

Panama Launches Commission to Investigate Atrocities of 1989 U.S. Invasion



Panama City, July 21 (RHC)-- Panama has launched a new special commission aimed at uncovering the historical truth behind the 1989 U.S. invasion of the Central American country to overthrow Manuel Noriega, whom the CIA had propped up for years.

Panamanian Foreign Minister Isabel De Saint Malo said: "We believe that our people should know their history." According to the newspaper *La Estrella*, the Truth Commission will investigate the number and identities of people killed and wounded during the U.S. military occupation, as well as the material damages it caused. A new national day of mourning to commemorate the day of the invasion, Dec. 20, 1989, is also expected to come out of the special investigation.

A group of Panamanian experts will spearhead the commission, with oversight from the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Fallen of December 20, 1989, according to local media.

The initiative will aim to fully and transparently uncover the details, according to the Foreign Ministry, which stated that the invasion violated international humanitarian norms and human rights.

“Based on the premise that all of society has the irrevocable right to know the truth, the work of this Commission will allow us to know the facts in a complete, official, public, and impartial way in order to vindicate the memory of the victims and move forward as a nation in the strengthening of democracy,” read an official government statement.

The investigation is expected to pave the way for reparations to be paid to families of the victims and for the history to be honored in schools' curriculums and public monuments.

On December 20, 1989, over 27,000 U.S. soldiers invaded Panama as part of President George H.W. Bush's "Operation Just Cause." The invasion allegedly aimed to carry out the arrest on charges of drug trafficking of Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega, a formerly close U.S. ally and CIA informant aiding U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the region.

The invasion, which came after failed coup attempts and economic sanctions in the wake of Noriega falling out of Washington's favor, is widely interpreted as part of U.S. efforts to maintain a supportive government in Panama and U.S. hegemony in the region.

The invasion resulted in at least 3,000 civilian and military victims. Many of the bodies remained unidentified after being burnt and piled up in the streets. The U.S. has never compensated the survivors impacted in the invasion or families of victims.

Noriega, jailed in Panama for charges of political assassinations, money laundering, and drug trafficking since being extradited from France in 2011, was scheduled to have brain surgery to remove a tumor on Thursday, but the operation has been postponed until further notice due to doctor's concern over his frail health.

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