



## Department of Social Development and World Peace

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### Colombia

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*In the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of the social teachings of the Church, we understand with new criteria the “social sins that cry to heaven because they generate violence, disrupt peace and harmony between communities within the same nation...Among these sins must be mentioned the drug trade, the recycling of illicit funds, corruption at every level, the terror of violence, the arms race, racial discrimination...and the irrational destruction of nature.”*

The Bishops of Colombia quoting *Ecclesia in America*, May 2002

**The Issue:** Colombia continues to experience one of the worst human rights crises in the world. The current conflict is rooted in a long history of extreme inequality and political exclusion, though it has intensified dramatically in recent years due in part to the infusion of drug-related profits that many of the armed actors currently receive.

Illegal armed actors, including the FARC and ELN guerilla groups and the nominally demobilized paramilitary combatants continue to be responsible for significant levels of violence against the civilian population each year. Colombia has the second highest number of internally displaced persons in the world. It is increasingly recognized that displacement in Colombia is intimately linked to strategies of depopulation and subsequent concentration of land and resources. In a number of locations land left behind by the forcibly displaced is now being developed for agro-industry and large scale infrastructure projects.

Colombia is the country from which 80% of the cocaine in the U.S. comes, as well as most of the heroin on the East Coast. It is one of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid, an aid package that, from the Church's point of view, has been excessively tilted toward anti-narcotics and counter-insurgency strategies.

Colombia has become one the most dangerous places for human rights workers, journalists, union leaders and church workers. In the last decade some 60 Catholic representatives, including bishops, priests, nuns and seminarians, and even higher numbers of Protestant pastors, have been killed.

Colombia has made little progress toward ending widespread impunity for human rights abusers. The State Department calls impunity the “greatest challenge to the credibility of the Government's commitment to human rights.” Criminal investigations and prosecutions of military personnel are exceedingly rare. Not a single high-ranking officer has been convicted of a human rights offense. According to the UN, there were no actions “by the Minister of Defense to suspend personnel as a preventive measure in cases of grave human rights violations.”

**U.S. Aid:** U.S. aid to ‘Plan Colombia’ was originally approved in 2000 as a six-year plan primarily dedicated to military support (80%) for counter-narcotics activities. The remaining funds were for alternative development, judicial reform, and aid to the internally displaced. The centerpiece of the U.S. aid was an anti-narcotics program to create and train new battalions, providing helicopters and intelligence aid, and relying on widespread fumigation as the principal means for eradicating coca. From 2000-2005, \$4 billion in U.S. aid has been provided, with \$3.2 billion dedicated to the security forces. Congress approved \$734.5 million for the overall Andean Counternarcotics Initiative in FY06. For FY07, Administration request is for *\$755.9 million with the House and Senate calling for more.*

A new area of concern is the paramilitary demobilization process. Although demobilization of armed actors is an important goal, the recent demobilization process with the AUC paramilitaries has occurred under a noticeably weak legal framework that does little to dismantle the paramilitary, address impunity by those responsible for human rights violations and massacres, and is unlikely to be able to provide real compensation for the victims of the conflict. The U.S. Congress approved \$20 million in aid to fund the paramilitary demobilization in Colombia in FY06. The Administration plans to take the \$20 million in aid for the demobilization out of the limited social aid for Colombia, including the aid for alternative development and possibly, from programs for the internally displaced.

**USCCB Position:** Since the spring of 2000, the USCCB has stressed that U.S. aid should (1) strike an essential balance between assistance to the armed forces and aid that more directly addresses the root causes of the conflict and assists the victims; (2) condition all aid on human rights criteria; (3) provide major support for programs that advance the peace process, including (4) alternative development, (5) judicial reform, and (6) humanitarian aid to the displaced. (See *Statement on Colombia*, 3/16/2000.)

## **Recommendations:**

**All U.S. aid to Colombia must include basic standards for the protection of human rights.** This is an overarching concern, but particular importance should be given this year **to monitoring the impact of the paramilitary demobilization and re-integration process**, to ensure strict application of the recently developed (Human Rights) Conditions on U.S. aid for this process.

**Support multi-lateral efforts to bolster a negotiated, political path towards peace.** The Colombian Bishops have repeatedly emphasized the importance of continuing on the path to a negotiated peace process as the only viable long-term strategy for resolving the conflict. A small proportion of U.S. aid is dedicated to peace-building initiatives and the U.S. has not shown demonstrable support for U.N. and multi-national efforts to support national peace processes. Every effort should be made to achieve a politically negotiated peace process with civil society participation.

**Increase development and humanitarian aid to Colombia.** Assistance to the internally displaced should be increased and its impact well documented. The U.S. can make a significant positive contribution to long-term peace and stability in Colombia by shifting the focus of its

foreign aid towards greater emphasis on effective social development. Additionally, aid to the internally displaced is one of the most positive elements of the U.S. funds allocated to Colombia and it is greatly needed. These funds are small percentage of overall U.S. aid and have been decreasing each year.

**Phase out aerial fumigation, and increase appropriate alternative development.** The Colombian Bishops have stated their clear opposition to fumigation. There are ongoing reports of legal food crops and livestock destroyed, water source contamination and increases in health problems. Many farmers who were fumigated and not provided aid of any kind—either emergency food aid or crop substitution programs;—either joined the ranks of the internally displaced or in some cases moved to neighboring provinces to grow illicit crops once more. Manual eradication accompanied by alternative development is a more humane *and* effective response.

**RESOURCES:** Statements (11/02) (3/02) (2/02) (3/00) and letters (3/02) (7/99) (1/99) can be found at <http://uscgb.org/sdwp/international/latinamerica/colombia.htm>. See also the “CRS In Solidarity with Colombia” link at <http://www.catholicrelief.org/where/Colombia/index.cfm>.

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