

A hopeful cabinet



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By Guillermo Alvarado

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One of the appointments that has attracted the most attention is that of jurist Iván Velásquez Gómez as head of the Defense portfolio, perhaps one of the most controversial ministries in a nation where for more than half a century there has been an internal armed conflict.

Petro assured that he will try to bring to a successful conclusion the negotiation of a peace agreement with the insurgent National Liberation Army, ELN, and undoubtedly the role of Velásquez at the head of the armed forces will be of singular importance.

He will also have the difficult task of separating the National Police from the army, which has been accused of committing serious human rights violations during protests in recent years. It is expected to become a civilian agency, under the direction of the Interior or Justice ministries.

Iván Velásquez has an extensive track record in the fight against corruption, drug gangs and irregular armed groups.

In 2013 he resigned from his job and left the country due to death threats and the UN appointed him as head of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, where he headed the investigations that led to the imprisonment of former President Otto Perez Molina and his second in office, Roxana Baldetti.

Another appointment welcomed by Colombian progressive sectors was that of indigenous leader Leonor Zalabata, who will be the next representative to the United Nations.

She is a woman with long experience in the defense of nature and the rights of indigenous communities, which have been hard hit by the armed conflict, the voracity of landowners and paramilitary groups.

Zalabata is a member of the Arhuaca ethnic group, which inhabits the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta area, and was awarded the Anna Lindhs international prize, given by the Swedish government, and the Franco-German Antonio Nariño prize, for her defense of human rights.

She is a clear representative of the indigenous cosmovision, based on principles such as "what is sacred is not what you have, but what you are", or "we are different, because we respect the other, who is different".

Less than two weeks to go before the beginning of Gustavo Petro's administration, who embodies the hopes of a people who wish for the end of a prolonged slaughter and the advent of a life with peace and justice.

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