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Salvadoran Government Vows No Concessions to Gangs

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The gangs are trying “to bowl over the population, to pressure the government to make a deal,” presidential spokesman Eugenio Chicas said.

All Salvadorans “in their right minds” reject the notion of an accord with criminals, he said.

Monday’s killings of bus drivers who plied their routes despite threats from the gangs aimed at paralyzing down public transportation were “terrorists acts,” Chicas said.

The government implemented a contingency plan to keep the buses running in the face of the gangs’ offensive, he said, adding that police were working to ensure that “crimes committed against people who provide this service do not go unpunished.”

In fact, the deputy chief of the national police said Tuesday that several people implicated in the murders of the drivers were already in custody.

Police have also determined that the gangs’ attempt to shut down bus service was ordered from behind bars by imprisoned bosses, Howard Cotto said.

Authorities are in the process of transferring gang leaders held at various facilities to El Salvador’s highest-security prison, Zacatecoluca, the deputy chief said.

All police leave has been canceled for the duration of the emergency, Cotto said, acknowledging that the gang offensive shut down 101 bus routes on Tuesday, mainly in the

central provinces of San Salvador, La Paz and Chalatenango.

Gangs in Central America derive much of their income from extortion rackets targeting bus operators and small businesses. Victims who refuse to pay often end up dead.

“These criminal groups have encountered in this government, in President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, a firm man, a man clear in his determination to impose a strategy of prosecuting crime, a strategy of giving them (the gangs) no truce,” spokesman Chicas said.

The police and the military are doing their job, he said, and the rest of society – politicians, grassroots groups and the business community – “are under the obligation to close ranks to strengthen, to recognize, the role of our police and our armed forces.”

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