

## **Executive Summary**

In November 2019, Bolivian security forces carried out operations against two protests in Sacaba and Senkata that resulted in the deaths of 21 Bolivian civilians and hundreds of injured. These casualties make November 2019 the second-deadliest month, in terms of civilian deaths committed by state forces, since Bolivia became a democracy, almost 40 years ago.

Multiple international institutions, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), have described these operations as “massacres.” The IACHR expressed concern about the “excessive and disproportionate use of public force” and “serious human rights violations” carried out by the Áñez government. International human rights institutions have made a firm call to the Bolivian State to comply with its international obligations by investigating the massacres, trying and punishing those responsible, and providing reparation to the victims and their relatives. Unfortunately, to date, there has been no concrete progress in the investigations. To make matters worse, the de facto government arbitrarily detained victims and witnesses of the massacres.

In response to these attacks, the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), the Europe-Third World Center (CETIM), the Association for Human Rights of Bolivia, the Andean Information Network, and the University Network for Human Rights present this submission to the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to present valuable evidence compiled by international human rights organizations to credibly reconstruct the facts.

## **Background**

The cases of Sacaba and Senkata occurred in the context of social protests carried out in the days following the forced resignation of President Evo Morales on November 10 and the takeover of power on November 12, 2019 by the unelected government of Jeanine Áñez.

On November 14, the day before the Sacaba massacre, Áñez promulgated Supreme Decree 4078, granting immunity to State security forces in operations deployed to “restore order.” The illegal executive action provoked widespread condemnation from the international community. On November 15, the day of the Sacaba killings, the de facto government issued Supreme Decree 4082, which authorized the allocation of 42.7 million bolivianos (\$6.2 million dollars) to further weaponize the armed forces.

## **Sacaba**

On November 15, Bolivian security forces, comprised of police and military, opened fire on a large group of unarmed protesters in Sacaba. According to eyewitnesses, police and military indiscriminately shot live ammunition and tear gas at civilians without warning. The state forces killed at least 10 and wounded more than 120 people that day. All of the dead and injured were indigenous civilians. No military or police officer suffered injuries.

Attacks that day were targeted. According to witnesses, state forces shot at protestors and bystanders who assisted the injured. One of the victims told the Harvard International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC), “The person next to me had been shot in the left side of his body. I was helping him when they shot me.” Soldiers also targeted protestors as they ran, shooting from a nearby bridge and military helicopter. According to witnesses, security forces also used racist language as they beat and attacked the protestors. One witness recounted State agents, saying, “What do you want here? Damn Indian, drug dealer, why did you come?” Despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to extrajudicial killings, the self-appointed government refused to acknowledge the massacres and promoted a narrative accusing the victims themselves of the violence.

### **Senkata**

On November 19, four days after the killings in Sacaba, State forces carried out a massacre in the Senkata zone of El Alto. Soldiers killed at least 11 people and injured 72 by firing into the crowd of demonstrators and bystanders outside the Senkata gas plant. Like in Sacaba, all casualties were indigenous civilians, and no police or soldiers were shot.

Witnesses recounted soldiers targeting those who helped the injured and people fleeing the gunfire. One observer remembered, “military tanks came down the road. There were soldiers sticking out of the tanks and shooting at everyone who ran.” Following the shootings, State forces continued to target victims. According to witnesses and hospital workers, police entered hospitals and clinics to harass and arrest victims who had been shot. Accordingly, many injured people did not seek medical attention, and families sought assistance at a nearby church.

Once again, the interim government asserted that civilians, not state forces, were responsible for the violence in Senkata.

### **Continued Abuses**

The extrajudicial killings carried out in Sacaba and Senkata have been exacerbated by:

#### **1. Irregularities in investigations**

There have been widespread irregularities in the investigation and adjudication of both massacres. State agents destroyed evidence, threatened witnesses and victims, and created bureaucratic obstacles that impede the rights of victims.

In Sacaba, for example, witnesses observed state forces destroying physical evidence of the attack, washing away blood at the scene and collecting bullets. In both locations, families and observers reported incomplete or inaccurate autopsy reports as well as missing or manipulated evidence. As a result, the investigations stemming from the events of Senkata and Sacaba have been severely delayed or impeded.

#### **2. Intimidation of witnesses**

Witnesses of the Senkata and Sacaba massacres have reported constant intimidation and stigmatization by government officials, doctors and health personnel, and the press. The government has carried out widespread arbitrary arrests of witnesses, and State forces have intimidated witnesses and victims in the streets and in hospitals.

### **3. Lack of reparations and access to justice**

After seven months, the victims of both massacres have not had access to any form of reparation, and even fewer have seen their right to truth and justice respected. To the contrary, reports indicate that state officials have obstructed investigations and delayed justice processes.

In Sacaba, for example, victims have reported delays in field studies of the scene of the massacre, refusal of the police to collaborate with the investigations, and a lack of response from the military to the requests for information from the prosecutor's office. In Senkata, state authorities have continuously failed to communicate with victims about the development of the investigation, the armed forces refuse to provide information requested by prosecutors about the military operation of the day of the massacre, and reconstructions of the events and ballistic studies have not been carried out at the site of the massacre.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the abuses committed by the Bolivian State, we ask the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to condemn the massacres in Sacaba and Senkata, require the Bolivian government to initiate adequate investigations into the killings and legal processes against those involved, and travel to Bolivia to personally monitor the progress of the investigations of the violations denounced in this report.