

Eight police officers killed in Colombia explosives attack

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A police officer walks near the wreckage of a car bomb that exploded near a police station in Padilla, [File: Andres Gonzalez/AP]

Bogota, September 3 (RHC)-- Eight police officers have been killed in an explosives attack in western Colombia, President Gustavo Petro said, the deadliest attack on security forces since he took office promising to end the country's nearly 60-year conflict.

Police sources said the officers were killed on Friday when the vehicle in which they were traveling was hit with explosives.

"I forcefully reject the attack with explosives in San Luis, Huila where eight police died. Solidarity with their families," Petro said on Twitter on Friday. "These acts are a clear sabotage to total peace. I have asked authorities to go to the area to take on the investigation."

Petro, a former member of the M-19 rebel movement, has pledged to seek "total peace" by restarting talks with National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels, applying a 2016 peace accord to former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) fighters who reject it, and negotiating the surrender of crime gangs in exchange for reduced sentences.

His predecessor, the conservative Ivan Duque, had broken off peace talks with the ELN following a 2019 car bomb attack on a police academy in Bogota that left 22 people dead.

Petro did not name the suspected perpetrators of the attack on Friday, but so-called dissidents from the now-demobilized FARC rebel movement are known operate in the area according to security sources.

Dissident groups have rejected the peace accord negotiated by their former leadership and count some 2,400 fighters in their ranks, according to the government. Several well-known dissident commanders have been killed recently, many in fighting across the border in Venezuela.

Colombia's conflict between the government, leftist rebels, right-wing paramilitaries and drug trafficking gangs killed at least 450,000 people between 1985 and 2018 alone.

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