

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1) Give brief overview of any significant differences between the current security situation in Colombia and that in 1996, esp. relating to a) FARC, b) the FLSDC and c) paramilitaries;**
- 2) What is the security situation in the town of Armenia now?**
- 3) Are FARC or paramilitary groups currently forcibly recruiting young men? If so, what is the current prevalence of this in the Armenia area?**

RESPONSE

- 1) Give brief overview of any significant differences between the current security situation in Colombia and that in 1996, esp. relating to a) FARC, b) the FLSDC and c) paramilitaries.**

The response to this question individually explores the three groups, [FARC](#), [FLSDC](#), and [paramilitary groups](#). It breaks the response to each group into the two years, 1996 and 2008, and then presents an overview of the significant differences between the two.

a) FARC

FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; also known by the acronym FARC-EP, where the EP means Ejército del Pueblo, or People's Army) is the largest guerilla group in Colombia and sources suggest that their actions pose the greatest threat to the security situation in the state. The second largest guerilla group, ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or National Liberation Army), were regarded by a Strategic Studies Institute report as a 'distant second group' who posed a 'law and order concern' rather than a national security concern (Marks, T. A. 2005, *Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security"*, Strategic Studies Institute website, 1 July, p. 2 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB610.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 1).

In 1996

By contrast with smaller guerrilla groups, FARC, by the late 1990s, had assumed a strong military position in Colombia and were beginning to make a transformation towards a more conventional style of modern, mobile warfare, as a Strategic Studies Institute report observed:

In 1982 FARC was just a small organization of 15 fronts with maybe 2,000 guerrilla fighters. By 1990 it had expanded its forces to 43 fronts with about 5,000 fighters. Now [in 2002] it has between 15-20,000 combatants in 60 fronts and mobile companies (these formations range from 60 to 400 individuals). **This has allowed them to move to mobile or maneuver warfare, the use of large units capable of directly confronting military units of equal size, of overrunning military installations and smaller units** (Marks, T. A. 2002, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, Strategic Studies Institute website, January, p. 7 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB18.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 2)

Several reports from government and non-government organisations provide an insight into the security situation in Colombia in 1996. A Human Rights Watch report noted:

During the first half of 1996, President Samper governed Colombia under a “state of internal commotion,” invoked after the killing of Conservative leader Alvaro Gómez on November 2, 1995, and extended through August. Although the measure never produced the capture of Gómez's killers, its stated goal, it did suspend key rights, like freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. The military was also authorized to circumvent local civil authority and petition the executive directly to declare “special public order zones” where more rights were suspended, like free movement. By the end of May, over one-third of Colombia was a “special public order zone.”

... Over 750,000 Colombians were internally displaced because of political violence, the single largest group in Latin America. A national study in 1995 found that paramilitary violence was responsible for 32 percent of all forced flight, compared to 26 percent caused by guerrillas and 16 percent by the armed forces. The problem worsened during 1996. Although the government developed a plan to assist the displaced, as of this writing it had failed to allocate funds to it. **Guerrillas routinely used forced displacement as a tool of war, demonstrating that neither side was yet willing to honor Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions, ratified by the government in 1995** (Human Rights Watch 1997, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1997 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 1 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6a8b138> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 3).

... For their part, guerrillas committed violations of international humanitarian law, including political killings, kidnappings, the use of landmines, and attacks on civilian targets, including public buses. In a single incident, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) militants were believed to have murdered eleven men on the Osaka Farm on February 14 (Human Rights Watch 1997, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1997 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 1 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6a8b138> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 3).

The US Department of State's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1996 – Colombia* also provides details on specific incidents involving FARC:

Guerrilla forces continued to be responsible for numerous killings and disappearances, as well as 30 to 50 percent of all kidnappings. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group showed no interest in releasing three American missionaries whom the FARC kidnapped on January 31, 1993.

... Guerrillas were responsible for between 30 and 50 percent of all kidnappings. They continued to deny, implausibly, that their practice of kidnaping constitutes common criminal extortion. Arrests or prosecutions in any of these cases were rare. Foreigners were attractive targets for kidnaping by both the FARC and the ELN, which generally demanded exorbitant ransom payments for their release.

... The loosely organized guerrilla groups of the Simon Bolivar Coordinating Body, which include primarily the FARC and ELN, commanded an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 full-time guerrillas organized in over 100 "fronts." These groups exercised a degree of permanent influence in over half of Colombia's local municipalities. **They committed a host of violations, including killings, kidnappings, deployment of antipersonnel land mines, oil pipeline bombings, and other acts of sabotage.**

According to estimates by CINEP and Justice and Peace, guerrillas were responsible for killing at least 189 civilians between January and September. In the continuing struggle for control of the narcotics and arms trafficking corridor of Uraba, guerrilla retaliation for paramilitary attacks regularly victimized innocent civilians, although some direct clashes with paramilitary units did occur. To justify summary executions of civilians, guerrillas typically charged that their victims were either informants for the army or related in some other way to the State, or that they simply refused to support the guerrillas' operations.

