
Piedad Cordoba: 'Paramilitarism Became a Regional Strategy'

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Former Colombian senator and human rights activist Piedad Cordoba spoke with teleSUR from Havana, Cuba Monday, a few days after paramilitary hitmen tried to assassinate her in Quibdo in the department of Choco.

Cordoba, the spokesperson for Marcha Patriotica, emphasized that there was a surge of paramilitarism in the country as the peace negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia are coming to an end, expressing her "great concern" over the issue.

The Marcha Patriotica, officially founded in 2012, brings together a number of social organizations, including those representing the rural poor, Indigenous, women and ethnic communities and leftist political groups and parties.

"In the past two years, a total of 120 Marcha Patriotica's activists were assassinated, and most of them last month," she said raising the alarm over the phenomenon of paramilitarism targeting the country's progressive sectors. "We demand the government guarantees our security," she added.

"The reason I was not assassinated, is because I was very alert, as I had received various death threats the day before, especially from sectors of Uribismo," she said referring to former President Alvaro Uribe who has been linked with paramilitary sectors.

She evoked her phone conversation with President Juan Manuel Santos after the murder attempt Friday: "a year ago, I met Santos and I proposed to dissolve the March, because 52 activists had been killed. But he replied that it could impact negatively on the peace talks, promising instead to provide us with security guarantees. Now the total number of assassinations tops 120," she deplored.

Explaining how the murders could impact the peace deal currently negotiated with the FARC in Havana, she argued that no peace agreement could be signed until there were real guarantees of security following the deal, as militants would disarm in order to join the political struggle.

Cordoba added she went to Havana precisely so she could discuss the issue of paramilitarism with the FARC peace delegation.

As teleSUR journalist, Ernesto Villegas, asked her opinion on whether paramilitarism was spreading across the region, recalling the use of chainsaws in Venezuela in order to carve up victims, Cordoba confirmed there was "a regional strategy ... in Venezuela, or in Honduras when they ousted President Manuel Zelaya, or in Ecuador when they tried to remove President Rafael Correa, or against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil: the opposition sectors start calling paramilitary sectors without thinking about the consequences – the murders, the threats on the population, among others."

She concluded that the Colombian peace deal was not an end in itself, but rather a means to create the conditions "so we can change the country toward more social justice and less poverty."
