

COLOMBIA

Soldiers charged in civilian “false positive” killings

[note: Although RRN did not write on behalf of these particular victims, RRN has written on behalf of other similar victims, mostly young men, killed as “false positives.” A “false positive” is when the military assassinates a civilian and then lies and says it occurred during a confrontation with rebel forces, ostensibly to inflate rebel body counts. The “false positive” scandal became so large that it forced the resignation of the commander of the army, Gen. Mario Montoya, in November 2009, who had allegedly encouraged the promotion of officers whose units killed the most rebels.]

Good news: May 1, 2009

Colombian soldiers charged in civilians' killings

Colombian authorities arrested a retired lieutenant colonel and seven other soldiers in the killings of two civilians who they allegedly presented as guerrillas slain in combat to inflate rebel body counts. Daniel Pesca and Eduardo Garzon were last seen in March 2008 in Bogotá. Authorities say their bodies appeared days later in rural Santander and were reported by the army as rebels slain in combat.

Five active soldiers and three retired officers were detained, including former Lt. Col. Wilson Castro and two others of lower rank, charged with crimes including homicide and forced disappearance.

The eight soldiers and former officers are also under investigation in other deaths reported as slain rebels. The scandal erupted after relatives of the victims spoke out about their disappearance.

Colombian prosecutors are investigating the killings of more than 1,600 people in the past five years who are suspected of being the victims of extrajudicial killings by security forces.