
Colombian Government Begins Work to Exhume Hundreds of Bodies

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“We’re fighting against impunity. This government, as none other, has committed itself to the rights of the victims in Colombia with historic deeds such as the one today,” Interior Minister Juan Fernando Cristo said during a brief ceremony.

The excavation is taking place at a site known as La Escombrera (The Dump) in Comuna 13, a complex of slums perched on the mountains surrounding the northwestern city of Medellin.

Comuna 13 has suffered from Colombia’s more than five decades of conflict among various guerrilla groups, the security forces and right-wing militias, as well as from the activities of criminal gangs.

Based on accounts from families of Comuna 13 residents who have been “disappeared,” authorities suspect that several hundred bodies are concealed within the mountain of trash at La Escombrera.

The first phase of the exhumation project, in which forensic anthropologists and other experts are taking part, will require an investment of about 1 billion pesos (\$350,000) and includes the construction of a mausoleum for recovered bodies that go unidentified or unclaimed.

The government will not halt its efforts until all the relatives of the missing people are given a chance to “find, identify and bury their loved ones,” Cristo said.