

Bolivia Asks Miners to Turn over Vice Minister's Murderers



La Paz, September 7 (RHC)-- Bolivia's government urged miners Monday to turn over the people responsible for the torture and murder of Deputy Minister Rodolfo Illanes, as a condition for future negotiations over their demands.

Interior Minister Carlos Romero said: "The National Federation of Mining Cooperatives, or Fencomin, should come clean by handing over the people responsible of Vice Minister Illanes' assassination," in statements to private TV channel PAT.

Rodolfo Illanes, deputy minister of the interior, was killed on August 25 after being taken hostage by protesting miners earlier in the day on the highway between La Paz and Oruro in an area called Panduro.

Prior to the kidnapping, two people had died in clashes between striking miners and police near Cochabamba. A third person was killed in similar clashes before Illanes was found dead.

According to officials, Illanes died of torture with blows to the head and body in an act carried out with "malice and premeditation." His aide was also seriously injured, but his condition stabilized after being in intensive care, local media reported.

The conflict between striking miners and the government heated up in late August when the Fencomin workers relaunched road blockades to protest government policies. The strike was sparked by a new piece of legislation, known as Law 149, enacted on August 19. The law preserves labor rights but challenges direct contracts between miner cooperatives and transnational mining giants, instead requiring state involvement.

Miners rejected the law, demanding the government loosen environmental standards and allow mining cooperatives to sign contracts with private companies directly to increase mining opportunities. The initial list of 10 demands increased to 24 during the course of the protests.

Fencomin was previously aligned with President Evo Morales' left-wing Movement Toward Socialism party, also known as MAS, which came to power with support of key social movements, including miners and coca growers.

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