

UN Official Slams Colombia over Internal Displacement Policy



Bogota, June 19 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The Colombian government lacks the political will to properly address the issue of internally displaced people resulting from its 50-year armed conflict, said Deputy Representative of the U.N.'s Refugee Agency Martin Gottwald on Thursday.

Presenting the U.N. report on the situation of refugees of the world, Gottwald said that although in recent years the estimates of the country's internally displaced have systematically decreased, they still remain very high. "It is early to say that forced displacements are over in Colombia, as violations of human rights persist," he added.

According to the U.N. estimate, in 2014 the country counted an additional 137,000 more displaced people, and ranked second in the world with a total of 6 million – placing behind Syria with 7.6 million.

This figure is likely to be underestimated, added Gottwald in an interview with EFE, as criminal bands threaten to kill displaced victims if they report their situation to authorities. He emphasized that the guerrilla fighters were not the only ones responsible for forced displacements, but also new irregular armed groups for about 40 percent of displacements.

In Gottwald's opinion, the Colombian government "has not done enough to reintegrate them into society," asking for the implementation of a policy and an integral strategy that would incorporate them fully back into society.

For instance, while more than half of the displaced occurred in marginalized suburbs of 25 Colombian cities, according to the UNHCR report, the recently approved National Plan of Development focuses on rural areas where the guerrilla groups operate rather than these districts. Moreover, the peace negotiations currently taking place between the government and the rebels are "not necessarily discussing everything that should be discussed," as the system of victims compensation usually focuses on financial reparations only.

According to the national estimate, 80 percent of Colombia's internally displaced lives under the poverty line, and 35 percent lives in extreme poverty.

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