

Colombia to offer up paramilitary boss

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BOGOTA, Colombia --

A powerful paramilitary boss faces a long prison sentence - and possible extradition to the United States - because he broke a partial amnesty deal by continuing to run a drug smuggling ring from jail, authorities said Friday.

Carlos Jimenez is the first jailed warlord to lose benefits conceded under a 2003 peace accord that led paramilitary leaders to surrender and demobilize 31,000 of their men in exchange for reduced prison terms and protection from extradition.

Interior Minister Carlos Holguin said that Jimenez had continued to oversee a drug-smuggling operation from jail.

Col. Cesar Pinzon, head of the judicial police, said that Jimenez had emerged as one of the "most powerful men" in the Norte del Valle cartel, Colombia's largest cocaine smuggling organization, before he surrendered in December 2006 together with his fighters from the Central Bolivar Bloc, a paramilitary militia.

The peace accord was meant to disband the paramilitaries. Created by wealthy ranchers to combat Colombia's rebel armies, they evolved into drug-trafficking mafias that committed some of the worst atrocities in the country's half-century civil conflict.

Under the 2003 peace deal, paramilitary bosses who have to stay out of criminal activity to keep benefits such as maximum prison sentences of eight years and protection from extradition.

Jimenez now faces a criminal investigation that could lead to decades-long prison sentence.

The office of President Alvaro Uribe also said it would order Jimenez's extradition if it was requested by the United States - which officially considers the paramilitary groups to be terrorist organizations and which has indicted other alleged Norte del Valle cartel leaders.

However, no foreign country has requested Jimenez's extradition, Holguin said.

Jimenez was moved Friday from the Itagui prison near the western city of Medellin, where more than 50 paramilitary leaders are being held, to a maximum security prison closer to the capital, Bogota.