The FARC continued its campaign of assassination against the Hope, Peace, and Freedom Movement, whose members had left the EPL in the early 1990's and had since become active in the National Syndicate of Agro-Industry Workers in Uraba. FARC guerrillas killed 2 children near Miraflores, Guaviare, when they detonated 1 of 50 land mines that their forces had deployed in the area. The FARC's September attack on unarmed policemen playing sports in the town of Uramita, Antioquia, was typical. In addition to one policeman and one adult civilian, the FARC killed a 3-year-old child during the attack. In another incident the FARC killed four policemen transporting prisoners in Antioquia. They then released the prisoners, including three murderers and one narcotics trafficker. In August and September, FARC forces killed over 100 people, at one point paralyzing traffic in half the country's departments by threatening to burn vehicles on the highway

In June FARC guerrillas allegedly were responsible for killing the governor of Cauqueta department, Jesus Angel Gonzalez.

There was some progress in the case of the 1995 murder of American missionaries Timothy Van Dyke and Steven Walsh. The authorities identified the FARC commanders responsible for these killings and issued warrants for their arrest; however, they were not in custody at year's end (see Section 1.e.) (U.S. Department of State 1997, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1996 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 30 January, sections 1.b, 1.g <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6aa6414> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 4).

In 2008

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* provides a review on the security situation in Colombia. Some extracts have been provided below:

The 42-year internal armed conflict continued between the government and terrorist organizations, particularly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

...

The FARC and ELN committed the following human rights violations: political killings; killings of off-duty members of the public security forces and local officials; kidnappings and forced disappearances; massive forced displacements; suborning and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens' privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; widespread recruitment of child soldiers; attacks against human rights activists; harassment, intimidation, and killings of teachers and trade unionists.

... Guerrillas, particularly the FARC, committed unlawful killings. Guerrillas killed teachers, journalists, religious leaders, union members, human rights activists, candidates for public office, elected officials and other politicians, alleged paramilitary collaborators, and members of the government security forces (see section 1.g.).

...In many areas of the country, the 12,000-member FARC and the 2,000-member ELN worked together to attack government forces or demobilized paramilitary members; in other areas, especially in Arauca Department, they fought each other. There were an estimated 1,990 guerrilla desertions during the year.

...FARC and ELN guerrillas committed numerous unlawful killings, kidnapped civilians and military personnel, displaced citizens, and recruited child soldiers. They killed journalists, religious leaders, candidates for public office, local elected officials and politicians, alleged paramilitary collaborators, and members of government security forces. The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that during the year the FARC killed at least 40 persons in seven massacres, although another 143 persons were killed in massacres in which the perpetrators remained unidentified (U.S. Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Colombia*, 6 March, sections 1.a, 1.g, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm – Accessed 8 March 2007 – Attachment 5).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s FARC employed IRA members to learn new explosives techniques which have become evident in recent attacks (McDermott, J. 2005, '“IRA influence” in Farc attacks', *BBC News*, 9 May <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4528109.stm> – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 6). Sources also indicate that FARC took advantage of the 1998 cease-fire and a demilitarised zone to mobilise their forces. A recent report from *Bloomberg* stated:

Betancourt [a former presidential candidate] was kidnapped along with her vice presidential candidate, Clara Rojas, in 2002 while campaigning against Uribe. The FARC took them captive as they entered the demilitarized zone former President Andres Pastrana set up in 1998 to effect peace talks. The rebels used the zone to build up arms, run drug-trafficking operations and plan kidnappings. (Murphy, H. and Faries, B. 2007, 'Uribe Proposes Demilitarized Zone for Hostage Talks', *Bloomberg*, 7 December http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=ahiFXy6lozLY&refer=latin_america – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 7)

Another report from the Strategic Studies Institute argues:

FARC put its money into its military bite and caught the government in 1996-98 still in counterinsurgency mode. In a series of actions throughout those years, FARC demonstrated that it had entered the mobile warfare stage (Marks, T. A. 2002, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*, Strategic Studies Institute website, January, p. 8 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB18.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 2).

However, by 2005 the Colombian government's Democratic Security and Defence Policy had reduced the effectiveness of this mobilisation. For example, Marks argues,

the reform leadership defeated FARC's attempt to transition to main force warfare (i.e., mobile or maneuver warfare; Stage II in the people's war framework).

