

## **Bolivia: Protesting miners kill interior minister after kidnapping him**

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**Sucre:** The Bolivian government today said that its deputy interior minister was kidnapped and killed by striking miners at a roadblock in Panduro.

### **Bolivia**

Striking miners in Bolivia kidnapped and beat to death the country's deputy interior minister after he traveled to the area to mediate in the bitter conflict over mining laws, officials said.

Rodolfo Illanes and his bodyguard were seized earlier on Thursday at a roadblock in Panduro, south of La Paz, official added.

Government Minister Carlos Romero called it a "cowardly and brutal killing" and asked that the body of deputy minister Rodolfo Illanes be turned over to authorities.

Illanes, whose formal title is vice minister of the interior regime, was "savagely beaten" to death by the striking miners, Defense Minister Reymi Ferreira told Red Uno television, his voice breaking.

Earlier, Romero had said that Illanes had been kidnapped and possibly tortured, but wasn't able to confirm reports that he had been killed by the striking informal miners, who are demanding the right to associate with private companies, among other issues.

The fatal beating follows the killings of two protesters in clashes with police, deaths that likely escalated tensions in the strike.

Illanes had gone to Panduro, 130 kilometers south of the La Paz, to open a dialogue with the striking miners, who have blockaded a highway there since Monday. Thousands of passengers and vehicles are stranded on roads blocked by the strikers.

Officials say he was taken hostage by the miners yesterday morning. At midday, Illanes said on his Twitter account: "My health is fine, my family can be calm." There are reports that he had heart problems.

The National Federation of Mining Cooperatives of Bolivia, once strong allies of President Evo Morales, went on an indefinite protest after negotiations over the mining legislation failed.