

# Colombia Update

## Peace Process Survives, War Spreads

THE TWO-YEAR PEACE PROCESS between the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas and the Colombian government survived a January 31 deadline set by the Pastrana administration on the previous extension of the arrangement whereby government forces have agreed to absent themselves from five municipalities in southern Colombia. This time, it has been extended for an additional eight months. The search for a similar peace arrangement with the ELN (National Liberation Army) went forward, but as of this writing in mid-March is at a critical impasse.

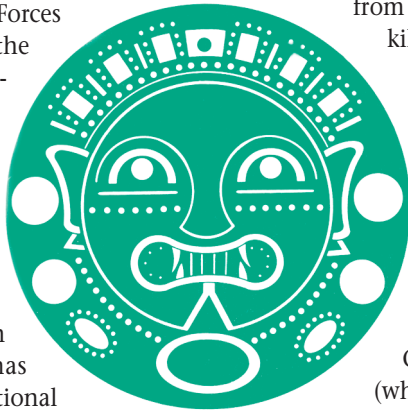
Even as peace agreements are pursued, paramilitary offensives continue in many parts of Colombia. Long affected by encroaching paramilitarism has been the city of Barrancabermeja, in north central Colombia, where the situation has been especially critical in recent weeks (see article by Régulo Madero, president of CREDHOS, p.3). Yet it is especially in southern and southwestern Colombia where the paramilitary forces have opened new fronts in the last year or so. These are areas targeted by Plan Colombia's "push into the south," the fumigation-and-helicopter-based crop eradication program that has great potential for bringing U.S. military advisers and U.S. corporate military consultants into direct confrontation with FARC forces (see p.19).

Nationwide the crisis of human rights and international humanitarian law has worsened as never before, with the toll of political-

ly-motivated violent deaths climbing from 10 persons killed each day to 20 persons killed each day (see p.3). Even so, Colombians of all walks of life continue to pursue alternatives to war. These include local and regional elected officials. In March 2001 the four governors, representing their own departments of Putumayo, Cauca, Nariño, and Tolima (who were also speaking on behalf of the governors of Caquetá and Huila) visited Washington, D.C., to protest the fumigation and the military thrust of Plan Colombia, and to promote alternative policies (see p.3).

In addition to addressing the above, this issue features interviews with Afro-Colombian leader Carlos Rosero, about how the Afro-Colombian communities have been affected, and with human rights workers Marta Ascuntar and Fernando Sánchez of Cali (p.14), as well as an article by Luis Gilberto Murillo (p.12), the former governor of Chocó, about Colombia's African roots.

As usual, a newsletter such as this can barely begin to convey the Colombia's complex situation and the dramatic humanitarian crisis. The resource list (p.20) suggests starting points for further research. Delegations such as those organized for May (p.19) and July by Witness for Peace offer the chance to see the situation for oneself. ❖



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# The Governors of the South Visit Washington

THE US AID PACKAGE, approved in July 2000, contains primarily security assistance for the Colombian armed forces and National Police. The plan is the result of a bilateral alliance between the Colombian government and the government of the United States: The Colombian government receives more resources for the counter-insurgency war, while the U.S. government imposes General McCaffrey's antidrug strategy focused on repressing supply by fumigating the illicit crops concentrated in southern Colombia.

This package is not a result of the peace negotiations or of any democratic effort to reach consensus with Colombian society at large or with the regional governments. It has been rejected nationally and internationally, specifically because it accords priority to escalating the war, does not offer sustainable social alternatives to the peasant coca growers, and generally contributes to the deterioration of the social, environmental, and humanitarian situation.

One of the most interesting political responses was seen in the October 2000 elections for governors and mayors in southern Colombia. These elections brought to power governors and mayors from independent political initiatives committed to a mandate that is squarely opposed to the repressive fumigation of the illegal crops, which supports the continuity of the peace processes and which demands the creation of democratic spaces and social solutions that are alternatives to the complex problems of poverty and exclusion that affect most of the population. This followed in the wake of the voices of civil society that made themselves heard in an October 2000 meeting in Costa Rica, which helped to define a position by the European Union and other countries of not wanting to have anything to do with Plan Colombia.

## Plan Colombia's defect: Doesn't take account of people

Four of these governors decided to visit Washington in March to denounce the negative effects of the fumigation operations carried out in December and January mainly in Putumayo, and to present alternative proposals. Their critique was put succinctly by Iván Guerrero, the governor of Putumayo: "Plan Colombia's major defect is that it doesn't take into account human beings," as it involves indiscriminate fumigation and fails to provide for human needs. Their proposal is based on the following points:

1. Demand the participation of society, the ethnic minority groups, and the local govern-

ments in the decisions related to the peace process, the antidrug policy, and the policies that affect their regions.

2. Opposition to drug trafficking but also to the fumigation of the economic base of the peasant coca growers, and the demand for peaceful and effective alternatives to resolve the social crisis, with social and agrarian reform programs, infrastructure, technical support, and access to markets. Support for manual eradication of the industrial-scale crops and the earmarking of these lands to social programs.
3. Support for the peace processes, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and rejection of assistance for the war.
4. Rejection of policies that provoke the social and environmental deterioration of the Macizo Colombiano and the Amazon basin, and demand for alternatives based on shared responsibility.
5. The U.S. government should turn away from Plan Colombia and instead embrace a policy to support the peace processes and the reforms aimed at overcoming poverty and political, social, economic, regional, and cultural exclusion.

The governors who traveled to Washington are:

**Cauca:** Floro Alberto Tunubalá Paja, Guambiano indigenous leader, elected by the Bloque Social Alternativo.

**Nariño:** Parmenio Cuéllar, independent, former justice minister of the Pastrana administration.

**Tolima:** Guillermo Alfonso Jaramillo, of the Partido del Socialismo Democrático, member of the Frente Social y Político.

**Putumayo:** Iván Gerardo Guerrero, Liberal party.

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Colombia Update is published twice yearly by the Colombia Human Rights Committee of Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Colombia Human Rights Network. We seek to educate policy makers, the press, and the general public on human rights-related events in Colombia, while reaching out to support Colombian communities and organizations seeking peace and social justice by non-violent means. Visit our website at [www.igc.org/colhrnet](http://www.igc.org/colhrnet) to find out more about how you can become involved.

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## Comisión Colombiana de Juristas reports: *Sharp Upturn in Deaths due to Political Violence*

*The following communication was released by the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, or Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ) on February 26, 2001.*

THE COLOMBIAN COMMISSION OF JURISTS takes this opportunity to release the results of its study on the situation of sociopolitical violence and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during the sixth-month period from April to September 2000. This is the most recent period for which we have processed data.

As is clear from the numbers, the deterioration in the situation is alarming, as the number of persons killed each day for sociopolitical reasons has doubled in the last two years. There were approximately 20 persons per day killed during the period studied. The average from 1988 to 1997, already uncommonly high, was 10 persons killed daily for political reasons in Colombia. In 1998 and 1999 that average had increased to 12 victims daily, by early 2000 it had climbed to 14. The fact that there are now 20 persons a day killed in political violence is a dramatic reflection of the barbarity that we are suffering, day after day, in Colombia. To this should be added the tragedy of the displaced persons, who once again numbered over 300,000 in the year 2000, a matter which we will consider in more depth in a forthcoming report.

Five of the 20 victims daily were killed in combat, including civilians and combatants. The remaining 15 were assassinated in their homes, in public places, or in their workplace. More than 15% lost their lives due to actions by the guerrilla forces. The other 85% died due to state or paramilitary actions. In the last two years this ratio was 20% to 80%. And from 1988 to 1997 it had been 30% to 70%. The striking increase in the number of victims most recently is related to the increase in paramilitary activities and the absence of effective government action to prevent, contain, or reduce these activities.

On recording this dramatic situation, the Colombian Commission of Jurists laments that the state authorities are more devoted to making enormous efforts in the area of propaganda than to achieving real results in respect for and protection of human rights. Several announcements and publications have been released by the Government in recent months to give the impression that it is combating the agents who perpetrate these violations. In the best of cases, the raw facts indicate the total incompetence in confronting them, if not tolerance for or complicity with them.

In coming days we will round out this panorama with other reports, including an analysis of the draft legislation in the Senate designed to create new mechanisms of impunity for the armed forces and police, empowering them to arrest persons without a judicial warrant, reviving provisions of law that permit the legal existence of the paramilitary groups, and introducing anti-democratic concepts in the organization of the state, such as "national power" and "national objectives" to which all inhabitants of Colombia would have subjected. ❖

## Human Rights Violations: Manifestations of a Perverse Model of Governance

by Régulo Madero, President of the human rights organization CREDHOS

*The Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos is based in the city of Barrancabermeja, and works throughout the Middle Magdalena river region in north-central Colombia. Founded in 1988, its founding President, Jorge Gómez Lizarazo, was awarded the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award in 1991.*

THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE MAGDALENA region of Colombia are bearing witness to the most profound human rights and international humanitarian law crisis ever known in Colombia's recent history. To make matters worse, there has been a dramatic increase in absolute poverty, with over 70% of the one million residents not even meeting their basic human needs, and unemployment averaging around 40%.