...An insurgent group such as FARC, forced from mobile warfare back to guerrilla and terror actions, of necessity needs to up the ante. This FARC attempted to do through its association with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Its efforts to utilize a variety of PIRA terror techniques that hitherto had not been seen in Colombia (or used as exception rather than rule), ranging from the precise placement of bombs to inflict maximum structural damage, to the use of secondary explosions to wreak havoc upon response crews to incidents, were all designed to inflict maximum casualties - and generate maximum terror. **That they failed left FARC with only the option it has now pursued: pinprick attacks that can produce tactical heat but lack strategic fire.** (Marks, T. A. 2005, *Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security"*, Strategic Studies Institute website, 1 July, pp. 6, 18 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB610.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 1).

A comparison of the US Department of State reports from 1996 and 2007 suggest that whilst the tactics may be different, there were few other differences in the actions undertaken by FARC. Their estimated numbers remained similar, and the reports both mention widespread kidnappings and murders. However, as explained further below, these reports also suggest that the number of these crimes has decreased significantly since 1996. According to respective U.S. Department of State Reports the number of FARC members was 10 000 to 15 000 in 1996 and 12 000 in 2007. Human Rights Watch put the number of militia in FARC in 2003 at over 26 500. (see U.S. Department of State 1997, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1996 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 30 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6aa6414> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 4; U.S. Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Colombia*, 6 March www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm – Accessed 8 March 2007 – Attachment 5; Human Rights Watch 2003, '“You'll learn not to cry”: Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September, p. 23 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

Sources indicate that the main differences in the security situation between 1996 and 2008 revolve around the actions of President Alvaro Uribe. In 2002 President Alvaro Uribe's administration implemented a counter-guerrilla strategy known as the "Democratic Security and Defence Policy". This policy sought to cancel the negotiation process of the previous government, and instead take a counter-insurgency approach to directly confront guerrilla groups in an effort to weaken their position within the state (see Marks, T. A. 2005, *Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security"*, Strategic Studies Institute website, 1 July <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB610.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 1).

A 2005 report from the Strategic Studies Institute provides an analysis of the policy, and gives some contrast of the situation over recent years.

Their actions [of the military under the Democratic Security and Defence Policy] are sustainable virtually indefinitely. **That their operations indeed have made life more difficult for FARC is without question. Just "how difficult?" is the query that cannot be answered definitively.**

... What ultimately must drive any assessment, as the military has incorporated into its own analysis, is the nature of the incidents being counted. This can involve anything from size to context. **An insurgent group such as FARC, forced from mobile warfare back to guerrilla and terror actions, of necessity needs to up the ante.** This FARC attempted to do through its association with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). **Its efforts to utilize a variety of PIRA terror techniques that hitherto had not been seen in Colombia (or used as exception rather than rule), ranging from the precise placement of bombs to inflict maximum structural damage, to the use of secondary explosions to wreak havoc upon response crews to incidents, were all designed to inflict maximum casualties—and generate maximum terror. That they failed left FARC with only the option it has now pursued: pinprick attacks that can produce tactical heat but lack strategic fire.**

... Faced with this profound threat to its viability as an insurgent movement, FARC must respond. **As a consequence, there should be no doubt that "violence" in Colombia will continue indefinitely.** Yet the counter by the state lies in precisely what is being done: creating a situation where the response is both "correct" and sustainable. The Uribe approach is certainly "correct" in the manner it conceptualizes the problem and seeks to respond to it; it is sustainable in its present form, because it demands no unacceptable investments of resources, human or material. It will face adjustments if the U.S. contribution ends, but it is unlikely this will happen for some time (Marks, T. A. 2005, *Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for "Democratic Security"*, Strategic Studies Institute website, 1 July, p. 19 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB610.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 1).

As these sources suggest, the most significant change in the security situation from 1996 to 2008 appears to be in the response of the government who are confronting guerrilla groups more directly. Guerrilla groups are still undertaking the same actions, although they have suffered setbacks, but beyond this it is difficult to quantify the different levels of security over this period. One indication may be that government anti-kidnapping forces have assisted in reducing kidnappings across Colombia from over 3500 in 1996 to 687 in 2007 (down from 800 in 2005) (see U.S. Department of State 1997, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1996 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 30 January, section 1.b <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6aa6414> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 4; US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human*

Rights Practices 2006 – Colombia, 6 March, section 1.b

www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm – Accessed 8 March 2007 – Attachment 5).

These figures suggest increased government control over the security situation, at least with regards to kidnappings, but Marks warns against making too many conclusions based on such figures:

Statistics are a double-edged sword. First, there is the political reality that efforts to arrive at metrics for assessing the progress of an approach – though absolutely necessary – take on meaning only as they are interpreted by the audience. All parties to the present Colombian political debate, for example, agree that there has been demonstrable progress toward normalcy by any metric utilized, such as the decline in kidnapping and murder. Yet there is little agreement as to what “normalcy” as an end-state actually should look like. Second, there is the empirical reality that no efforts have proved successful at “explaining” statistically the causes of insurgency.

