alternative media facilities.

Alleging the need to avoid possible excesses, the Duque administration also launched other security measures such as the closure of international borders, deployment of 4,000 additional police on the streets and aerial surveillance of protests.

Colombia's main organizations of workers, farmers, and students reject Duque's neoliberal policy package, which seeks to eliminate the state-based pension fund, increase retirement age and hire young people with salaries below the minimum wage.

Progressive parties and organizations also require the right-wing government to demonstrate a greater commitment to the implementation of the Peace Agreement and more protection to the lives of social leaders, who have been victims of selective killings executed by "unidentified" paramilitary groups.?????

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, at least 777 social leaders and 137 former guerrilla fighters have been killed in Colombia, according to the Institute for Development and Peace (Indepaz)??????.

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