

## **Clashes in Colombia over military post row**

**By Aljazeera**

**19 Jul 2012**

Colombian security forces have clashed with indigenous activists who stormed a hill-top military base that they were occupying.

One person was killed and more than 20 others were injured in Wednesday's clashes in the Cauca province, in south-west Colombia, according to local media reports.

Anti-riot police were sent to Cerro Berlin after Nasa tribesmen carrying sticks had driven about 100 soldiers from the army post they were guarding on the mountain.

Early on Wednesday, police used tear gas to remove the indigenous group from Cerro Berlin, some two hours from the town of Toribio.

Indigenous leaders have called on both government troops and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to abandon the jungle-covered mountains so they can rebuild their lives after years of bloodshed killed dozens from their community.

Indigenous leader Marcos Yules said his people wanted all armed men, be it rebels or members of the security forces, to leave.

"We profoundly regret having to use force to restore our constitutional rights. This could have been avoided if the army heeded our request in due form and the government had ordered them to leave," the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca said in a statement.

### **War on FARC**

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has said the government will hold a meeting with Nasa representatives, but only once they stop occupying the army post.

Citing an email from a captured FARC computer, Santos blamed rebel propaganda for stoking tensions: "Without accusing, far from it, the indigenous people of being in cahoots with the FARC, but yes there are elements we know have direct links."

Santos said the government would not remove soldiers from the area, but it was open to dialogue even though pulling troops out from the region was not negotiable.

Santos swept to office in 2010 promising to build on the security advances that began under former President Alvaro Uribe, a US backed offensive weakened the FARC and drug gangs, making Colombia safer and fostering foreign investment.

In late 2011, Colombian forces dealt the rebels a major blow, killing FARC leader Alfonso Cano in Cauca. The province had become an area of intense military operations since Cano took over the insurgent group three years before.

Since then, rebels have fought back, stepping up attacks on economic targets like oil and mining installations and threatening the government's drive to restore Colombia's image.

**Copyrights Aljazeera**