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Colombia: Cabinet Reshuffle

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On July 3, the 14 members of President Cesar Gaviria's cabinet resigned at his request. The cabinet consisted of eight members of Gaviria's Liberal Party, four from the Conservative Party and one from the M-19 Democratic Alliance. The M-19 party is a former guerrilla group that bargained for political power as part of a negotiated demobilization three years ago. Colombian presidents appoint a new cabinet often as frequently as each year during their four-year term. This is Gaviria's second cabinet since he took office Aug. 7, 1990. Conservative Party leaders asserted that the president had removed the party from his government. The Conservatives oppose the administration's new tax policies. An official party communiqué said Gaviria offered the party an "indecorous" and "unacceptable" participation in the new cabinet. The party is currently divided in three factions. Bogota mayor Andres Pastrana, leader of the New Democratic Force (NFD) faction, told reporters that only his faction will participate in the new cabinet. The M-19 party, which also opposes the tax reforms as well as privatization of state-run companies, was promised at least one cabinet post. On July 5, the government released the names of cabinet members. Liberal Party members heading the interior, defense, education, agriculture, treasury, and foreign trade ministries were retained. Foreign Minister Noemi Sanin, affiliated with one of the excluded Conservative Party factions, will continue in the post as an independent. New appointments are justice, Andres Gonzalez (Liberal Party); public works, Jorge Bendeck Olivella (Liberal); mines and energy, Guido Nule Amin (Liberal); communications, William Jaramillo Gomez (Liberal); economic development, Luis Moreno (Conservative NFD faction); labor, Luis Ramirez (NFD faction); and health, Gustavo De Roux (M-19 Democratic Alliance). On July 6, spokespersons for the M-19 party said that they had requested De Roux to turn down the health ministry post. De Roux is a sociologist and industrial engineer. M-19 Sen. Gustavo Petro said, "It is not that [De Roux] lacks the qualities to perform as a minister, but rather the M-19 Democratic Alliance does not recognize him as a member."

In a written statement delivered to the Agence France- Presse, ADM-19 leaders said that during meetings with President Gaviria the previous week, the party provided a list of candidates for the cabinet post. The list did not contain the name of Gustavo De Roux. Party leaders said the list turned over to Gaviria contained the following names: Luis Gomez Pimienta, Alberto Caicedo Borda, Rafael Vergara, Otti Patino, Argelino Garzon, Alvaro Echeverry, Carlos Ossa Escobar and German Toro. Next, the statement said, "If De Roux decides to accept the health ministry post, we request that he does so in the capacity of a political independent, rather than as a representative of the M-19."

(Sources: Associated Press, 07/04/92; Agence France-Presse, 07/03/92, 07/04/92, 07/06/92)

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