The human rights crisis is a result of repeated, deliberate, permitted, and systematic actions taken by the Colombian government against the very social fabric of society; its social leaders, human rights defenders, and the general population. The situation has gotten so critical that the State is not even guaranteeing the safety of international organizations, which facilitated the designation of the humanitarian organization Peace Brigades International as a military target by the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries.

Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights are steadily mounting in Barrancabermeja. From May 16, 1998 to date, over 50 people have been disappeared; 18,000 have been displaced into the city; and for the first two months of 2001, one person has been killed every 12 hours, on average, because of the armed conflict. In the year 2000, three times as many people died per capita than in the rest of the country. These deeds were preceded by the assassination of over 3,300 people during the 1990s, with absolute impunity.

We human rights defenders continue to be subjected to harassment, targeting, threats, criminal prosecution based on false evidence, forced displacement, and assassination attempts. We are denied the most fundamental guarantees for conducting our humanitarian work without having to face such obstacles.

The international humanitarian law crisis engulfing the region is a result of the degradation of the armed conflict. This can be seen in the indiscriminate belligerent actions by the state security forces, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries, with different levels of responsibility.

Many organizations have been forced to limit their work or to dismantle altogether, leading the social fabric to weaken and become dispersed. The existing organizations are victims of the state's security apparatus, and the paramilitary groups, and in more than a few cases, of the guerrilla groups, having been declared to be military targets. The Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (CREDHOS) has been declared a military target by the AUC (paramilitaries) 18 times, and in the

*continued on page 4*

last five months seven directors of CREDHOS have been forced to leave the city.

The key determinants of the social and political problem in this region are:

- (1) The government's unwillingness to solve the basic needs of the population, and its implementation of an exclusionary model of development.
- (2) The imposition of an authoritarian model of governance

The imposition of this exclusionary development model has brought on, the de facto means, the expropriation of the property rights of small and medium farmers and merchants; it has imposed "flexible" working conditions, the disintegration of the trade-union organizations, and the physical elimination of their leaders.

Authoritarianism is aimed at "solving" the armed conflict by force, and any petition or voice on behalf of the social sectors leads to the conditioning or dismantling of the democratic non-governmental organizations of the region, and the physical elimination of their leaders, or they are condemned to forced displacement.

These two models constitute a whole, and have come to replace the rule of law by a de facto state that does not recognize the human person as a subject of rights, but as a subject of obligations. This model is being imposed by the state security forces, the illegal self-defense forces, and by the most conservative political and economic sectors of the region. That is why one can find settlements of paramilitary forces in the urban areas of over 45 different municipalities, all in the same jurisdictions where the state security forces are based in the region.

The implementation of these models of development and governance is what enables us to show that human rights violations are not random or isolated, and that the government is also implicated in these criminal practices. To the contrary, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are systematic and are an essential part of keeping unmodified the prevailing model of accumulation of wealth. This is why the Colombian government is not carrying out the recommendations that the United Nations has been making for several years now regarding human rights.

Under these critical conditions, we call for the social organizations, human rights defenders, and civil society to focus their work on the following:

- The President of Colombia should be urged to immediately adopt measures to ensure the protection of social leaders, human rights defenders, and the civilian population.
- There should be a coordinated effort outside of Colombia to change the government's policy so as to improve the situation of human rights and international humanitarian law in Colombia. Efforts should also promote de-escalation of the war, strive for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict, and bring about alternative substitution of illegal coca crops in consultation and coordination with the communities.
- Acts of international solidarity should be redoubled, with systematic accompaniment, monitoring, political pressure, and the establishment of sister communities and organizations.
- Urge the armed actors to respect the civilian population, protest, and humanitarian accords.
- Request that the eradication of illicit crops be by means that do not to cause environmental disasters.

Barrancabermeja, March 5, 2001 ❖

## Colombia Human Rights Network Spring 2001 National Tour

**Colombia's Untold Story:  
Civilian Voices From Conflict Zones**

**March 15 – April 13**

The Colombia Human Rights Network, in coordination with the U.S./Colombia Coordinating Office, will host its annual Spring Tour of Colombian civil society activists featuring the theme "Colombia's Untold Story - Civilian Voices from Conflict Zones," from March 15 to April 13, 2001. The tour's speakers are grassroots leaders Régulo Madero and Carlos Alberto Palacios, who will visit 9 cities across the United States to tell their stories of advocating for human rights and peace in Colombia. Régulo is the president of the regional human rights organization CREDHOS, and will discuss the complex conflict in Colombia, and the extreme difficulty and danger of working for human rights in the city of Barrancabermeja, hard-hit by violence (see article opposite). Carlos is a former priest and current organizer of the Putumayo Project for Peaceful Coexistence. He will address the impact of U.S. fumigation on human rights and the grassroots struggle for peace in Putumayo department, the area where U.S.-backed counternarcotics offensives began late last year.

The speakers will go to the following cities: Chicago, Washington D.C., New York, Boston, Santa Ana, Albuquerque, Seattle, Denver, and San Francisco. We hope that you will be able to join us in raising awareness about the human rights crisis in Colombia and the challenges faced by human rights defenders and peace activists. For more details, please contact the U.S./Colombia Coordinating Office:

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# WOLA Delegation in Putumayo told: “Stop the Fumigation!”

*by Joe Eldridge, Kay Spiritual Life Center, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Washington Office on Latin America. Joe traveled with the WOLA-led delegation in mid-February to Bogotá, Puerto Asís (Putumayo), and San José de Apartadó (Urabá region).*

FIFTEEN MAYORS FROM PUTUMAYO cannot have it wrong, especially when their views are echoed by other local officials, health care workers, human rights defenders and small farmers. During a recent visit to the region organized by WOLA (which included two members of Congress), dozens of local government officials, human rights and health workers, small farmers and community organizers gathered in Puerto Asís to vehemently deliver a message which they hoped would reach Washington: Stop the campaign of aerial fumigation!

Without warning on Dec. 19 of last year the US launched a massive aerial strike on coca cultivation. Thousands of hectares of coca have been destroyed, but according to many small growers collateral damage to food crops has been extensive. Indiscriminate fumigation has defoliated forests, killed cassava and plantain crops and threatened to pollute watersheds. The spraying also targeted farms of many who had signed an agreement with the government for manual eradication. According to procedures established by the Pastrana government, coca farmers participating in the government plan would be spared bombardment with toxic chemicals and receive technical and economic assistance. These social contracts have been ignored in the haste of the eradication efforts (see Washington Post, March 6, 2001).

The delegation heard moving testimonies about the growing costs of the aerial fumigation. In the municipality of San Miguel, the town had agreed to voluntary destruction of the coca plants, yet endured a month of defoliants dumped on their forests, rivers, farms and homes. The border with Ecuador, inhabited by indigenous tribes, and which had been declared off limits by the government, has had more than 90% of its land sprayed. The massive use of defoliants has disrupted thousands of poor families, destroyed farms and left a residue of potentially serious health consequences.

Both the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) and the paramilitary forces, now competing for control of the region, have at least theoretically agreed with the universal call for manual eradication. However the 24th Army Brigade, garrisoned in Putumayo, has been blocking manual eradication. The brigade also stands accused of human rights violations which has led to a suspension of cooperation with the United States. (The Leahy amendment to the Appropriations bill forbids U.S. military aid to units accused of human rights violations.) An investigation is under way and a renewal of Pentagon support is pending.

Community leaders, aware of the perils inherent in the cocaine industry, seemed genuinely interested in finding an economically viable alternative to coca. According to the governor of Putumayo, Ivan Gerardo Guerrero, the peasant farmers are

fearful of both the paramilitaries and the Farc guerrillas. According to Guerrero, if peasants denounce the paramilitaries they will wind up dead – same if they denounce the Farc. The growers are caught in the middle, fearful of becoming the latest statistic in the escalating conflict between “paras” and guerrillas or between the military and the guerrillas.

All the voices from Putumayo were unanimous about Washington’s reliance on force. Huey and Blackhawk helicopters are not the answer. The citizens of Putumayo believe that reliance on the Colombian military as a strategic ally in the fight against drugs will yield only more violence and death.

Regrettably not only is the lion’s share of US aid directed toward the military and the police, but that is the only aid in yet in evidence in Putumayo – or elsewhere. The economic assistance is lagging far behind – to date not one farmer reported having seen any economic or development aid.

Virtually everyone in Putumayo is sustained by coca. At present the growers have no incentives to move from the illicit to the licit economy. Without an accelerated and comprehensive approach to crop substitution and financial help, peasant farmers will have no choice but to move to other areas to resume cultivation of coca. While USAID is considering alternatives such as rubber, extensive cattle grazing, fish, medicinal plants, much more consultation and research will be required to determine both feasibility and sustainability.

Meanwhile the violence continues to escalate. Over the last several months the paramilitary armies have seized control of many of the productive areas of coca cultivation, by challenging the Farc. Like the Farc, the paramilitaries tax the cultivation, the processing and the marketing of coca products. On the other hand, sometimes they find it more efficient and profitable to vertically integrate, simply seizing control of all levels of production and trafficking. When asked about assigning blame for human rights violations, human rights workers (both governmental and nongovernmental) were quick to assert that the paramilitaries had become the most notorious offenders.

As more people are displaced from their farms and deprived of their livelihoods, they provide a recruiting bonanza for both the paramilitaries and the Farc. While many are conscripted against their will, hunger drives others into the ranks of the armed groups.

