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COLOMBIA: INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The Second Bi-annual Michael Baptista Lecture

held at York University
Wednesday the 23rd of May, 2001

by

Amanda Romero-Medina

Quaker International Affairs Representative
Andean Region

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Abstract

Colombia has received increasing international attention in the past three years in response to the deterioration in the internal war that has affected the country for more than forty years. However, the myth that violence in Colombia is largely due to drug trafficking has served to mask the complex historical and political components of an armed conflict that currently represents the most critical issue in the hemisphere.

This paper begins by analyzing one of the most pressing issues of the Colombian conflict: the internal displacement of poor Colombians, its causes and characteristics, and the responses by several actors in society. It relates internal displacement to human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by different parties in the conflict.

The paper moves on to discuss current problems with the peace process that have developed in tandem with the implementation of Plan Colombia, an ambitious programme based on the assumption that Colombia's problems are due to the negative effects of drug trafficking. In this context, the paper considers the problematic responses to the Pastrana administration's appeal for international co-operation, giving particular attention to the concerns of ethnic minorities in Colombia and to the economic interests behind the "war on drugs". It concludes by presenting recommendations from civil society organizations working to overcome Colombia's long-running conflict.

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Introduction

Colombia has received increasing international attention in the past three years in response to the deterioration in the internal war that has affected the country for more than forty years. However, the myth that violence in Colombia is largely due to drug trafficking has served to mask the complex historical and political components of an armed conflict that currently represents the most critical issue in the hemisphere.

This paper begins by analyzing one of the most pressing issues of the Colombian conflict: the internal displacement of poor Colombians, its causes and characteristics, and the responses by several actors in society.

The paper examines how this phenomenon of internal displacement constitutes and is related to human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by different parties in the conflict. The paper will also review the escalation of the armed conflict and the role of each of the parties involved.

The peace process with the largest guerrilla group, FARC, which began with the inauguration of President Pastrana in 1998, is being jeopardised. Obstacles to initiating a dialogue with the second-largest guerrilla force, the ELN, and the exclusion of other smaller groups, reveal erratic or non-existent state policies regarding the future of a possible peace agreement.

This situation has developed in tandem with the implementation of Plan Colombia, an ambitious programme based on the assumption that Colombia's problems are due to the negative effects of drug trafficking. With this argument, the Pastrana administration has designed a strategy to attract international co-operation. The response of foreign governments has been twofold. On the one hand, the United States approved a \$1.3 billion "package" for the first year of Plan Colombia, consisting largely of military assistance. On the other hand, European and other Western countries have emphasised the need for more aggressive support for the manual eradication of illicit crops. However, neither of these approaches questions the use of aerial spraying, and both maintain decisions made by state members of UNDCP.

The paper will briefly analyze the results of these policies, giving particular attention to the concerns of ethnic minorities in Colombia, and to the economic interests behind the "war on drugs". I will then conclude by presenting recommendations from civil society organizations working to overcome Colombia's long-running conflict.

Internal Displacement

Colombia now ranks second in the world in terms of the number of its citizens who have been internally displaced. According to church and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), more than two million Colombians have been forced to flee their homes in the past ten years.

This situation has to do with widespread human rights violations that go unpunished. Principally, it is related to death threats by the warring parties in a context where the methods of armed conflict have deteriorated severely.

The flows of individuals and families that characterized most of the displacements in the late 1980s and early 1990s continue today. However, added to them are massive displacements of entire communities, mainly in rural areas disputed by guerrillas and paramilitaries, the latter closely affiliated with the police and armed forces.

People flee without their belongings. Some have suffered theft and/or sexual abuse, have had their houses burned or crops destroyed, or have lost relatives to torture or execution.

The displaced first move to other hamlets or towns until, as often happens, paramilitaries or guerrillas, in their expanding bids for territorial control, attack their new location. The displaced then have to move for a second or third time, in their pursuit of a safer place to live. In this journey, they often lose the means to lead decent lives, and they face not only discrimination, but also hunger and desperation.

In the end, those suffering from this persecution settle in cities. Since 70 percent of Colombia's population is concentrated in urban centres, problems of unemployment and lack of housing and services have become more critical.

Almost all populated Colombian territory has problems stemming from the existence of large settlements of poor displaced people. Although the same areas continue to produce displacement because of intense combat, new regions are also being affected. Recently displaced people are concentrated in cities such as Cali, Medellin, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cartagena and mostly, Bogota. This pattern reveals a new trend, one which, as explained later, corresponds to a strategic move by the armed actors (please see Appendix I: Flows of internal displacement).

