

Helicopter with Colombian president aboard comes under fire

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**Bullet holes seen on a helicopter that Colombian President Ivan Duque was travelling in
[Colombia Presidency/Handout via Reuters]**

Bogota, June 26 (RHC)-- Colombia's President Ivan Duque has said a helicopter he was on was struck by multiple bullets when flying through the country's Catatumbo region towards the city of Cucuta, capital of

the country's Norte de Santander province on Friday.

In addition to Duque, the helicopter was carrying other officials, including defence minister Diego Molano, interior minister Daniel Palacios, and governor of Norte de Santander Silvano Serrano.

"It is a cowardly attack, where you can see bullet holes in the presidential aircraft," the president said in a statement. No one was injured in the incident, a spokesman for the presidency said. Photos released by the president's office showed the tail and the main blade had been hit.

Duque said the aircraft's "safety features" prevented a "lethal" attack. Security personnel have been given clear instructions to find those behind the attack on the helicopter, the president added.

"Once more we reiterate that as a government [we won't give up]... in the fight against drug trafficking, terrorism and the organised crime that operate in the country," Duque said. "[They won't] intimidate us with violence or acts of terror. Our state is strong and Colombia is strong to face these threats."

The troubled Catatumbo region, on Colombia's border with Venezuela, is home to extensive coca crops, the chief ingredient of cocaine. It is where fighters of the leftist National Liberation Army (ELN) operate – former FARC fighters who reject a 2016 peace deal with the government – along with armed criminal groups involved in drug trafficking.

Earlier this month, a car bomb was detonated at a military base used by the 30th Army Brigade in Cucuta, injuring Colombian troops and US military advisers. While defence minister Molano said the attack could have been carried out by the ELN, the rebel group denied having any role in the bombing.

Since Duque came to power, Colombia has endured its worst outbreak of violence since the peace accord with the FARC.

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