The heart and soul of Plan Colombia is the coca eradication effort in Putumayo. If the last several months are indicative, it is off to a rocky start. Unless there is a major policy adjustment, it is doomed to failure. The failure will not only be measured by grams of cocaine on U.S. streets. It will be measured by the number of innocent lives claimed in Colombia.❖

# Reflections on Returning to Colombia

by Adrian Jazmín Arroyave, human rights activist

“I ask you that we stop to ponder the grandeur to which we can still aspire if we dare to value life in another way. I ask that courage of us that situates us in the true dimension of the human being. All of us give in from time to time. But there is something that doesn’t err, and that is the conviction that only the values of the spirit can save us from this earthquake that threatens the human condition.”

*La Resistencia, Ernesto Sábato, p. 12*



MOVED TO EXPERIENCE A COLOMBIA that was new for me, I decided to go back after 13 years of living abroad. I went back for a diploma program in human rights and international humanitarian law, and, though it may seem silly, it was important for me to have had the opportunity to see and feel how people are living day to day in Colombia. Things as simple as riding a *buseta* to the University of Antioquia each day, and hearing *vallenatos* along the way; speaking with the man who sold me mangos at the corner of my house about what he thinks about the situation in Colombia; participating the last Tuesday of each month in the demonstration that women dressed in black hold at the Parque Berrío to protest all the violence; or simply hearing the professors at the university, people of great intellectual caliber, each specialized in different subjects. With them I learned the importance of knowing history, research skills, and the processes that have triggered this undeclared war. The first days were a sort of first take of what my stay would be like for the six months I spent in Colombia.

I studied the domestic law and international standards that should be taken into account in a country with so many conflicts as Colombia; these were useful for understanding not only the whole picture of destruction and pain that a war leaves in its wake, but also to see the work that civil society is doing so valiantly to build a social fabric with their voices, hands, projects, work, and tenderness; they are the face of the Colombian women and men who, with hope, struggle to keep from being dragged into the war, and who are seeking a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

It is known that Colombia is still a paradox when it comes to human rights, not only because it is one of the most stable democracies in Latin America, with a tradition of civilian, democratically-elected governments, but because behind that façade of stability hides a country with intense internal conflicts. The figures are chilling, with some 30,000 people a year dying from one or another of the forms of violence; most of those deaths, contrary to what is thought, are not caused by the political violence, but are the consequence of common crime and crime in the streets, but the political violence is fast worsening. Although successive governments have publicly committed to defending human rights, they have not done enough to afford citizens the minimal guarantees needed to be able to live in dignity.

And so the state is responsible when, by its omission, Colombian citizens are massacred, kidnapped, threatened, and displaced, without anyone to watch out for their interests, because in Colombia it is easy to perpetrate any of these crimes without the perpetrators being punished, for Colombia also has one of the highest rates of impunity in the world.

I was able to get a broader perspective on the different processes being built by citizens when I traveled to other regions, visiting their different experiences. For example, I went to Mogotes in Santander del Norte. This town has had a very interesting experience; its citizens formed a Constituent Assembly, with an operating team and an assembly of 250 community members accompanied by the diocese of San Gil, in Santander. Tired of the corruption of their mayors and since their last mayor was kidnapped by a guerrilla group, they decided to take control of the government. This process had to be monitored by the state and supported by the national and international community. In 1999, this led them to win the peace prize awarded in Colombia by a group of companies to acknowledge the efforts of people working for peace.

I also had an opportunity to accompany the Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres on a march to support the valiant work of the women of the Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) in the middle Magdalena region. The march set out from the city of Medellín to Barrancabermeja in Santander, 18 busses with approximately 800 women and men on an 8-hour journey to meet the women from other parts of the country who awaited us at the entry to the city to begin the march. When we arrived in the afternoon, the people were ready with their black dresses, representing the mourning and rejection of the different forms of violence besetting Colombia. Girls, boys, youths, women, men, with joyful music groups, colorful floats, and slogans that we shouted all along the way showed Barrancabermeja and the country that in Colombia civil society doesn't want more war, and is calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict, which takes an especially high toll on the civilian population.

The most difficult moment I experienced in Colombia was when I witnessed the forcible search by the Cuerpo Técnico de Investigaciones (judicial police) of the Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC), sparked by a phone call they supposedly received stating that a kidnapping was taking place there, which was false. At the time I was working as a volunteer at the Secretariat of the Red de Hermanamiento. That day, in last August, five members of IPC's human rights office received death threats by members of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, and because of that an emergency meeting of the Red de Hermanamiento was taking place at the IPC when the state agents arrived. I felt so powerless and such anguish when I saw the members of the CTI pointing their weapons, from outside, at those of us inside. It was a moment of great confusion, which, fortunately, didn't result in any deaths, but which left the message of the harassment to which human rights defenders are victim.

After living in Colombia the last six months, I returned to the United States surprised and impressed by the work of civil society, which leads me to conclude that the Colombian people rise above not only their rulers, but also the actors in the conflict, because they are the people who create life with new proposals, because they are capable of standing up and saying that they do not agree with the war and that they want to live in dignity. This is why it is essential for those of us Colombians who live abroad to take an active part supporting the processes that civil society is fostering in Colombia, and to call on the Colombian government to respect human rights and adopt policies conducive to social justice so that there can be a peaceful solution to the conflict.❖

## Phone Tapping in Medellín

WHAT HAS BEEN WIDELY KNOWN by human rights activists in Colombia and abroad for years was finally given national attention when it was discovered that the anti-kidnapping Police of Medellín had tapped the phones of over 170 NGOs, most of them human rights organizations. The story was broken by the Colombian newspaper El Espectador, which on February 16, 2001 reported that this revelation was the result of an investigation carried out by the Human Rights Unit and the Medellín Section of the Office of the Attorney General. The extent to which this type of illegal activity has been carried out throughout the country has yet to be established. It is also common practice for the Colombian Army to tap the phones of certain individuals and organizations. As one can imagine, countless individuals have been at risk because of these actions.❖

## 'Nunca Más' Colombia Report Documents Three Decades of Terror

ON NOVEMBER 28, 2000, the 'Nunca Más' or Never Again Colombia report was released. The report presents the results of a comprehensive study of human rights violations in Colombia from 1966 to 1998. Some 38,000 cases of human rights during this 32-year period were documented, with 99.6% of those crimes going unpunished.

The objective of the 'Nunca Más' report is to facilitate an end to impunity in Colombia. The documentation of crimes against humanity is one way to promote truth seeking and justice, and in turn can help to avoid the continuous reproduction of violence.

The database will serve many purposes, chief among them to provide accurate information regarding human rights violations to those in charge of overseeing an eventual peace process. Of equal importance is the report's contribution to creating a complete historical record of the extremely bloody civil conflict that has ravaged Colombia for the past four decades.

The 17 organizations responsible for the report are ASFADDES, Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo", Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Comisión Interfranciscana de Justicia, Paz y Reverencia con la Creación, Corporación Sembrar, CREDHOS, Reiniciar, CODEHSEL, Corporación Jurídica Libertad, CEBS, Corporación Humanidad Vigente, Fundación Manuel Cepeda, ANUC-UR, ANDAS, and Misioneros Claretianos de Colombia.❖

# ASFADDES Human Rights Workers Under Threat

*This article is based on a sign-on letter that 24 U.S.-based NGOs supported, calling on the Colombian government to guarantee the safety of the members of ASFADDES, dated February 22, 2001.*

The human rights organization known as the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES) has played a critical role in the promotion of human rights in Colombia and helping the family members of victims of political violence seek justice. They have worked for the last dozen years to make forced disappearance a crime officially on the books in Colombia, which was finally accomplished with the passage of a law criminalizing forced disappearance last year.

Since 1993, ASFADDES has been the victim of numerous threats, attacks and harassment. As a result of this mounting pressure and concern for the members' safety, ASFADDES has temporarily closed their doors since December of 2000.

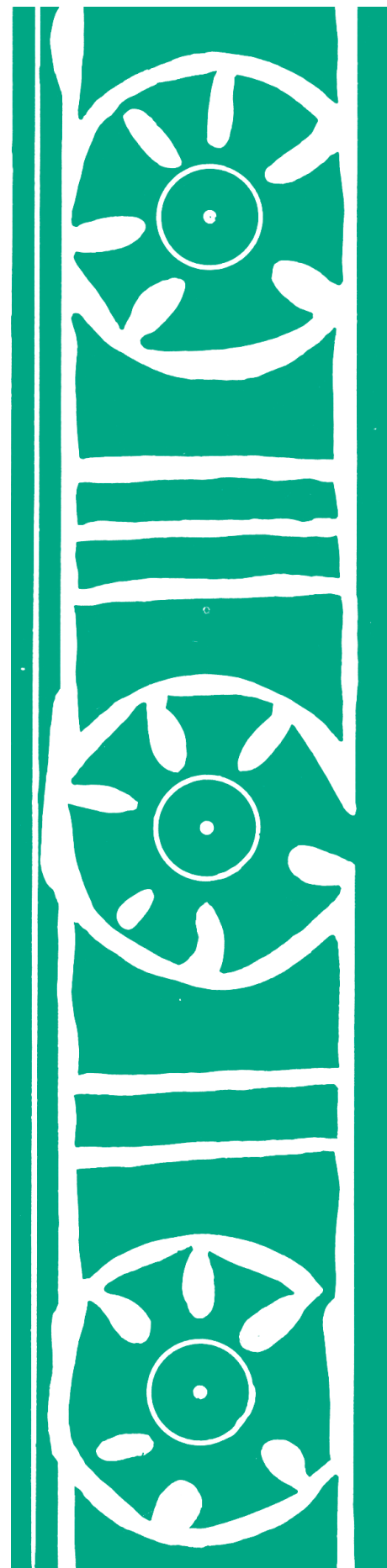
In November, the Medellín ASFADDES offices received numerous threatening phone calls and mail, and a member of the Popayán section of ASFADDES was reportedly being followed.

