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Peruvian Town Lynch Mayor

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Category/Department: Peru
Published: 2004-05-07

A mob of local residents tried Mayor Cirilo Fernando Robles Callomamani for embezzling public funds and then attacked him and several other aldermen on April 26 in the Peruvian town of Ilave near Lake Titicaca. The mob beat Robles to death and tied his corpse to the post of a bridge he had failed to rebuild during his administration. The chaos spread in subsequent days to the nearby town of Tilali, where rioters kidnapped and held hostage five aldermen on April 29 after the mayor had fled for his life.

Ilave lies 1,300 km southeast of Lima in the department of Puno near Peru's southeastern border with Bolivia and is home to a population of Aymara-Quechua Indians. Robles was the town's first Aymara mayor.

David Jimenez, president of the regional government of Puno, called the killing the tip of an iceberg and, along with many national legislators and Robles' widow, criticized the federal government for not dealing with leaders of protests that had arisen in Ilave almost a month prior to the lynching.

Police retake town after riot

After accusing Robles of corruption, the mob took him from the city council building and beat him to death. Video captured an attack on a house where Robles supporters and sub-officials were holed up. The crowd successfully overtook the house and beat the people inside until some were covered in blood. Rioters then went on a rampage, attacking a police station with fire bombs.

Interior Minister Fernando Rospigliosi ordered the cornered police to hold off the attackers. A policeman interviewed on Radioprogramas radio station said about a thousand rioters had begun throwing molotov cocktails at the station, where 50 policemen, some of them injured, had run out of tear gas grenades. "Don't let them take hostages or take your weapons," Rospigliosi told the unidentified police officer during the Radioprogramas interview. Phone service to the police station was cut minutes later.

More than 200 riot police were deployed there the following day and established control. Meanwhile, mayoral duties were handed to Robles' deputy, who is under investigation for allegedly inciting the mob that murdered Robles.

Two major public works projects for which Robles took credit remain incomplete, according to Lima daily newspaper La Republica. Robles had said he would use last year's 8.3 million sol, or US$2.4 million, municipal budget to repair the Puente Viejo bridge, which collapsed in 2000, and to pave the Ilave-Mazocruz highway, which would join the bi-national highway that comes from the border town of Desaguadero and continues to the southern department of Tacna. Both projects have been inaugurated, but neither is complete.
About 10,000 people, mostly Aymara Indians from surrounding villages, had been demanding Robles' resignation on the grounds that he was corrupt and had failed to deliver on campaign promises. Rospigliosi said it was unclear why the violence had continued to escalate following the mayor's killing. Radio reporters who tried to enter the town said the rioters turned them away.

**Nearby town mayor flees, 5 officials held hostage**

The killing scared Melecio Larico Quispe, the mayor of Tilali, a village of 5,000 people on Lake Titicaca's northern shore, police Capt. Abner Bardales told the Associated Press from the capital city of Puno. He said Larico Quispe fled his village April 27 and took refuge in the city of Juliaca, fearing a similar fate after residents accused him of corruption. 800 people then took five aldermen hostage.

"We have been protesting for 18 days, demanding the resignation and removal of the mayor," said Tuben Coasaca, who identified himself as president of the village council. The hostages were released after three days of negotiation with high-level government officials.

Newspapers estimated that Puno lost over 1.5 million soles, or close to a half million US dollars, in tourism revenues because of the violence. The Regional Director of Foreign Commerce and Tourism of Puno, Gamaliel de Amat Quiroz, said 1,400 tourists cancelled trips to Puno and estimated losses at US$140,000 per day. Vice-mayor investigated for inciting mob Robles' widow Marina Cutipa says Vice-mayor Jose Alberto Sandoval incited the mob to kill the mayor.

Video shows Sandoval running the trial against Robles in the city council chambers prior to the lynching and newspaper reports say he was a long-time rival of Robles. Sandoval, in hiding, told the broadcast program "La Ventana Indiscreta" that during the trial he was only fulfilling the prosecutorial role voters had granted him. Officials are investigating his role in the mob's actions.

Police sources told the La Republica they had previously detained Alberto Sandoval for being a member of the group Sendero Luminoso, but that documents showing his links to the group had been misplaced and Sandoval was therefore released. Police also considered Alfredo Yanqui Flores, also in hiding after the riot, to be a principle suspect as material author of the murder.

Witnesses told police that Yanqui Flores, amid hundreds of others, took Robles from his house, kicked him, tore his shirt, and led the mob. The region where Ilave lies is an important point for contraband and drug smuggling from both Bolivia and Peru, according to La Republica. The paper has conjectured that the putsch may have had something to do with gaining control of the area's narcotics manufacturing and transit profits. The town of 16,000 also lies along an important supply route for legitimate goods, in a popular tourist region.

**Interior Minister faces censure for response**

Even after more than three weeks of protests had gripped Ilave, failure to provide police reinforcements for the town prompted strong criticism against Interior Minister Rospigliosi in the Congress and the press. Rospigliosi is responsible for internal security in Peru.
A poll of legislators by La Republica found that 55 of the 61 members of Congress necessary to pass a measure of censure were planning to vote against Rospigliosi, an increase from the 41 who had previously planned to vote for censure. The Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), the main party in opposition to President Alejandro Toledo's Peru Posible (PP) party, introduced the measure.

APRA legislator Mercedes Cabanillas of the Prosecutorial Commission of Congress (Comision de Fiscalizacion del Congreso), called on Rospigliosi to resign his post, "because his administration is stained with blood." Robles' widow Marina Cutipa says that repeated requests to the federal government and National Police for protection for her husband went unfulfilled.

Rospigliosi defended his decisions, saying if he had sent a larger force to Puno the day of the lynching, there would have been a massacre. He referred to the violence in Bolivia last October when a police and military crackdown killed dozens of protestors against President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (see NotiSur, 2003-10-24). He says if the censure against him passes, "I will go away holding my head high."

Puno's head of regional government, David Jimenez, blames the government for the bloodshed. "The unfulfilled promises of the government have created a deep social conflict which is expressed against the nearest authorities. The situation is not unique to Ilave and in other provinces there is similar discontent." Although he condemned the violence, Jimenez said the bases of the social protest are just. "It is the great Quechua-Aymara nation, marginalized, ridiculed, tired, that calls upon a deaf, dumb and mute central government," he said.

Nearly half of Peru's 26 million people are Quechua or Aymara Indians and the overwhelming majority are poor farmers. In a nationally televised address, President Toledo called on Ilave to "maintain the climate of tranquility," and said his government understood the town's plight. But he also issued a warning, saying, "Democracy means order and discipline. In a nation of law we cannot permit someone to take justice into his own hands. We will act with all the force that the law permits. Those responsible at all levels will be severely punished."

The violence in Puno further degrades

President Toledo's wounded credibility (see NotiSur 2003-12-12 and 2004-02-13), as coca growers' protests and various labor strikes hit the capital city in tandem with the grim reports from Puno. Even as Peru has experienced steady economic growth since Toledo's administration took power, unemployment and poverty have remained prevalent there, particularly in indigenous communities like Ilave.