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Violence Erupts in Medellin as Colombian Government, Rebels Discuss Peace

by LADB Staff

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June 2: Twelve persons were assassinated in Medellin, including two policemen and one soldier. In Itagui municipality, south of Medellin, a policeman was killed. On the same day in the Uraba region of Antioquia department, another policeman was shot to death on his way home from work. According to statistics published by Semana news magazine, 2,203 kidnappings were reported in Colombia from 1982 to 1988. Ransom was paid in 837 of the abduction cases. The Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) was responsible for 544 abductions, and collected ransom monies in 277 cases totaling about \$9 million at the current exchange rate. The National Liberation Army (ELN) kidnapped 299 persons in the 1982-86 period, obtaining nearly \$15 million for the safe return of 144 abductees. The April 19 Movement (M-19) carried out kidnappings on a nearly weekly basis over the seven years in question. M-19 obtained nearly \$1 million for the return of 67 abductees. A total of 378 kidnappings were attributed to "unidentified persons," who charged about \$3 million for the safe return of 82. Common criminals kidnapped 701 persons, and obtained more than \$3.5 million in ransom for the release of 176.

June 3: In the first three days of the month, 35 persons were killed in Medellin. Notimex reported that over 4,500 persons have died in terrorist actions throughout the country thus far in 1990. Most of the violence has occurred in Antioquia department. Colombian news magazine Semana reported that in the first four months of the year, 2,372 homicides and 86 kidnappings were recorded in Antioquia department.

June 4: Presidential spokesperson Horacio Serpa announced that the government has decided to accept a proposal to participate in peace talks by 15 self-defense groups established to fight guerrillas in the Magdalena Medio. In a communique released in mid-May, the vigilante organizations offered to turn over their weapons to the army, since rebel groups have withdrawn from the region. In a joint communique, presidential peace adviser Rafael Pardo, and representatives of the Popular Liberation Army, the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), and the indigenous rebel group Quintin Lame, pledged to promote conditions to advance peace talks. On May 23, Pardo established his first contact with EPL spokesperson Bernardo Gutierrez, resulting in the release of all kidnapped persons over a 20 day period.

June 6: In Chalan, Sucre department, 50 rebels pertaining to the National Liberation Army (ELN) occupied government offices, blocked a major thoroughfare, and attacked a police station. In the two-hour gun battle, two guerrillas were killed, and 11 persons were wounded, including one policeman, one rebel, and nine civilians. Military sources said guerrillas used molotov cocktails and fragmentation grenades. The community's church, police station and the mayor's office were heavily damaged. June 7: Euclides Diaz Tirado, deputy in the Cordoba provincial assembly, was kidnapped from his home in Montelibano by unidentified assailants. Diaz was elected March 11 on the Popular Front Movement ticket.

June 8: Police reported the kidnapping of two employees of the National Fund for Rural Roadways in Cauca department. Although no one claimed responsibility, police said National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels were prime suspects. Ten police officers kidnapped by rebels April 7 were released in the village of Tabor, Huila department. In a communique released from Cordoba department, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) announced plans to release all persons kidnapped in the region. Presidential peace adviser Rafael Pardo Rueda announced that the EPL and the government had reached an agreement in principle on the matter of releasing kidnapping victims, to be followed by cease-fire talks.

June 19: According to a report by the National Police judicial investigations department (DIJIN), in Colombia 640 persons were killed in the June 12-18 period, most in Antioquia department. The report said that 70% of the victims were shot to death, slightly more than 10% died as a result of wounds from knives and other sharp instruments, and the remainder were killed in traffic accidents. A June 12 report by DIJIN indicated that 107 persons were assassinated in a three-day period in Antioquia department alone.

June 21: Police spokespersons said four policemen were assassinated on the streets of Medellin, bringing the total murdered by presumed drug trafficker hit men to 123 in 1990.

June 22: Defense Minister Oscar Botero said the army is sending its Mobile Brigade, an anti-terrorism unit, to Medellin to halt killings of police by drug traffickers. Botero said that in addition to troop reinforcements, the military is installing a new helicopter base in Medellin to be used in the fight against the drug-related violence. Last week the army dispatched 350 more soldiers to Medellin from the elite Rifle Battalion. Citing police sources, radio networks RCN and Caracol reported that police commenced a new anti-drug crackdown in Medellin, stepping up detentions, searches and street patrols. In a 24-hour period, security forces arrested at least 86 people suspected of involvement in assassinations of policemen.

June 23: Two policemen were assassinated in Medellin, bringing to 127 the number of law enforcement officers slain in the city so far this year. According to AP, in the past two months, government officials have sent 1,500 soldiers and policemen to reinforce Medellin's security force. More than 4,000 policemen are patrolling the streets.

June 24: Police said 20 armed men entered the tavern, shooting indiscriminately at customers drinking and listening to music. Police reported that on Saturday night at least 19 persons were assassinated and seven seriously wounded in a tavern located in Envigado, located about 20 km. south of Medellin. Witnesses said 20 armed men entered the bar and indiscriminately shot at customers who were drinking and listening to music. Seventeen persons died on the premises, and another two shortly thereafter in hospital. [On June 25, Notimex reported that the death toll from the tavern shooting had risen to 20.]

June 25: Notimex reported that in the past three days, 55 persons had been killed in the past three days in Antioquia. Social Conservative Party president Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo said a rising number of genocides registered in Medellin has transformed the city into "a war zone." Lloreda said

the problem of public security is a "complex" one, and said the department's citizens "are in the midst of cross-fire," the origin of which "is difficult to establish."

June 26: Government representatives traveled to the Cauca mountains to begin peace talks with the indigenous rebel group Quintin Lame. On May 15, the government announced interest in direct talks with the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Workers Revolutionary Party and Quintin Lame. The rebel organization was established in 1980 as a cell of the April 19 Movement (M-19). Later, Quintin Lame broke with M-19, and is currently part of the Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinator, created in 1987. Government sources say Quintin Lame has some 800 members in arms. (cont.)

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