

# *The beam in the eye*

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By Guillermo Alvarado

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights determined that 46 people died during this year's days of protests in Colombia, of which at least 28 were the direct responsibility of the security forces.

These figures are much higher than those accepted by the government of President Iván Duque, and confirm the denunciations repeatedly made by social and humanitarian organizations, as well as the families of the victims.

As will be recalled, a national strike began last April to reject a tax reform that increased tax burdens on the middle and lower strata of society, while lightening them for large companies and wealthy sectors.

The protests took place almost everywhere in the country, but in some cities such as Bogotá, the capital, and Cali they were repressed with excessive force by the so-called Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron, ESMAD, an elite police force that even used firearms against the demonstrators.

The executive always tried to hide the fact that serious human rights violations had been committed, but the evidence is overwhelming.

This was pointed out by Juliette de Rivero, representative of the High Commissioner, who assured that there are well-founded reasons to sustain that there was an unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against the population.

There are also ten other cases of deaths attributed to "non-State" groups, i.e. paramilitaries, who carried out armed attacks against the demonstrators, without the authorities doing anything to prevent it.

The office concluded that the fatal victims of these events were young people between 17 and 26 years of age and most of them lived in poor neighborhoods or were of peasant, Afro-descendant, indigenous and internally displaced people due to violence in rural areas.

There were also reports of rapes and sexual assaults, and in 16 of them the perpetrators were members of the police.

The government repealed the aforementioned tax reform, but protests continued to demand better living conditions and opportunities for study or work.

It remains to be seen what will be the reaction of the government of President Duque, who during his entire administration has dedicated himself to accuse neighboring Venezuela of violating the human rights of its population, without ever presenting concrete evidence of his allegations.

Now he has a beam in his own eye and it remains to be seen if he will apply in his country the recipes he so brazenly recommends to others.

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