These threats follow serious and systematic attacks against the organization. On October 6, 2000, two members of the Medellín branch of ASFADDES, Angel Quintero and Claudia Patricia Monsalve, were disappeared. On September 30, three members of ASFADDES were declared military targets in a pamphlet published by Colombia's largest paramilitary group, the AUC. On July 11, Elizabeth Canas Cano, a member of the Barrancabermeja branch of ASFADDES, was murdered.

ASFADDES members are under particular threat because they are one of the few organizations to bring cases against members of Colombia's security forces domestically and internationally — before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights — often raising the profile of collusion between Colombia's security forces and the paramilitary groups.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ordered the Colombian government to provide special protective measures to ASFADDES members to ensure their safety. Certain measures of physical protection have been taken by the government, although ASFADDES asserts that these are not always carried out expeditiously. However, ASFADDES is extremely concerned that the Colombian government has not taken effective measures to investigate and prosecute the multiple cases of threats, harassment, murder and disappearance directed against ASFADDES members, and thus ensure that this violence will come to an end.

The Colombian government must take effective actions to vigorously investigate those who plan and perpetrate attacks against the ASFADDES members, and to prosecute those responsible in civilian courts. The government must also ensure that the ASFADDES offices receive the proper protection. These measures should be taken in the context of a broader call to all the armed actors to respect the legitimate work of local, regional, national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as to abide by international humanitarian and human rights law. ❖





# An S.O.S. From Cauca and Nariño

*excerpted and translated from "Hoy Lanzamiento Campaña Nacional e Internacional S.O.S. Por las Organizaciones Sociales y las Comunidades de los Departamentos de Cauca y Nariño," Bogotá, 1 de Febrero de 2001*

Over the past year, paramilitary forces have expanded their operations notably not only in Putumayo, in the Colombian Amazon but also in, the departments of Cauca and Nariño. On February 1, 2001, in Bogotá, several prominent Colombian human rights organizations signed on to an SOS Campaign on behalf of the social organizations and communities of this southwestern region. The dramatic escalation of paramilitary threats against the social organizations in these two departments is an integral part of the paramilitary strategy in the region.

The origins of the paramilitary terror in the departments of Cauca and Nariño date back to the November 1999 mass mobilizations of over 40,000 residents of the southwestern departments of Cauca and Nariño. A multitude of social, unionist, peasant, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian organizations took part in a 26-day blockade of the Pan American highway in an effort to convince the Colombian government to take concrete actions to solve the grave social problems of poverty and to remedy its neglect of the region.

Because of the magnitude of the movement, the government was forced to negotiate with the protesters, and signed an agreement not only to address the socio-economic demands of the people but also to guarantee the security of the population as they work towards these objectives.

During the nonviolent protest, though, various government officials, including former Interior Minister Néstor Humberto Martínez, had publicly declared that the social mobilization had been promoted by the guerrillas, and that the top leadership of these organizations were infiltrated by members of the armed insurgency. The obvious result of these tendentious statements was to put those people involved in grave and immediate danger of retaliation by the paramilitaries.

Since May 2000, the paramilitaries' response has been strong and bloody. The Western Block of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries, which is made up of the Calima, Pacífico, Farallones and Paez fronts, made their presence of terror known in the municipalities of Cauca. Approximately 200 people have been assassinated; four people have been disappeared; the mayors of Almaguer, Bolívar, Balboa, Caloto and Rosas have been threatened; and some 7,000 Afro-Colombian people have been displaced (including 700 Afro-Colombian families and 450 indigenous families from the Delicias reserve near Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca). In the zone of the Alto Haya, nearly 5,000 people have been unable to leave the area because of threats, and 50 displaced families went to Buenaventura. Some 50 teachers have also been threatened in several different municipalities.

All these events have been reported to the Colombian government by numerous social and human rights organizations, yet to date, the government has not taken any action against these paramilitary groups. For example, in a December 1, 2000 letter, the human rights organizations that signed on to this SOS document asked the national government to take special measures to guarantee the safety of the people in the department of Cauca. No response was ever received from the government, and the terror continued in December 2000 and January 2001. Petitions have also been sent to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to seek protection for these threatened communities.

The situation in the department of Nariño is equally worrisome, since there have been several massacres and death threats against the peasant and Afro-Colombian communities that took part in the November 1999 mobilization and blockade of the Pan American highway.

Concern over the situation in the departments of Cauca and Nariño is mounting since they are slated for fumigation campaigns as part of Plan Colombia. Even more unsettling is the escalation and strengthening of the paramilitary strategy in the region. Therefore, the governors of Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo, Huila, and Tolima are determined to find a peaceful alternative to Plan Colombia.

The human rights organizations call on all kinds of NGOs and the general public, both in Colombia and internationally, to help develop a campaign to urge the Colombian government:

- (1) to protect the human rights of all the people of Cauca and Nariño;
- (2) to investigate and prosecute in civilian courts those responsible for human rights violations, especially members of the armed forces accused of having links to paramilitary groups;
- (3) to stop the implementation of Plan Colombia, because it will intensify the humanitarian crisis in the region; and
- (4) to urge the administration of President Pastrana to carry out and implement all the agreements reached by the governors of the South, including Cauca and Nariño.

MINGA, CODHES, CINEP, Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, and the Corporación Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo" ❖

# Human Rights in the Pacific Coast Region: An Interview with Carlos Rosero

*Carlos Alfonso Rosero is one of the founding members of the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN, or Black Communities Process) and a leading protagonist in the struggle for collective appropriation of traditional territories of the Pacific coastal rainforest by Afro-Colombian communities. The PCN has focused on the recognition of the cultural, ethnic and collective territorial rights of Afro-Colombians and seeks to challenge western modernization and development efforts in the vast rainforest region of the Colombian Pacific coast. In February and March he visited New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston and Montreal, in a visit supported by the Colombia Human Rights Committee of Washington, D.C., the Colombia Media Project of New York, and Colombia Vive of Boston, all members of the Colombia Human Rights Network, plus the American Friends Service Committee and Global Exchange.*

**Colombia Human Rights Committee:** What is the general human rights situation for the Afro-Colombian community in the Pacific Coast region?

**Carlos Rosero:** Historically in the Pacific there has been a constant violation of the social, economic, and cultural rights of our people, which can be seen in an infant mortality of 110 per 1,000 live births; a \$500 to \$600 per capita annual income, compared to the \$1,500 to \$1,700 national average; only 2 of every 100 Afro-Colombians go on to college; and health care is poor or non-existent. The situation has become even worse because of the armed conflict. Threats, selective killings, massacres, and displacement used to be limited to areas such as northern Chocó, but this pattern has now spread throughout the rest of the Pacific coast. Displacement by development projects is one of the biggest and most systematic human rights violations we face. The Afro-Colombian population is especially vulnerable because our political, social, cultural, civil and collective rights continue to be violated. There is also no representation of Afro-Colombians in the different levels of government. The national government's interest is the interest of a few rich elites, and those interests are hurting our communities, the environment, and our cultural rights.

**CHRC:** To what extent do the paramilitaries have a presence in the region?

**CR:** In the case of the Pacific, the paramilitaries made their presence felt in the north in Chocó in areas such as in San Juan, Quibdó, and Bajo Atrato, but they are also present in Buenaventura, Naya, and Nariño in general. They are in strategic zones in the Pacific, areas through which people have to pass. In Buenaventura paramilitaries control the highways and the port, from where 60% of Colombia's exports are shipped. That area is also key for cocaine shipments. Tumaco is a similar case; it is the port closest to Ecuador. There seems to be a major connection in the Pacific coast between large development projects, displacement, and the paramilitaries.

**CHRC:** How severe is the problem of displacement for the Afro-Colombian population?

**CR:** It is one of the biggest problems we face. Recently the Colombian government acknowledged that 30% of the 1.9 million people internally displaced in Colombia are Afro-Colombians. Two cases come to mind when I think of displacement in the Pacific coast. Seven thousand people from over 25 communities in Suárez and Buenos Aires were displaced late last

year, despite the fact that various NGOs had informed the government of an imminent attack since September. Five thousand residents were trapped in the area because movement was restricted, and a blockade of food and medicine made the situation all the more difficult. The paramilitaries controlled that area for a period of months. What is going on in Santander, in the middle Magdalena region, is also happening in the Pacific coast, the killings and the displacement, except that the indiscriminate assassinations are targeting large numbers of Afro-Colombians. The situation is so bad in Cauca that we asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to issue measures to protect the civilian population in that region.