... In the matter of statistics, it is the combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators that gives rise to the judgment that progress is being made. This does not mean, however, that merely advocating “more of the same” is the prescription for further action so much as “staying the course” (Marks, T. A. 2005, *Sustainability of Colombian Military/Strategic Support for “Democratic Security”*, Strategic Studies Institute website, 1 July, pp. 15-16 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB610.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 1).

More information on the security situation in Colombia appears in the response to question 2.

b) FLSDC

No information could be found in any of the searches made on ‘FLSDC’, ‘Liberal Social Democratic Force of Colombia’, ‘*Fuerza democrática social liberal de Colombia*’ or any derivatives.

c) Paramilitaries

In 1996

The largest paramilitary group in Colombia is the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia). As with FARC, many references to paramilitary groups refer specifically to the actions of the AUC.

A 1996 Human Rights Watch report on the relationship between the military and paramilitary groups reveals:

The military-paramilitary partnership is a fact of life throughout Colombia. Human Rights Watch has learned that collaboration between military intelligence, division, brigade, and battalion commanders, and paramilitaries continues, as laid out in Order 200-05/91. **Based on our interviews with witnesses and former participants, the government’s own investigations, and abundant material collected by human rights groups and journalists, we believe that the military high command continues to organize, encourage, and deploy paramilitaries to fight a covert war against those it suspects of support for guerrillas.**

In our case study on the northern Magdalena region, we show how the military has armed and equipped paramilitaries and patrolled with them. In some cases, the military has apparently moved paramilitaries around the country to carry out political killings. Although the army denies conducting surveillance of political parties and elected officials, we

present evidence demonstrating that the surveillance of legal political groups appears to be among the prime duties assigned to military intelligence, which has apparently used paramilitaries to gather information and later act on it by threatening and killing people. In one interview, a retired army major described paramilitaries as the “principal source” of army intelligence. “These people live in the region and have contacts with both their own side and with the enemy,” he told us. “In fact the principal action of the paramilitaries is [to collect] intelligence, in addition to serving as an extermination group” (Human Rights Watch 1996, *Colombia’s Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States*, UNHCR Refworld website, 1 November, section 1 <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6a8530> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 9).

Another Human Rights Watch report on the situation in 1996 noted:

President Samper’s measures had little effect on political violence or human rights violations, which remained numerous. **In the first six months of the year, an average of three people a day fell victim to political killings, which totaled 522. As a percentage of such cases, paramilitary violence rose in comparison to 1995.**

New evidence emerged in 1996 showing that the military continued to promote paramilitaries and used them to collect intelligence and assassinate Colombians suspected of guerrilla ties. For example, in Segovia, in the department of Antioquia, a government investigation led to the arrest of a captain who eyewitnesses said escorted six paramilitaries flown in from Medellín to a military base on April 22, then killed fourteen people and injured fifteen (Human Rights Watch 1997, *Human Rights Watch World Report 1997 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 1 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6a8b138> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 3).

Whilst an Amnesty International Report on Colombia stated:

More than 1,000 civilians were extrajudicially executed by the security forces and paramilitary groups operating with their support or acquiescence. Many victims had been tortured. Human rights activists were repeatedly threatened and attacked. More than 120 people “disappeared” after detention by the armed forces or paramilitary groups. “Death squad”-style killings of people regarded as “disposable” continued in urban areas. Several army officers were charged in connection with human rights violations, but many others continued to evade accountability for thousands of extrajudicial executions and “disappearances” in recent years. Guerrilla groups were responsible for numerous human rights abuses, including scores of deliberate and arbitrary killings and the taking and holding of hundreds of hostages (Amnesty International 1997, *Amnesty International Report 1997 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 1 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6a9f92c> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 10).

The US Department of State report for 1996 stated:

According to credible NGO sources, during the first 9 months of the year, members of paramilitary groups committed 59 percent of politically motivated extrajudicial killings; guerrillas were responsible for 33 percent; and government forces for 8 percent of them (U.S. Department of State 1997, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1996 – Colombia*, UNHCR Refworld website, 30 January <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6aa6414> – Accessed 11 January 2008 – Attachment 4).