The response of the government to the dramatic situation faced by displaced Colombians has been neither efficient nor coherent. After organizations of the displaced applied pressure by occupying public facilities (and even the headquarters of the International Red Cross), the two previous governments introduced legislation aimed at solving the problem. This legislation included Decree 387, a law that creates a system to assist displaced peoples nation-wide. Yet, according to the displaced people themselves, and to NGOs working with them, corruption and vicious attitudes of political patronage have prevented those in need from obtaining lasting solutions.

Unlike victims of natural disasters (like the earthquake in Quindio Province two years ago),

the displaced do not enjoy special programmes for housing or employment opportunities. They are given immediate relief for three months, after which time they must struggle to receive food or shelter. Colombia's internally displaced people face the same types of difficulty as refugees who have fled to other countries (please see Report on Forced Displacement in Colombia – 1999, by the Support Group for Displaced People Organizations [GAD] at <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/doc/gad1.html>).

Groups of displaced peoples have obtained support from international NGOs specializing in humanitarian aid. Some have been successful in improving living conditions and establishing new parameters for a relatively peaceful environment. The more important of these groups are organized in so-called "Peace Communities." Despite bitter attacks by the armed parties, including open rejection by and lack of protection from the armed forces, these communities have inspired many because they are building a genuine peaceful solution to war.

Some displaced peoples, tired of begging and being treated miserably, have decided to return to their communities even though it is still unsafe to do so. Given the many dangers they face, these groups are constantly accompanied by and receive moral support from churches and international peace organizations such as Peace Brigades International.

Human Rights Violations and Internal Displacement

Displacement is coinciding with a situation of chronic and widespread human rights violations. Indeed, independent analysts have documented how internal displacement itself is a terrible human rights violation and is a consequence of the interrelated manifestations of abuses of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

For more than fifteen years, human rights organizations have denounced the alarming increase of politically-motivated disappearances, selective and massive killings, torture and other human rights abuses to the United Nations Special Rapporteurs and the UN Commission on Human Rights.

In 1997, as a result of calls by the UN Commission on Human Rights, the government of President Ernesto Samper and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) signed an agreement to establish a Permanent Office of the United Nations for Human Rights in Colombia.

Despite initial problems, the UN office in Colombia has played a key role in monitoring and providing advice to both the government and civil society organizations. The UN office reports its findings to the UN Commission on Human Rights each year. Those reports have contained important recommendations, building on those made by other UN and OAS human rights bodies. The reports have also served as a basis for further actions, including statements by successive Chairpersons of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

However, so far none of this has effectively improved the situation, given a lack of political

will on the part of the Colombian state to reduce violence and comply with its international obligations. For its part, the Colombian government has argued that it is difficult to reverse a cycle of violence inherited from the past. The government has also argued that it is a victim of right-wing paramilitaries, which have targeted public officials investigating abuses.

Evidence shows the contrary. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recently declared in her statement to the 55th Session of the Commission on Human Rights,

[t]he paramilitary phenomenon again grew in extent and strength. The Government's commitment to the counteracting of paramilitary groups has been weak and inconsistent. That is in part obvious from the authorities' replies to communications from the Office informing them of the existence of bases, roadblocks and paramilitary movements or warning of imminent attacks. The instruments adopted by the Government to provide an effective and timely response in the struggle against the paramilitary groups have proved ineffective in containing their expansion or promoting their disbanding. In some cases the instruments have not even been used. The existence of links between public servants and members of paramilitary organizations and the absence of sanctions remain matters of the greatest concern. (Paragraph 5, E.CN.4/2001/15)

The existence of Colombia's armed conflict cannot solely be blamed for this situation. Even prior to the initiation of armed insurgent movements, the Colombian state had responded to protests with the use of illegal methods for social control, including the physical elimination of political opponents. Now the escalation and spread of open confrontation has worsened the possibilities for the respect of human rights (please see Appendices II, III, and IV: Human Rights Violations in Colombia).

Statistics indicate a rapid increase in the rate of abuses. Impoverished peasants and rural dwellers have been victimised, as have trade union leaders and representatives of social organisations. While the government has responded to increasing criticism by setting up several ad hoc commissions ostensibly to address this problem, none have succeeded in stopping the violence.

Human rights monitors have also been heavily targeted. Scores of human rights defenders from local, regional and national organizations have been tortured, murdered, disappeared or forced to flee their homes or seek asylum outside Colombia as a result of death threats. Members of the armed forces and the police have been implicated in a number of these crimes.

In the past ten years, training in human rights standards and international humanitarian law has been included in the curricula of the Armed Forces, the Police and government officials. Yet there is a continuing failure to implement these norms. Clearly, what is lacking is a commitment to democratic values and respect for human beings, a commitment which requires a different concept of education – one in which academic lessons are just one part of a more comprehensive process.

