

Bolivian Government Confirms Minister Beaten to Death by Miners



La Paz, August 26 (RHC)-- Bolivia's deputy minister of the interior who was kidnapped Thursday morning has been killed, according to the government of Bolivia in a press conference Thursday night.

Carlos Romero, head of the Ministry of Government, told reporters: "Everything indicates that our Deputy Minister Rodolfo Illanes has been cowardly and brutally murdered."

He said that more than 100 arrests had been made in relation to the murder. Bolivian authorities early Friday morning said that they had recovered Illanes' body which reports say has sign of torture.

Striking miners in Bolivia seized Deputy Minister of the Interior Rodolfo Illanes Thursday morning in a move authorities slammed as a "kidnapping" amid an escalating conflict between mine workers and President Evo Morales' administration.

Illanes was captured in the area of Pandura, on the highway between the cities of La Paz and Oruro, Romero announced earlier in the day in a press conference.

Romero had also accused the miners of threatening to “torture” the official and of provoking violence in the country during the strike, including aggressions against police and journalists.

A representative of the Federation of Mining Cooperative in Bolivia, known as Fedecomín, also confirmed that the organization was holding Illanes, but rejected the government’s characterization of the move as a “kidnapping.” In a radio statement, the mining organization claimed that the deputy minister was captured after walking amid protesters and had not been harmed.

The murder comes after the striking miners relaunched highway blockades on Tuesday to pressure the government to answer a list of 24 demands, increased from an initial list of 10. Clashes broke out Wednesday between police and protesters on the road between Cochabamba and Oruro, reportedly killing two people. Protesters blame security forces for the deaths, but police claim they did not use excessive force. Dynamite was reportedly set off in the confrontations.

Evo Morales government has called for dialogue, urging miners on Thursday to send a “positive sign” that strikers are willing to lift the highway blockades launched earlier this week and sit down at the negotiating table.

Defense Minister Reymi Ferreira said that the murder “will not go unpunished.” Ferreira also said that President Evo Morales “is deeply moved.”

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