

15 Colombian Miners Trapped, Feared Dead in Flooded Mine



Bogota, May 14 (teleSUR-RHC)-- At least 15 mine workers were trapped in a gold mine in northwest Colombia on Wednesday after it flooded and collapsed. Emergency rescue teams worked into the night attempting to free the workers trapped dozens of feet underground. The workers are feared dead, given the difficulty of the rescue.

The rescue operation is projected to take three days to be able to pump enough water to reach the miners, according to Colombia's National Mining Agency. Some of those trapped were working at a depth of up to 55 feet at the time of the collapse, officials reported.

President Juan Manuel Santos and some 50 rescue workers and medics responded to the emergency. The National Mining Agency also reported the presence of gas in the mining shafts, which may have contributed to the collapse.

There are conflicting reports of whether the mine, located in the indigenous Riosucio in Colombia's Caldas province 136 miles northwest of Bogota, was operating legally or illegally. There are several mining projects in the area.

On Monday, the government raided 63 unlicensed FARC-operated mines in the Amazon in a crackdown on illegal mining activity. Colombia mines approximately 55 tonnes of gold annually, much of which is extracted by in precarious conditions by informal or illegal mine workers. More than half of Colombia's mines are unregulated.

In 2014, 87 mine accidents killed at least 120 people. In 2010, over 70 were killed in a coal mine explosion, the worst mining disaster in the country's history.

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