Five Colonels in Colombia Charged for 'False Positives' Killings

Bogota, June 11 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Court hearings for five colonels were held on Monday in the cities of Bogota, and Medellin, over the murders of 72 civilians between 2006 and 2007. The colonels were arrested between March and April of this year when the hearings against them started. Commander Edgar Avila, Second Commander Jose Zanguna Duarte, as well as Heads of Operations Diego Padilla, Raul Huertas and Carlos Cadena all belonged to the "Pedro Nel Ospina" Battalion based in Medellin.

The accused colonels allegedly hunted, kidnapped, and murdered vulnerable people, mostly from farm families, in an attempt to plant weapons near their corpses so the soldiers could claim they were guerrilla fighters. Corrupt operations like this, known as "false positives" in the army's record of guerrilla killings, were unveiled by a long-running meticulous investigation by the leading attorney of the Human Rights Unit in Medellin, Luis Fernando Zapata.

Human rights organizations estimate the Colombian army murdered some 4,300 civilians under the government of far-right former President Alvaro Uribe, which had implemented a policy setting "kill targets" in exchange of merits and promotions.

The General Attorney announced that about 1,662 military members were being investigated under the probe so far, including 505 officials, as well as 56 police officials. Previously, only five other officials have been condemned, which makes the trial of the "Pedro Nel Ospina" Battalion of particular importance in the country's history.

Battalion "Pedro Nel Ospina" was then especially under fire for allegedly having killed the greatest number of guerrillas. "They were congratulated for their courage and bravery during these military operations," said the attorney. "They are active members of the public force that colluded in this kind of criminal behavior."

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