In 2008

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Colombia* provides information on the recent activities of paramilitary groups:

Illegal armed groups committed the majority of human rights violations. **Despite a unilateral cease-fire declared by the AUC in 2002 and a nationwide demobilization, renegade paramilitary members committed the following criminal acts and human rights abuses: political killings and kidnappings; forced disappearances; torture; interference with personal privacy and with the political system; forced displacement; suborning and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens' privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; recruitment and employment of child soldiers; and harassment, intimidation, and killings of human rights workers, journalists, teachers, and trade unionists.**

...There continued to be credible reports that some members of the security forces cooperated with illegal paramilitaries in violation of orders from the president and the military high command (see section 1.g.). Such collaboration often facilitated unlawful killings and sometimes may have involved direct participation in paramilitary atrocities.

Impunity for military personnel who collaborated with members of renegade paramilitary groups remained a problem (see section 1.g.).

Renegade paramilitary members committed numerous political and unlawful killings, primarily in areas under dispute with guerrillas or lacking a strong government presence (see section 1.g.).

...Demobilized paramilitaries committed crimes, which primarily affected civilians. The NGO Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ) claimed that paramilitaries, demobilized or active, had killed more than 3,000 civilians from December 1, 2002, through July 2006.

According to CINEP [Centre for Investigation and Popular Education], demobilized paramilitary members were responsible for the deaths of 58 civilians from January through June, a 75 percent decrease from 234 deaths reported during the same period in 2005. Demobilized and renegade paramilitary members killed journalists, local politicians, human rights activists, indigenous leaders, labor leaders, and others who threatened to interfere with their criminal activities or showed leftist sympathies (U.S. Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Colombia*, 6 March, sections 1.a, 1.g www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm – Accessed 8 March 2007 – Attachment 5).

A report from the Council of Foreign Relations comments on the demobilisation of paramilitary groups in recent years:

In 2003, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe took a step to quell the violence associated with at least one of those actors when he signed a peace deal with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or the AUC, the country's largest paramilitary group. Over thirty thousand combatants have demobilized since the agreement, and judicial proceedings to try top commanders are in process. Yet political scandals revealing the extent of paramilitary infiltration of Colombian security forces and the upper ranks of the government have rocked the country. In addition, new criminal organizations have emerged in the wake of the AUC that bear a striking resemblance to their paramilitary predecessors.

... Between 2003 and 2005, violence committed by paramilitaries dropped sharply; for instance, assassinations dropped from 1,240 to 329, according to a research organization in Bogota.

... Despite its problems, the demobilization process has revealed the degree to which paramilitaries have infiltrated the highest levels of Colombian politics. Investigations by the Supreme Court and the attorney general's office have brought to light startling information about collusion between paramilitary commanders and Colombian security services, military commanders, and high-ranking politicians.

... In September 2007, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe told the United Nations that in Colombia, "today there is no paramilitarism. There are guerrillas and drug traffickers." Many observers—from the United Nations to Colombian analysts—disagree. On the contrary, they say, the paramilitaries are smaller, more clandestine, and operating with just as much impunity as before the AUC's demobilization.

The Colombian government admits that there is a problem with "criminal organizations," but it does not identify these groups with the paramilitaries. In a May 2007 report on Colombia's armed groups, the International Crisis Group says that regardless of what one labels these groups, they all have ties to drug trafficking and criminal networks.

It documents three types of armed groups: paramilitaries that did not demobilize; groups in collusion with drug cartels; and criminal gangs that have arisen to fight for a share of the drug trade. Sergio Caramagna, head of the OAS mission in Colombia, told NPR, "the danger is that these groups have a big fountain of revenue that comes from narcotrafficking that allows them to develop and recruit people and continue affecting the population" (Hanson, S. 2008, *Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups*, Council on Foreign Relations website, 11 January <http://www.cfr.org/publication/15239/> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 11)

By contrast with Hanson's report, a 2005 Human Rights Watch report suggested that the demobilisations were a step backwards for Colombia:

President Uribe and other senior Colombian officials have been touring Europe and the United States to seek governments' political and financial support for their demobilization law.

In Europe, the response has been lukewarm, though both the Spanish and British governments have indicated a willingness to become involved in verification of the process through the European Union. The member states of the OAS have yet to speak to the issue.

In the United States, responses have been mixed. Several Senators –both Republican and Democrat –have taken a strong and clear position: support depends on Colombia's correcting serious problems in the law, and actually destroying the structure and power of these armed groups. The U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, however, has made statements in favor of the law.

As demonstrated by this report, the government's record and practices so far should not inspire any confidence that the problems in the new law will be overcome in implementation. To the contrary, there is every indication that this process is serving primarily the interests of paramilitary commanders and doing little to advance peace or justice. And once the law has been implemented, and sentence reductions granted, it will be too late for the Colombian government to correct its mistakes and recover its leverage over the paramilitary leadership.