Abuses of International Humanitarian Law

In 1996, the Colombian government ratified the Second Optional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions, which unilaterally obliges all parties in conflict to respect the civilian population. However, state security forces frequently fail to comply with their obligations under this international norm.

To cite one example, last year, a group of eleven elementary school children on a field trip in the northern province of Antioquia were killed by soldiers who claimed they thought they were guerrillas. While survivors reported they had been calling for help, the soldiers also claimed they heard nothing and subsequently failed to provide medical assistance to the wounded. Those responsible were sent to a military court instead of a civilian one, even though, under Colombian law it is the latter which has jurisdiction over cases of human rights abuses.

Victims who have been caught in the crossfire have denounced how both state security and insurgent forces have attacked or occupied schools, churches and towns without any consideration for the civilian population.

Indeed, in recent years, Colombia's guerrilla organizations have adopted methods of combat that also clearly violate international laws regulating conflicts. Extensive coverage by the media of these cases has created the distorted perception that it is only the guerrillas who are responsible for such abuses.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the guerrillas are responsible for the majority of kidnappings, especially of wealthy people. They have also been responsible for documented cases of torture, individual killings, oil pipeline bombings, roadblocks, the destruction of electrical facilities and towns, blackmailing and, more recently, forcibly recruiting of child soldiers (please see Appendix V: Kidnappings in Colombia 2000).

As the cruelty of the war intensifies, civilians are becoming the main targets.

Communities that defend their autonomy not to participate in the armed conflict, a right upheld under Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and the Second Optional Protocol, face growing danger as they are subjected to pressure to take sides. Increasingly, for all the armed parties, "neutrality" has become a forbidden concept.

At the same time, the suspicion that a person has taken sides is often the main justification executing them. Selling food or offering water or shelter to any of the combatants has become a crime. Yet all of the warring parties rely on civilians to provide intelligence and strategic support for military operations.

Perhaps one of the most terrible practices has been the hiring of mercenaries, both national and international, since the early 80s by the official armed forces, allegedly to combat kidnappings and fight "the internal enemy."

Backed by increasing financing provided by drug lords, these mercenaries are now responsible for the majority of human rights abuses, particularly in rural areas.

These mercenary paramilitary forces call themselves "Auto Defensas" or self defence groups, a term that is frequently echoed by the government. They often include former members of the military and police, institution which share the same counterinsurgency goal as state security forces.

While they claim to be a third independent actor in the conflict, there is abundant evidence demonstrating clear links between paramilitary groups and the state's armed forces. In certain cases, paramilitaries are even active duty members of the official armed forces who make possible covert operations, either through direct actions or omissions. This is the only way to explain the massive killings taking place in areas completely controlled by government forces and the fact that warnings of impending attacks are disregarded.

The paramilitaries have sought to justify their actions by referring to atrocities committed by the guerrillas. Some ranchers and business people do not hide their sympathy for paramilitary leaders and operations. Neither do high-ranking officials.

Colombia has had a long history of militarization and solving disputes through violent means. Today, more and more people believe that the only solution to the Colombian conflict is defeating "the enemy" militarily. The problem is that all the armed parties are convinced that they will obtain a military victory.

Peace Process

Photos published in the press of then-Presidential candidate Andres Pastrana embracing FARC Commander Manuel Marulanda helped Mr. Pastrana win the elections. Colombians were tired of the war and thought that finally peace was near in this troubled country.

The government's establishment of a De-militarised Zone (DMZ) of 42,000 square kilometres in order to facilitate peace talks offered great hope to Colombians and the international community.

While one year of conversations has been an important step forward, it has yet to bear fruit. So far, the parties at the table have only agreed to a methodology for initiating dialogue. From the beginning, human rights concerns have been absent from the agenda. To date, the main issues have included the exchange of soldiers and police officers taken by the rebels in military operations five years earlier, and state action to dismantle paramilitary groups. A series of "public hearings" have been held in which social, economic and political topics have been raised by representatives of civil society organizations, including the business sector. However, these hearings do not have a decisive character or imply transformations in practice.

Several obstacles have interrupted the rhythm of this process, and there is a mutual feeling of

a lack of policies and transparency necessary to achieve peace. To date, some leaders and representatives of civil society organisations, including diplomatic missions in Colombia, have been able to attend hearings, but the truth is that the peace process has failed to provide opportunities for real participation by representatives of all sectors of the population. What prevails is the continuing belief in a military solution rather than a clear commitment to achieving a lasting peace.