On May 11, 2000, in Valle del Cauca, there was a major displacement because of a paramilitary massacre. In June, a 40 point plan was made to stave off future attacks, but there have been 8 massacres since that date. The government has done nothing. Even the Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo), responsible for responding to early warnings, has not done its job. Two years ago, before the invasion of the paramilitaries, the Secretary of Government for Valle del Cauca had labeled the population guerrilla collaborators, and the Army warned the people that the paramilitaries were coming. The Army has a very strong presence in the area, and soldiers often wear ski masks, which are generally worn by the paramilitaries. The army would question children about the community and the location of people, clearly putting those children at risk, which violates many norms of international humanitarian law. The other famous displacement case is that of Río Sucio. The people of the area say that the army and the paras worked together in that attack. Displacement of Afro-Colombians is a general phenomena. Refugees crossing the borders into Ecuador and Panama face major problems, especially since they are repatriated without guarantees for their safety. In November, 25,000 Colombians crossed the border to Ecuador; a large percentage were Afro-Colombians.

**CHRC:** How strong are the links between the army and the paramilitaries in the Pacific coast and what sort of evidence is there to prove this sort of collusion?

**CR:** The names on the lists that the paramilitaries carry are given to them by the Colombian Army. The threatening of our communities by the army, especially by the men in ski masks, is another example. In the May massacre that I mentioned before, the cars that the paramilitaries came in drove in through one military check point and left through another, without ever



being stopped. This is all very difficult to explain. There are just too many strange coincidences. This phenomenon is seen throughout the country. We see this as a strategy used by the military. Many times they are one and the same.

**CHRC:** What do you think of Plan Colombia, especially the U.S. military aid package?

**CR:** Plan Colombia is not a Colombian plan. It was drawn up by the Colombian government and by the officials in Washington. There was no consultation with the people of Colombia, especially the Afro-Colombians. This plan will dramatically escalate the conflict in Colombia. It will regionalize the conflict and it supports unsustainable economic development projects that will only hurt our communities and the environment. The fumigation alone will cause terrible ecological and human damage. This is a strategy that has not worked, and that must be re-evaluated very critically. Lastly, I am very suspicious of a plan in which they give us money to buy helicopters from the United States. It's a kind of business deal at the highest levels, a deal, though, that has a human cost. This war is not hurting the real people in charge: the money launderers, the chemical manufacturers, the bankers, and the corrupt politicians.

**CHRC:** What do you think the people in the U.S. can do to help the people in Colombia?

**CR:** First, they can inform the public about the conflict in Colombia. Secondly, there needs to be more international accompaniment of communities in danger. Thirdly, people need to understand the external consequences of U.S. policy towards Colombia. There is much to be done. U.S. citizens should go to Colombia and visit, and take back what they experience, to change the destructive policies of the United States. ❖

## Afro-Colombian National Speaking Tour: The Right to Life, Peace, and Dignity

February 22 – March 9, 2001

The Colombia Human Rights Committee of Washington, D.C. and Global Exchange took the lead in sponsoring this multi-city Afro-Colombian tour. It brought together a wide array of prominent Afro-Colombian leaders, such as Carlos Rosero, one of the founding members of the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN); Oscar Gamboa, the Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Mayors Federation, and Luis Gilberto Murillo, the former Governor of Chocó. Also part of the delegation were Aureliano Ramírez Zúñiga, mayor of Timbiquí; Clemente Estupiñán, mayor of Guapi, and Martín Tobar, chairman of the city council of Buenaventura. Numerous Afro-Colombian media representatives came as well.

The tour stopped in New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Boston and then in Canada. The Afro-Colombian delegation was extremely pleased with the opportunity to speak about their situation and by the great reception with which they were greeted.

While in Washington, D.C., the delegation testified before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; had meetings with representatives of the World Bank, the Pan American Health Organization, the State Department, and the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Colombian Ambassador; they hosted panel discussions at Congress, the University of Maryland, American University, and the International Human Rights Law Group; in addition they attended the Colombia Steering Committee, had a roundtable breakfast at the Inter-American Dialogue, and had an interview with the Washington Post.

Overall, the main goals of the tour were achieved; these were to raise the awareness in the United States about the humanitarian crisis in Colombia, and its impact on the Afro-Colombian community, which comprises 28% of Colombia's population, and to foster effective ties of solidarity between Americans and Afro-Colombians for the purpose of conducting informed coordinated action in the future. This tour then is the beginning of a long and arduous process for the Afro-Colombians in their search for justice, peace, and equality, but one which at least now cannot be ignored by the Colombian government. They have made their voices heard.

To learn more about this tour and how to get involved in future work on behalf of the Afro-Colombians, please contact:

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# El Chocó: The African Heart of Colombia

by Luis Gilberto Murillo, former Governor of Chocó and CHRC member

*The author is the former Governor of the department (state or province) of El Chocó in Colombia. He was forced to abandon his political career and seek refuge in the United States following his kidnaping by paramilitaries and threats on his family. He was the youngest person to ever win a gubernatorial election in his country. Now in exile in the U.S., he is an outspoken Afro-Colombian advocate for the environment, the rights of ethnic minority groups, and peace in Colombia. The following is excerpted from a speech given at The American Museum of Natural History in New York, on February 23, 2001.*

First of all, I want to thank the American Museum of Natural History, the Colombia Media Project and The Caribbean Cultural Center for this opportunity to share with all of you some Afro-Colombian experiences, to learn about the Chocó, and to become more aware of the current conditions and challenges that the Afro-Colombian community is facing.

Chocó, like the rest of the Pacific Coast, is a land of great contrast between immense poverty and enormous wealth; between economic exploitation and cultural development, between Bogotá's historical neglect and Chocó's autonomous development efforts. Colombia's Black minority comprises about 36% to 40% of the nation's population, but officially is only recognized as 26%. This means that our population is about 11 million of the total 42 million population. This is the second largest population of people of African descent in all of Latin America, after Brazil.

African slavery in Colombia began in the first decade of the 16th century. By the 1520s, Africans were being imported into Colombia steadily to replace the rapidly declining native American population. Africans were forced to work in gold mines, on sugar cane plantations, cattle ranches, and large haciendas. African labor was essential in all the regions of Colombia, even until modern times. African workers pioneered the extracting of alluvial gold deposits and the growing of sugar cane in the states of Chocó, Antioquia, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Nariño in western Colombia.

In eastern Colombia, near the cities of Vélez, Cúcuta, Socorro, and Tunja, Africans manufactured textiles in commercial mills. Emerald mines, outside Bogotá, were wholly dependent upon African laborers. Also, other sectors of the Colombian economy like tobacco, cotton, artisanry and domestic work would have been impossible without African sweat. Slavery in Colombia was as unjust and cruel as in other places in the Americas. In pre-abolition Colombian society, many Afro-Colombian slaves fought for their freedom as soon as they arrived in Colombia. It is clear that there were strong free African towns called palenques, where Africans could live as cimarrones, that is, Africans who escaped from their oppressors. Some historians consider that Chocó was a very big palenque, with a large population of cimarrones, especially in the areas of the Baudó River. Very popular cimarrón leaders like Benkos Biojo and Barule fought for freedom. Black people played key roles in the independence struggle against Spain. Historians note that three of every five soldiers in Simón Bolívar's army were African. Not only that, we also participated at all levels of military and political life.

Slavery was not abolished until 1851, and even after emancipation, the life of the Afro-Colombians was very difficult. Afro-Colombians were forced to live in jungle areas as a mechanism of self-protection. There, we learned to have a harmonious relationship with the jungle environment and to share the territory with Colombia's indigenous communities.

From 1851, the Colombian State promoted the ideology of mestizaje, or miscegenation. This whitening of the African population was an attempt by the Colombian government to minimize or, if possible, totally eliminate any traces of African or indigenous descent among the Spaniards. So in order to maintain their cultural traditions, many Africans and indigenous peoples went deep into the isolated jungles. Afro-Colombians and indigenous people were, and continue to be, the targets of the armed actors who want to dis-

From 1851, the Colombian State promoted the ideology of mestizaje, or miscegenation. ....in order to maintain their cultural traditions, many Africans and indigenous peoples went deep into the isolated jungles.



place them in order to take their lands for sugar cane plantations, for coffee and banana plantations, for mining and wood exploitation, and so forth.

In 1945 the department of El Chocó was created; it was the first predominantly Black political-administrative division. El Chocó gave Black people the possibility of building a Black territorial identity and some autonomous decision-making power. Very powerful people in the national government, though, were determined to see the destruction of the new political-administrative unit. Therefore, El Chocó was not given very much attention by the national government, and was instead characterized by a constant pattern of displacement and natural resource exploitation, which continues to this day.

In the 1970s, there was a major influx of Afro-Colombians into the urban areas in search of greater economic and social opportunities for their children. This led to an even larger group of urban poor in the marginal areas of the big cities like Cali, Medellín and Bogotá. Right now, most Afro-Colombians are living in the urban areas. Only around 25%, or 3 million people, are based in rural areas, compared to 75%, or 9 million people in the urban zones. Not until 1991, after a very strong popular struggle, did the new

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Colombian Constitution give us the right to collective ownership of traditional Pacific coastal lands, and special cultural development protections. But this important legal instrument has not been enough to completely address our social and developmental needs.