We therefore urge the Colombian government to take immediate action to reform its demobilization law and policies. And we urge other countries and international institutions to abstain from lending their credibility to this process. To do so would be to turn themselves into tools of drug traffickers and killers, and accomplices to a process that undermines human rights, justice, and the already weak rule of law in Colombia (Human Rights Watch 2005, *Smoke and Mirrors: Colombia's demobilization of paramilitary groups*, HRW website, vol. 17, no.3, August, pp. 62-64 <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/colombia0805/colombia0805.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 12).

The above sources suggest that whilst demobilisation has been progressing, and whilst violence caused by paramilitary groups has been on the decline, these groups are finding other ways to undermine the system (such as through corrupt politicians – see the source below). Aside from these, sources suggest that the security situation involving paramilitary groups has improved since 1996, in particular since the 2003 truce (Hanson, S. 2008, *Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups*, Council on Foreign Relations website, 11 January <http://www.cfr.org/publication/15239/> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 11).

2) What is the security situation in the town of Armenia now?

There are several towns and cities in Colombia that are called Armenia. However, the reference to the city of Armenia is a city with a population of about 320 000 people, that forms the capital of the department of Quindio. A map shows the location of this Armenia in the central-western part of Colombia (Armenia, Colombia, MSN Encarta Interactive World Atlas – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 13). A Dutch thesis on conflict in Colombia also includes a map of the approximate area of activity by FARC, ELN, and the main paramilitary force, AUC (Van Der Linden, J. 2006, 'Colombia: peace in visibility? Analysis of the armed conflict and possible solutions', Diploma of the Second Cycle in Commercial Sciences Thesis, Lessius College, Antwerp, Belgium, E-thesis website <http://www.ethesis.net/colombia/colombia.htm> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 14). However, it should be noted that this should only be used as a general indicator of 'regular strong activity', because, as outlined below, both guerrilla and paramilitary groups are active throughout the country. Cross-referencing these maps together suggests that Armenia and the department of Quindio lay on the fringe of guerrilla activity. A 2003 report in the *Washington Post* noted:

Given the fragile security situation in the mountains surrounding Quindio province – Colombia's two guerrilla groups, who have been known to kidnap foreigners, maintain a presence along the mountain roads and in some remote villages – the recommended transportation is by plane from the capital, Bogota, just an hour's hop over the central cordillera (Wilson, S. 2003, 'Colombia: A Jolt of Coffee Culture in the Jungle', *Washington Post*, 23 November <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A3639-2003Nov21?language=printer> – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 15).

The effect of this fragile security situation can be seen in a report from a missionary website. Following the breakdown in peace talks in 2002 the report noted:

“Tension is up, of course, and everyone is very aware of the moment-by-moment news being broadcast,” said LAM-Canada missionary Beverly Ramirez from her home in Armenia, northwest of the most intense military action. “All across the country we are being advised not to travel, either by air or by road, unless absolutely necessary. We are also advised, if at all possible, to stay close to home, work and school.”

While Armenia has been quiet as far as guerrilla conflict has gone over the past years, Ramirez reported that a nearby town of Calarca is plagued with both urban and rural guerrillas. “We are on the alert, but not in a panic mode,” she reported (MacHarg, K. D. 2002, ‘Missionaries In Colombia Face Uncertainty As Peace Talks Collapse’, John Mark Ministries website, 26 February <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/163.htm> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 16)

In terms of specific events, a report from the U.S. Office on Colombia noted,

Suspected members of the 50th front of the FARC group attack a police patrol outside the city of Armenia, in the Quindio department, killing one patroller and injured two more. Troops were sent to pursue the rebels, Colprensa reports (U.S. Office on Colombia 2005, ‘InfoBrief’, U.S. Office on Colombia website, 26 September <http://www.usofficeoncolombia.com/InfoBrief/092605.htm> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 17)

Another report from the U.S. State Department noted:

Guerrillas failed to respect the injured and medical personnel. Both the FARC and the ELN frequently executed wounded prisoners, threatened and harassed doctors and nurses, and killed enemy combatants receiving medical care. **For example, in February, the FARC kidnapped a nurse from her car in Armenia, Quindio Department** (U.S. Department of State 2005, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2004 – Colombia*, 28 February, section 1.g <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41754.htm> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 18).

In terms of more recent events, Travel Advice issued by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade noted:

On 2 September 2007, ten soldiers were killed and several injured by the FARC in an area bordering the departments of Quindio and Tolima (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, ‘Travel Advice – Colombia’, DFAT website, 8 January <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Colombia> – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 19).

