

# Colombian Rebels Blamed for Hostage Deaths

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CARACAS, Venezuela, June 28 — President [Álvaro Uribe](#) of [Colombia](#) lashed out at the country's largest guerrilla group on Thursday, accusing it of killing 11 kidnapped lawmakers after the guerrillas said the hostages died in cross-fire during a military attack this month.

The guerrilla group, the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#), or FARC, said Thursday that the killings took place June 18 at an undisclosed camp. The report complicates recent efforts to thaw relations between the rebels and Colombia's government, which have fought for four decades.

“This unfortunate reminder shows that the war is still very much alive,” said Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo, a former negotiator for Colombia's government with rebel groups. “Blame for the killings will be allotted to the FARC, as well as the government for its reluctance to cede to the guerrillas' demands.”

Mr. Uribe said no rescue attempt had been made, despite the rebels' claim that the lawmakers were killed during an attack by an “unidentified military group.” He has previously called on the army to rescue the dozens of prominent captives held for many years by the rebels.

Relatives of the lawmakers made emotional statements from Cali, claiming Mr. Uribe's refusal to accede to the rebels' demand for a demilitarized zone for a prisoner exchange had only contributed to the reported deaths, though no evidence of the killings had been produced.

“His old problems with the FARC did not allow him to act like a statesman,” said Vicente Pérez, the brother of one hostage reported dead, Edison Pérez Núñez, in a reference to Mr. Uribe, whose father was killed by the rebels in a botched kidnap attempt in 1983.

“We have our hearts destroyed,” Mr. Pérez said in a telephone interview from Cali. “This is unimaginable.”

In a live televised address, Mr. Uribe called for a hardening of policy toward the rebels, apparently a shift after the recent release of dozens of imprisoned guerrillas, including Rodrigo Granda, a senior rebel official captured in Caracas in 2004, in hopes that the rebels would reciprocate.

Calling the FARC “terrorists,” Mr. Uribe said his government would not accept “blackmail” or a demilitarized zone for the guerrillas, even though a similar area was established for demobilized paramilitary fighters as part of an earlier effort to end widespread killing by them.

The rebels kidnapped the lawmakers from southwestern Valle del Cauca Province in a daylight operation in 2002 by posing as an army bomb squad and driving off into the mountains with the captives on a stolen bus. The rebels said Thursday that just one of the lawmakers, Sigifredo López Tobón, was still alive.

The rebels also hold three American military contractors, taken prisoner after their plane crash-landed in a guerrilla stronghold in 2003, as well as Ingrid Betancourt, a former presidential candidate, who holds French citizenship, and her assistant, Clara Rojas. The rebels killed 10 hostages in 2003 after a failed rescue attempt by the Colombian military.

The communiqué issued by the rebels about the killings, dated June 23, fueled questions as to the veracity of the report. Saying military intelligence officers had not known the captives’ location, Mr. Uribe said no rescue attempt could have been made.

Mr. Uribe, speaking on television before flying to Cali to meet with the victims’ grieving relatives, said that the lawmakers must have been killed “vilely” by the rebels.

Political analysts also questioned whether resurgent paramilitary groups might have had a hand in trying to rescue the lawmakers.