Access to education, health care, and countless other basic human needs continues to be extremely limited due to governmental neglect and discrimination. In addition to those serious social problems, the cruelty of the armed conflict has now reached our region, making this situation even more unbearable. We are now the military targets of the armed actors, especially the paramilitaries, who are committing most of the massacres against our population and are displacing them from their traditional ancestral lands in rural and urban areas, to defend their economic interests. The massacres have become a common occurrence in El Chocó and the Pacific Region. There many examples of this situation. We can see what is happening in Juradó, Río Sucio, Bojaya, Quibdó, the San Juan River, the Naya River, Raposo River, Buenaventura, Tumaco, Barbacoas, and elsewhere.

In Colombia right now, there are 1.9 million people internally displaced by the violence, the majority Afro-Colombians. El Chocó in particular and the Pacific region generally are suffering the militarization and paramilitarization of their lands, accompanied by a strong process of deculturation. The armed actors are not permitting the traditional right to active neutrality, and are threatening our cultural identity, and our historical social structure of peace and solidarity.

I think the most important challenge for Afro-Colombians today is to build a strong alternative movement, one that strives for the inclusion of all Colombians, allowing all cultural expressions to have the same opportunities for self-development without violence, and without any kind of discrimination, is vital. Territorial autonomy, and the possibility for indigenous and Black people to think and plan our futures by ourselves, is absolutely necessary. We the people of Chocó and the Pacific coast consider ourselves the African heart of Colombia. Colombia and all of Latin America cannot deny their African roots. To the contrary, they should be proud of those roots! ❖



# Critical Situation in Cali, Valle del Cauca: Interview with CSPP

*The Colombia Human Rights Committee interviewed Marta Ascuntar and Fernando Sanchez from the Cali branch of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP) about the situation of human rights in the Valle del Cauca department. Valle del Cauca is one of Colombia's southern regions that has been particularly affected by the armed conflict in the last year as paramilitary forces opened new fronts in this department.*

*The Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners is Colombia's oldest human rights non-governmental organization; it provides legal counsel and defense work for prisoners who are social activists or members of guerrilla groups, while promoting and protecting the rights of political prisoners.*



"FARC & ELN: Kidnappers and Terrorists Guerrillas are Assassins"

This photograph was taken in May of 2000 in the Colombian city of Cali. This sign (as well as others) were reportedly placed on some of Cali's major avenues by groups that are openly against left-wing opposition and are suspected supporters of paramilitary activity". Other messages included (translated): "Death Penalty to those who are corrupt and kidnappers - If YOU think that you are not a part of the conflict, you are an ACCOMPLICE to it" and "Our strength is being felt".

Photo taken by CSPP - Cali

**CHRC:** How has the situation in Valle del Cauca changed in the last four months?

**MA:** In the last month, the situation has worsened, mostly because of the intensification of paramilitary attacks. This began with the formation of the AUC's Calima Bloc in late 1998, and through the course of 1999, five different paramilitary fronts were created in Valle del Cauca.

Their presence has made the situation of internal displacement and massacres, which at one time was limited to the center and north of the department, spread to the entire Valle del Cauca, and even intensified in the south since last May. Currently, paramilitaries are permanently present on the border between Valle del Cauca and Cauca and have a strong presence in the Farallones Mountains and the Pacific Coast.

**FS:** The human rights situation in Valle del Cauca has worsened immensely. Although the actual number of deaths from killings and massacres that occurred in this past year has decreased slightly, there are new worrisome trends in the conduct of the paramilitary groups, which Marta has already mentioned. Specifically, these trends are the paramilitary's new strategies of control and territorial power in Valle del Cauca's rural areas in the southern, Farallones, and Pacific coastal regions.

**CHRC:** From your point of view, what are the primary factors that have contributed to this change?

**MA:** Various conditions have built up to this point. The principal element is, of course, the growing presence of the paramilitary group and its direct implications. But the worsening of Cali's situation is not due to the paramilitary presence alone. For example, the social crisis facing Cali in terms of mounting unemployment, which has increased about 40% this year alone, is not necessarily because of paramilitary actions.

One must first understand why paramilitary groups exist in Valle del Cauca. Their presence can be attributed primarily to the support they receive from members of the Colombian military. This support has peaked because of incidents such as "La María" Church kidnapping in mid-1999 and the Kilometer 18 kidnapping late last year. These two events triggered strengthened relations between the army and the paramilitary, and thus the massive presence of these paramilitary groups.

Not only has the direct collaboration between paramilitaries and the military been a deteriorating factor. One must also consider the tacit approval of certain sectors of Valle's civil society. These sectors accept the paramilitary presence and do not take a stance against the paramilitaries' killings and massacres of peasants and other marginal groups. Other conditions also contribute to the presence of paramilitary groups. Valle del Cauca is a very industrial region, including many megaprojects with foreign investment. These projects are linked to the interests of landowners, which leads to the violent expropriation of land and so to many of the crimes against peasants.

**FS:** The paramilitary phenomenon, very subtly supported by certain civil and governmental sectors, is largely driven by economic interests of these groups. This is especially evident when one sees the connection between paramilitary presence and megaprojects. The inhabitants of the areas being designated for these megaprojects are threatened by paramilitary groups, and peasants are either killed or displaced. Development and modernization take place because of bloodshed. Those peasants who remain are threatened and

harassed, until they too are forced to leave or succumb through the pressure from paramilitary groups to collaborate with them by terrorizing the population, blocking their roads, or other means. This occurs especially in the southern Valle municipalities, by the border with Cauca.

The government has also fostered conditions for an intensified paramilitary presence. The media portrays the armed forces as heroic and in control, exemplified by the cases of the two massive kidnappings, which is aimed at keeping the population from seeing their negative side. Consequently, members of the armed forces will not be questioned about their direct or indirect support to paramilitary groups. Accordingly, whoever questions the armed forces and their support for the paramilitaries—including union leaders, social activists, and human rights defenders—are immediately categorized as being against the control and order imposed by the armed forces and the state.

Cali's middle- and upper-class population, supported by the business elite, the Catholic Church and the local authorities, are factors for an increased paramilitary presence, as they protest and hold demonstrations against guerrilla acts, but never once denounce the massacres perpetrated by paramilitaries. They go so far as to place banners in various places of the city where they praise the members of the military, criticize the peace process and condemn the guerrilla groups, all the while never mentioning the paramilitaries. These sectors also control the media, where they disseminate similar views.

**CHRC:** In a nutshell, what are the critical current events in Valle del Cauca?

**MA:** Well, all attacks and incidents that stem from paramilitary presence are critical. Yet, to me what is critical in most cases is that there are no hard-hitting actions by the armed forces or police that indicate they are fighting the paramilitaries. In fact, it seems that these paramilitary attacks stem from inside the armed forces.

I find particularly worrisome the continual killings and massacres currently taking place in the Farallones; along the border between Valle del Cauca and Cauca, especially in the municipalities of Timba, Buenos Aires, and Santander in Cauca, which borders southern Valle; and along the main roads of Valle. Many killings occur on the different roads, no exact casualty figures are given, because there is often no precise way to track these deaths.

An especially worrisome trend is the many threats against union leaders. The AUC has threatened the lives of all of the CUT's main representatives in Valle del Cauca. Other unions have been pinpointed by the paramilitaries and are also under threat. On January 14, a unionized worker in the public utilities sector was killed, creating an environment of tension and despair.

There have also been many other incidents, but there is another one which I find particularly worrisome, a disappearance last month. In December, a lawyer for political prisoners, Fernando Cruz Peña, was disappeared, apparently by police members of the SIIJIN [police intelligence]. We still have no word as to his whereabouts.

Finally, I must mention the prison situation, as this is the setting where the Committee works. There have been many

confrontations between common criminals and inmates who belong to paramilitary factions and those who are members of guerrilla groups. This has made our work very difficult. On December 2, 2000, two political prisoners were killed by paramilitaries in the prisons; they order execution-style killings, and many others are threatened.

**CHRC:** What measures are human rights defenders and social activists taking to address this situation?

**MA:** As I mentioned earlier, there is really a very strong sense of tension and despair. Most people have responded by leaving Cali, especially the union leaders. There really has not been an opportunity to develop a strategy with the unions, as they had to cease all their activities completely. This month [January 2001] people are starting to begin their work again, but accompanied, of course, by great fear.

**FS:** Human rights defenders and social activists lodge formal complaints with government authorities about the threats against them. We are trying to obtain protection from the Colombian government, as well as from international organizations such as the OAS. Yet there is still a high degree of impunity for paramilitary acts, and not much done to protect us.

As if this was not enough, we cannot make our situation public through demonstrations or protests because of legal repression exercised by the security forces. If we were to publicly protest our situation, we'd risk being arrested.

**CHRC:** What has been the reaction of local and departmental authorities to the situation faced by human rights defenders and social activists?

**MA:** There has no reaction whatsoever. For the governing authorities in Valle del Cauca, human rights defenders and union leaders are equal to guerrilla members. This has actually been said publicly to our faces. The authorities have not even limited themselves to merely making some sort of verbal commitment to us – they really are not at all willing to acknowledge the seriousness of the human rights situation in Valle del Cauca.