As noted, sources suggest that Armenia is on the fringe of, or just outside, the typical range of regular FARC activities; however, the Humanitarian Situation Maps and Humanitarian Situation Reports provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicate regular armed confrontations and attacks against civilians in and around Quindio (note also that the city of Pereira, often the target of attacks, lies approximately 35km north of Armenia; for several recent reports, including maps, see United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2007, ‘Weekly humanitarian situation report’, ReliefWeb website 18 December, No. 34-35-36 http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SODA-7A48ND-Full_Report.pdf – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 20; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2007, ‘Weekly humanitarian situation report’, ReliefWeb website 8 October, No. 27 http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/KKAA-77T37U-Full_Report.pdf – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 21).

These sources also support the consideration of Quindio as having a ‘fragile security situation’, where attacks by FARC still occur and ‘events’ are regularly mentioned in the most recent situation reports by the OCHA (see below). The OCHA does not provide details

on exactly what type of events occurred in each department, instead, these events to the following: armed confrontation, homicide, kidnapping, minefield, attack against infrastructure, attack against civilians, mass displacement, and massacre. A review of these sources suggests that it is difficult to accurately determine the security situation as the patterns of guerrilla and paramilitary activity are often random. For example, an OCHA report from October 2007 noted that during the two-week reporting period, three 'event's took place in Quindio, and also the smallest department in Colombia, and, by contrast, twelve 'events' took place in the neighbouring department of Tolima. Several weeks later another OCHA report noted that during a longer, three-week reporting period, one 'event' took place in Quindio, whilst four 'events' took place in Tolima (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2007, 'Weekly humanitarian situation report', ReliefWeb website 18 December, No. 34-35-36

http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SODA-7A48ND-Full_Report.pdf – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 20; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2007, 'Weekly humanitarian situation report', ReliefWeb website 8 October, No. 27

http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/KKAA-77T37U-Full_Report.pdf – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 21).

In addition to this, sources suggest that some activities, such as kidnappings, can occur anywhere, even in relatively safe areas. A report from the Overseas Security Advisory Council noted that "Government or guerrilla control in a given area is subject to change, sometimes quickly and without notice" (Overseas Security Advisory Council 2007, 'Colombia 2007 Crime & Safety Report', OSAC website, 21 February <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=63537> – Accessed 15 January 2008 – Attachment 22).

3) Are a) FARC or b) paramilitary groups currently forcibly recruiting young men? c) If so, what is the current prevalence of this in the Armenia area?

This response individually addresses the forced recruiting of young men by [FARC](#) and [paramilitary groups](#), and comments on the prevalence of this forced recruiting in the [Armenia area](#).

a) FARC

An RRT Research Response from 2000 addressed the issue of FARC forcibly recruiting young men and explored the nature of the recruitment process in the late 1990s (see RRT Research & Information 2001, *Research Response COL13929*, 13 January – Attachment 23). More recently, FARC has been reported as continuing their practice of recruiting young men and children as soldiers. A Human Right's Watch report from 2003 stated:

Human Rights Watch estimates that more than 11,000 children fight in Colombia's armed conflict, one of the highest totals in the world. At least one of every four irregular combatants in Colombia is under 18 years of age. Several thousand of them are under the age of 15, the minimum age permitted for recruitment into armed forces or groups under the Geneva Conventions.

... Approximately 80 percent of child combatants in Colombia belong to one of the two left-wing guerrilla groups, the FARC or ELN. The remainder fights in paramilitary ranks.

... The FARC continues to recruit and use children, and have made no commitment to stop this practice. By Human Rights Watch's estimate, the FARC has the majority of child combatants in Colombia. A conservative estimate is that 20 to 30 percent of all FARC combatants are under 18 years old (Human Rights Watch 2005, 'Colombia: Armed Groups Send Children to War: U.N. Security Council to Discuss Colombia's Child Soldiers', HRW website, 22 February <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/02/22/colomb10202.htm> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 24).

Human Rights Watch have also provided details on the recruitment of young men and child soldiers in a report titled '“You'll learn not to cry”: Child combatants in Colombia' (Human Rights Watch 2003, '“You'll learn not to cry”: Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8). Some extracts have been provided below:

The great majority of child recruits to the irregular forces decide to join voluntarily. Yet forcible recruitment occurs in some parts of Colombia. Human Rights Watch interviewed thirteen former combatants, all of whom had belonged to either the FARC-EP or the UC-ELN, who described having been forced to join the ranks of the group unwillingly; they made up slightly more than 10 percent of the children we interviewed. Another two children said that they had been pressured to join a guerrilla group. And even the voluntary decision to join irregular forces is more a reflection of the dismal lack of opportunities open to children from the poorest sector of rural society than a real exercise of free will. Irregular forces exploit children's vulnerability. They mount recruitment drives that glamorize the warrior life and tempt with promises of money and a brighter future. Some families send children to combat because they are unable to support them, and they know that membership in an armed group guarantees a square meal, clothing, and protection. Many children join to escape family violence and physical or sexual abuse, or to find the affection their families fail to give. Others crave the status of a gun or a cell phone. Camp life promises adventure, comradeship, and a chance to prove oneself. The reality of life as a combatant is deeply frightening. But once incorporated, children cannot leave voluntarily. To the contrary, they know that the price of attempting to desert could be their lives.