**FS:** The current positions being taken publicly by the government with the support of the upper class and the Church suggest that next year there will be many acts of the dirty war on a scale not yet seen in Valle. We know that they will attack and eliminate anyone they consider an enemy of the order they have imposed. In fact, a new military commander of the Third Brigade actually stated that they will fight what he called "the human rights lie that the subversive groups produce to lower the army's morale".

**MA:** We are asking the Ministry of Interior and the government to fulfill the promises their representatives have previously made to us in regarding protection. Even so, the Ministry has not yet implemented its agreements with us, in particular with the union leaders. And as for the Committee, the only thing the Ministry of Interior has done for our protection is to provide one cellular phone and money for a personal transportation system that never comes when scheduled. ❖

# FACT SHEET

## Forced Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops: *A Reply to the State Department*

Feb. 9, 2001

On January 17, 2001, The U.S. State Department's Bureau for Western Hemisphere Affairs published its Fact Sheet: The Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, to respond to the many questions raised about the herbicide used for aerial spraying in Colombia. The U.S. State Department publishes these Fact Sheets as a matter of protocol, when an issue related to U.S. foreign policy raises controversy or becomes the object of open debate, as has been the case with regard to glyphosate and the other ingredients present in the fumigation formulas applied in Colombia.

In response to this Fact Sheet, we the undersigned organizations drafted this Counter Fact Sheet, in which we reply to each question put forward by the U.S. State Department by supplying a response more in keeping with the reality of fumigation. This policy, imposed by the U.S. on producer countries, is part of a supply reduction strategy that disregards the damages that aerial spraying causes both to the environment and to the livelihood of the peasants inhabiting the areas fumigated.

Arguing that glyphosate, when applied in the dosages recommended, can be "less harmful than aspirin," the U.S. government justifies using the herbicide on illicit crops. However, there is evidence that herbicide concentrations much higher than the ones recommended are being applied in Colombia, and that monitoring and control bodies are failing to react against this violation of safety guidelines. Glyphosate is also not sprayed alone. The Fact Sheet does not make a single reference to the fact that commercial fumigation formulas in Colombia mix glyphosate with other ingredients, thus modifying its properties. For us, any discussion centering exclusively on glyphosate is a sham, since the problem is not the herbicide in itself but its association with potentially much more toxic substances, about which no information is supplied and no reliable studies regarding their safety margins exist. In this respect, we would like to call attention to a report, also prepared by the U.S. State Department, released on January 23, 2001 and entitled: Report on the Effects on Human Health and Safety of Herbicides Used in the Colombian Aerial Spray Program. This report specifically mentions the presence of two other ingredients in the spray formula applied in Colombia at present. According to this report, apart from glyphosate today's formula contains two adjuvants (Cosmoflux-411F y Cosmo-In-D), which are manufactured in Colombia. These adjuvants are briefly described as "inert ingredients". There are no toxicological studies, however, regarding the effects of mixing the Cosmoflux-411F surfactant with pesticides. In fact, incorporating these two adjuvants into the current formula was a decision taken with complete disregard for the control mechanisms needed to reach such decisions. Moreover, the report fails to mention that the commercial formula Roundup Ultra contains other ingredients besides glyphosate and the two adjuvants.

The aim of this Counter Fact Sheet is to lay bare the contradictions existing between the technical arguments put forth by the U.S. government in favor of chemical spraying, and the reality of what fumigation represents for the areas affected by it. Today, individuals and communities alike are filing a growing number of complaints as direct consequences of aerial spraying. Thus it is important to promote debate around an issue in which many interests are at stake. These interests are being advanced at the cost of the health of the local population and the regional environment, both already seriously affected by drug production and processing. We call for the immediate suspension of aerial spraying and we adhere to Paz Colombia's proposal to create, as soon as possible, an independent and international commission of experts dedicated to thoroughly evaluating the antidrug policy as it is implemented in Colombia, especially right now when the aerial fumigation program is being intensified in Putumayo department, as part of Plan Colombia.

### **State Department Fact Sheet:**

[http://www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/colombia/fs\\_010117\\_faqs.html](http://www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/colombia/fs_010117_faqs.html)

"Report on the Effects on Human Health and Safety of Herbicides Used in the Colombian Aerial Spray Program,"

<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid/012301.htm>

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You can read the Counter Fact Sheet, and much more on U.S.-backed fumigation programs in Colombia and elsewhere, at [www.usfumigation.org](http://www.usfumigation.org)

To find out how you can get involved in a grass-roots coalition effort to stop the fumigation, contact Amazon Alliance, tel (202)785-3334, fax (202)785-3335, [amazon@amazonalliance.org](mailto:amazon@amazonalliance.org) ❖



# Colombian NGOs Call for Further UN Action

*With a united voice, 56 Colombian non-governmental and social organizations in a letter to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights 57th session. The organizations supported the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights in Colombia's (OUNHCHR) report (E/CN.4/2000/8) that "human rights have not been given sufficiently high-priority treatment by the Government, nor have international recommendations been followed." (par. 168). The organizations' correspondence also included recommendations to the Commission. Following are excerpts of the letter:*

The OUNHCHR has adequately fulfilled its dual mandate, yet the Colombian Government continues to disregard its recommendations, resulting in continued deterioration of the human rights and international humanitarian law situation.

Regarding the deaths and disappearances for which the alleged perpetrators are known, 79.95% are attributed to government agents: 2.44% directly (29 victims) and 77.51% indirectly through paramilitary groups, (920 victims). Guerrilla groups are purportedly the perpetrators of 20.05% of these cases (238 victims). (Colombian Commission of Jurists' (CCJ) Data Bank.)

The population subjected to forced displacement has continued to rise as a result of the escalated armed conflict and, on occasion, in efforts to facilitate the completion of large-scale projects. It is estimated that over 300,000 people were displaced in 2000, while government policies have been inadequate to prevent the phenomenon and take care of victims' needs. (Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement.)

"Plan Colombia", which was approved by the United States Congress, will intensify internal confrontations and increase human rights and humanitarian law violations, as is already the case in the Putumayo region.

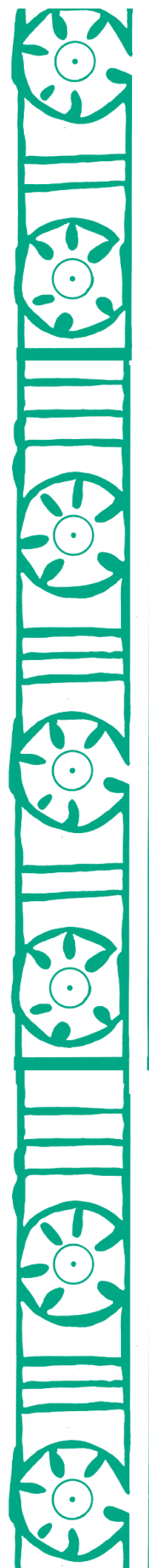
The security forces have admitted that they do not confront paramilitary groups. A Ministry of Defense report states that results of efforts against paramilitary groups "can hardly be proportional due to the fact that guerrilla groups attack and confront Security Forces ..., self-defense groups shy away from actions against the forces of law and order and have a policy of non-confrontation, which yields fewer opportunities to cause casualties and captures among their ranks." ("La Fuerza Pública y los Derechos Humanos en Colombia", March 2000.) Further verification is provided in the High Commissioner's third report on Colombia, which states, "This Office has been witness to statements by high-ranking Army Officers that paramilitary groups do not threaten constitutional security and consequently, it is not the Army's responsibility to combat them."

The signatory organizations support efforts favoring a negotiated solution to armed conflict. The quest for peace must go hand-in-hand with a serious human rights policy, which the government does not have at the present time. This policy must guarantee victims' rights to truth, reparation and just sanctions for responsible parties. We demand respect from the armed participants for the rights of non-combatants, as well as signing of humanitarian agreements.

Consequently, we ask this Commission to do the following:

- Based on the High Commissioner's report, vigorously show your deep concern for the human rights crisis in Colombia, as well as for repeated breaches of recommendations made.
- Strengthen OUNHCHR's mandate in Colombia by ensuring adequate financing, supporting its work and urging the Colombian government to follow its recommendations.
- Ask the High Commissioner to present its report on Colombia to the United Nations General Assembly.
- Name a Special Rapporteur for Colombia as a complementary mechanism to support the OUNHCHR to help ensure compliance with international recommendations.
- Make a special call to countries providing military aid to Colombia so that such aid not be used to violate human rights and, that a condition thereto be compliance with repeated United Nations recommendations.
- Decide on all of the foregoing through a Resolution, due to the lack of cooperation by the Colombian government, as seen in its repeated breaches of international recommendations.

Bogotá, Colombia, December 2000 ❖



## U'wa Struggle Continues

The U'wa indigenous people continue their peaceful struggle against the Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum, which began its seven-month exploratory drilling phase in early November 2000. The situation on the ground at the drillsite has become extremely militarized.

On September 30, 2000, the U'wa reported that a military escort of 3,000-4,000 soldiers accompanied OXY's convoy of more than 80 trucks transporting drilling equipment from the town of Saravena. As of February 9, 2001, U'wa representatives noted that there were still around 2,000 soldiers in the vicinity. Twenty-five U'wa continued to maintain their vigil and they reported that the situation is fairly stable. They have not reported any current mistreatment, but the U'wa still want to mobilize to block any further encroachment of their territory, and are still desperately seeking funds to do so.

The international campaign in the support of the U'wa people has had some success. As of a result of some 75 protests worldwide, Fidelity Investment dumped over 60% of its overall holdings in Occidental, representing \$400 million dollars, or the equivalent of 18 million shares. The largest single shareholder is now Sanford Bernstein & Co., which controls 53 million shares, valued at more than \$1.1 billion.

In December, Roberto Pérez, President of the U'wa Traditional Authority, visited the San Francisco offices of Sanford Bernstein to deliver a letter demanding that Sanford divest from Occidental.

Following is a communication from the U'wa Traditional Authority:  
November 22, 2000

Once again, the U'wa people reject the enslaving attitude of Occidental Petroleum, which continues to disregard the sovereignty and legitimacy of the U'wa, a millennial people, by allowing agents of the multinational Occidental Petroleum to trample our Ancestral Territory.

For our people, it is ominous and abusive that the men of Occidental, along with the Colombian government, program actions that injure and violate the cultural and territorial principles of the U'wa and of the campesinos who are our brothers who come with impartiality to support our just cause, therefore:

The U'wa people continue with our strong position against exploitation of our resources in our ancestral and sacred territory. We continue denouncing before the world the inhuman acts that the multinational Occidental Petroleum and the Pastrana government render upon our people. We do not accept for any reason the expropriation of our territory, which is duly titled in the name of the collective property of the U'wa people. Soon the company will carry out an expropriation which engineer Pedro Valderrama claims has been duly legalized by a decision from a judge from Toledo (Norte de Santander) whereby the company could use 12 hectares. We believe the expropriation of 4 hectares of land titled under collective deed and duly registered to the U'wa people is imminent. This land also makes up part of our ancestral territory.

This is how Occidental has shown its interests to the media, by hiding the abuses and violations that are plotted with the Colombian government to satisfy the necessities of the multinational companies and, as a consequence, violating human rights, and exterminating human and natural resources, and millennial cultures that still exist in this territory.

SO THAT LIFE CONTINUES, WE CONSERVE THE WATER, SOIL, AND TREES

Kuibira Rikara

Delegate of the Traditional Authority

Sirakubo Tegria

Delegate of the Traditional Authority

## Colombia Human Rights Network

The Colombia Human Rights Network formed in October 1990 as a way of pooling the efforts of several Colombia committees of volunteers in several U.S. cities. Since then the Colombia Human Rights Network has sponsored visits by over 20 grass-roots social and community activists and human rights workers from various regions of Colombia. Another project has been the production of this newsletter, which begins its eleventh year with this issue. Visit the CHRN web page at [www.igc.org/colhmet](http://www.igc.org/colhmet). You can also contact the member committees of the Colombia Human Rights Network as follows:

### Colombia Vive (Boston)

59 Fenno St.

Cambridge, MA 02138

tel. (617) 868-7770; fax (978) 452-5711

Cathy\_Crumbley@uml.edu

### Chicago Colombia Committee

2816 N. Kedzie, #1

Chicago, IL 60618

tel. (773) 862-5125

maya@ig.org

### Colombia Human Rights Committee (Los Angeles)

P.O. Box 4643

Laguna Beach, CA 92652

tel. (954) 859-5880

cinearte@hotmail.com

### CHIBCHA (San Francisco)

#### Colombia Human Rights Information Committee

P.O. Box 40155

San Francisco, CA 94140

tel. and fax (415) 282-6941

### Colombia Media Project (New York)

P.O. Box 1091 GPO

New York, NY 10116

tel. (212) 802-7209

mmcompa@igc.org

### Colombia Human Rights Committee (Washington)

P.O. Box 3130

Washington, D.C. 20010

tel. and fax (202) 232-8148

colhrc@igc.org

## US Civilian Military Contractors Involved in Colombian Combat Operations

The downing of a US fumigation helicopter on February 18 revealed that US military contractors are engaging in Colombian combat operations despite President Bush's stated policy of limiting US military involvement in Plan Colombia to a strictly advisory function. The helicopter gunship was one of six sent to protect four crop-spraying planes sent from Larandia air base to Caquetá, parts of which are controlled by the FARC guerrillas. Ground fire wounded the helicopter pilot, forcing him to land. One helicopter succeeded in rescuing one of the four downed crewmen before having to flee FARC gunfire. A second helicopter finally succeeded in removing the other crewmen along with the downed helicopter's guns and radio. Colombian police reported that the last rescue helicopter was on the ground under fire for ten minutes. Reports by Associated Press and the Miami Herald also indicate widespread use of such contractors in Colombia. The teams are usually ex-Special Forces military who take part in potentially dangerous search and rescue operations amid a press blackout from DynCorp and the State Department.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been very careful to avoid military casualties in any of its overseas operations. The Caquetá incident indicates that the US military is using private US citizens employed by defense contractors to avoid such official military casualties and body counts. Besides DynCorp, several other US firms and at least one Canadian company are heavily involved in Colombian operations. MPRI of Arlington, Virginia is providing a group of senior ex-military officers to advise the Colombian high command in Bogotá. Vector Aerospace of Newfoundland is providing helicopter repairs and for Colombia. The US Congress has set a limit of 300 military contractors for Colombia operations, yet U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson has told Congressional delegations that they may soon need to increase that number.

Recently Tim Reiser, aide to Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, told AP that using US contractors will "reduce the potential fallout when mistakes happen or Americans are caught in harm's way." As fumigation teams and their protective search-and-rescue support units move more deeply into guerrilla territory in pursuit of illusive drug war victories, it remains to be seen how the American public will react to increasing evidence of US military contractors putting themselves in harm's way. They may not always escape as easily as the team in the department of Caquetá. ❖

## Witness for Peace

**Colombia Delegation: May 21 – June 2, 2001**  
**Bearing Witness to U.S. Military Policy in Colombia**

On this delegation, participants will:

- Meet with a wide range of experts and activists to hear their analysis of U.S. Policy in Colombia.
- Learn about the economic roots of Colombia's conflict.
- Hear testimonies of displaced people and others directly affected by the conflict
- Travel to areas outside Bogotá to see first hand the impact of U.S. military assistance.
- Gather the tools and skills you will need to work on changing U.S. policy when you return to your community.

**Deadline: April 15, 2001**

For more information and an application, contact:

Elizabeth Miller  
(202)588-1471 • miller@witnessforpeace.org

Jim Flynn  
(435)654-4928 • jeflynn@qwest.net  
<http://www.witnessforpeace.org>



## Amnesty International's Day of Action:

### No More Killings of Human Rights Defenders in Colombia

On April 2, Amnesty International and other friends of human rights in Colombia will be protesting across the United States and in other countries to say "NO" to the threats and violence against human rights defenders which Colombia has recently experienced. Army-backed paramilitary groups have been systematically threatening and killing many such workers with complete impunity. Join Amnesty International as we tell the Colombian Ambassador that all the public relations efforts in the world won't wash the blood of human rights activists from the Colombian government's hands.

Call (202)544-0200 ext. 252 for more information. ❖

## Colombia Update

### Subscribe to *Colombia Update!*

Subscriptions are US \$15.00 for individuals, \$25.00 for institutions, for one year. International, add \$5 for air mail. Please make checks payable to and mail to:  
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from the *Los rostros del pasado* by Antonio Grass

## ONLINE RESOURCES

If you'd like to learn more about Colombia and have access to the World Wide Web, the following sites and their links are a good place to start.

- Amazon Watch** - <http://www.amazonwatch.org>
- Amnesty International** - <http://www.amnestyusa.org>
- Center for International Policy** - <http://www.ciponline.org>
- Centro de Investigaciones y Educacion Popular CINEP** - <http://www.cinep.org.co>
- Church World Service** - [http://www.churchworldservice.org/colombia\\_denom\\_work.htm](http://www.churchworldservice.org/colombia_denom_work.htm)
- Colombia Human Rights Network** - <http://www.igc.org/colhrnet>
- Colombia Labor Monitor** - <http://www.prairienet.org/clm>
- Colombia Support Network** - <http://www.colombiasupport.net>
- Colombian Army** - <http://www.ejercito.mil.co>
- Consultoría Para Los Derechos Humanos y El Desplazamiento** - <http://www.codhes.org.co>
- Defensoría del Pueblo** - <http://www.defensoria.org.co>
- Department of State** - <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/wha/index.cfm?docid=471>
- Foreign Policy in Focus** - <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/colombia.html>
- Global Exchange** - <http://www.globalexchange.org/colombia>
- Human Rights Watch** - <http://www.hrw.org>
- Latin America Working Group** - <http://www.lawg.org>
- Killing Pablo** - <http://www.killingpablo.com>
- Paramilitary Group (AUC)** - <http://www.colombialibre.org.co>
- Peace Brigades International** - <http://www.igc.org/pbi>
- U.S. Committee for Refugees** - <http://www.refugees.org>
- U.S. Fumigation in Colombia and the Third World** - <http://www.usfumigation.org>
- Washington Office on Latin America** - <http://www.wola.org>
- Witness for Peace** - <http://www.witnessforpeace.org>

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