... Although the UC-ELN is often believed to resort to press-ganging less than the FARC-EP, Human Rights Watch found that some fronts seem to resort to forcible recruitment on a significant scale. Of the twenty former UC-ELN combatants who described the circumstances of their recruitment to Human Rights Watch, six (or nearly one-third) said that they had been recruited against their will. Of the seventy-two former FARC-EP combatants who provided such information, seven (or 9 percent) said they had been forcibly recruited. (Two more said that they had joined the group under pressure.) (Human Rights Watch 2003, '“You'll learn not to cry”: Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September, pp. 10, 25-26 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

This Human Rights Watch report suggests that forced recruitment sometimes occurs in contested areas where people are forcibly driven from their homes:

The Colombian press reports sporadically on forced recruitment by FARCEP guerrillas in contested zones across the country. In July 2002, the 39th and 44th fronts of the FARC-EP were reported to have forcibly recruited at least thirty-five children in Puerto Alvira, Meta, before driving hundreds of townspeople from their homes. "The kids were scared, and no one said a thing. I recognized Marquitos among them, a town kid who helped to load the boats, but he kept his eyes down," an eyewitness told reporters.⁸⁴ In October 2002, the mayor of Juradó, Chocó, a town near the border with Panama, reported the recruitment of at least eight

children by the FARC-EP's 27th front (Human Rights Watch 2003, ' "You'll learn not to cry": Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September, p. 31 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

In a section detailing the recruitment of children, the report notes:

Forcible recruitment in Colombia is the exception rather than the rule. It rarely takes the form of a military press-gang operation in which villagers are herded together at gun-point. More subtle pressures are usually involved. Often inducement and persuasion are backed by thinly veiled threats. Both the FARC-EP and the UC-ELN are credibly reported to resort on occasion to force to gain new recruits.

... The most plausible explanation of forcible recruitment is the inability of guerrilla units to replenish their ranks by voluntary enlistment alone. We are unable to judge whether the use of force is authorized at higher levels or whether recruiters resort to force to meet their targets even though the official guerrilla policy prohibits the use of force (Human Rights Watch 2003, ' "You'll learn not to cry": Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September, pp. 42-43 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

b) Paramilitaries

Paramilitary forces were also responsible for forcibly recruiting young men and children, however, sources suggest that, compared to FARC and ELN, paramilitary forces rely less on forced recruitment because they can afford to pay wages that are attractive to young recruits. Human Rights Watch noted:

Although cases of forcible recruitment have been reported, the money seems to have been decisive in gaining new recruits. Once admitted into the ranks, if children attempt to desert, they risk capture and execution by their commanders as suspected infiltrators or informers.

The paramilitary forces pay child recruits a wage monthly or every three months, ranging between 900,000 and 1,200,000 pesos (approximately U.S. \$300 to \$400), with bonuses for special missions. Most of the former paramilitary children we interviewed said that they joined primarily for the money, even though this attitude was frowned on by paramilitary leaders. Many entered the AUC in the company of friends or already had contacts within the group.

"After school I was a baker's assistant. It was hard work and paid badly," said Leonel, who joined when he was fourteen. "I went to work on a farm but the work was hard too, so finally I joined the paras. I had friends inside. It paid 300,000 [U.S. \$100] a month. It seemed like an easier life."

Adolfo, tall and dark, said that when he joined he was asked how much money he needed in order to leave his family. "The recruiting sergeants were army reservists. They ask you how much money you need. Once you accept the money, that's it, you're in. If you don't turn up at the agreed time, you're dead" (Human Rights Watch 2003, ' "You'll learn not to cry": Child combatants in Colombia', HRW website, September, pp. 9, 41 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

c) If so, what is the current prevalence of this in the Armenia area?

No information could be found in the sources consulted to suggest that there is a strong prevalence of guerrilla or paramilitary groups forcibly recruiting young men in the Armenia area. As outlined above, guerrilla and paramilitary activity appears to be sporadic and unpredictable and, aside from areas of intense conflict, it is difficult to outline any particular area in Colombia where forced recruiting may be prevalent (for greater insight into the practice of forced recruiting throughout Colombia see Human Rights Watch 2003, ‘ “You’ll learn not to cry”: Child combatants in Colombia’, HRW website, September, pp. 9, 41 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 8).

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