The United Nations General Secretary appointed a Special Representative for Peace in Colombia, Mr. Jan Egeland, from Norway. However, his efforts have been overshadowed by the implementation of Phase I of Plan Colombia.

Plan Colombia

The effects of conflict in Colombia have been severe. The government argues that economic development is not possible without a peace agreement to provide an environment conducive to encouraging international investment.

However, it is necessary to explain that during the past decades, the Colombian economy has remained relatively stable because of money from drug trafficking. The introduction of drug trafficking to Colombia in the late 70s was tacitly accepted by powerful sectors of society. Today, those same sectors deny any links between private or public money and the drug trade, claiming that only guerrillas and paramilitaries trade in cocaine and heroin.

Colombia currently produces 50 percent of the illicit drugs consumed in North America and Europe. From this dirty business, Colombia receives just 10 percent of the profits from the total sales of illegal drugs, while 90 percent remains in northern consuming countries. Guerrillas and paramilitaries may be involved in the first stages of drug production, but very little has been done to expose those who profit from the retail and wholesale business in the countries of consumption.

It is necessary to speak of the perversity of this crime that is destroying Colombia. Drug lords have bought large tracts of land in strategic areas to plant coca and poppies, while the government has taken no effective preventative action. These drug lords have deforested important sections of Colombia's tropical forests. As well, they have distorted the cultural traditions of hardworking peasants by paying enormous amounts of money for their harvested coca. They have created a culture of easy money, in the process destroying families and fuelling violence.

But drug processing and trafficking has only benefited small sections of Colombian society. Despite the war, or because of it, the poor have become poorer and the rich much wealthier (please see Appendix VI: Economic growth and internal war in Colombia).

The drug trade has been linked to the illicit arms trade since the times of the "Contras" in Nicaragua. There has been substantial evidence which connects these two illegal activities to the US military. The Colombian case is no exception. These are some factors to bear in mind when analyzing the nature of Plan Colombia.

Designed with the advice of the United States government, the Plan was initially presented as

the means to "achieve democracy and economic prosperity". While its components will not be studied here, according to the rationale of Plan Colombia, the illicit drug trade is entirely responsible for violence and poverty in Colombia. Indeed, Plan Colombia does not recognise economic or political injustices as the principal causes of conflict, but instead views drug-related corruption as the principal reason for the present situation.

The US \$7.5 billion Plan presents Colombia as a country in which the international community should invest in the largest set of reforms and economic schemes ever designed (please see Appendix VII: Aid to Colombia 2000-2001).

Coinciding with US foreign policy, Plan Colombia received a support of US \$1.3 billion in 2000. The military, congressmen and corporations lobbied for three months to have this initiative approved by the US Congress (please see Appendix VIII: Plan Colombia request proposal).

The outrageously high proportion of military "assistance" in the US government's contribution to Plan Colombia reflects a variety of interests embedded in its formulation. Indeed, the US money for Plan Colombia requires the Colombian government to purchase equipment, helicopters and training from private and public US corporations. In addition, the "social and economic" aspects of that "assistance" require US-owned companies to apply for AID funds, with the exception of money allocated for the "peace" segment. Once this requirement is fulfilled, Colombian NGOs and civil society organizations may receive contracts to implement these programmes (please see Appendix IX: Colombia 2002 Request)

According to the Washington-based Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPONLINE), the request for funds will be made possible through the normal federal budget process. This differs from the previous US\$1.3 billion "package" that came in the form of a separate "supplemental appropriation", according to information from the State Department's web site. Information from the Defence Department is not available.

While the US contribution to Plan Colombia is predominantly military, the European Union and Switzerland, amongst other countries, have expressed reservations about this approach, declaring their intention to support "economic alternatives" for the substitution of illicit crops.

However, these intentions are not consistent with the bilateral agreements between the Colombian state and the United Nations Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP), whose main components of aerial spraying openly oppose environmental standards and lack measures of control to avoid human rights abuses.

Plan to Combat Drug Production at the Source: The Case of Putumayo

In order to eradicate approximately 30,000 hectares of coca plantations in the province of Putumayo and thereby weaken the illicit trade of drugs, the initial objective outlined in the English

version of Plan Colombia (the first version known in Colombia) was to:

- Strengthen the fight against drug trafficking and dismantle the trafficking organizations through an integrated effort by the armed forces.
- Combat illicit cultivation through continuous and systematic action of both the military and police forces, especially in the Putumayo region and in Southern Colombia, and strengthen the eradication capacity of the Colombian National Police.
- Establish military control of the south for eradication.
- Destroy the processing structures and improve land, air, sea and river interdiction of drugs and illegal precursor chemicals.
- Establish government control over key drug production areas.

Putumayo belongs to a region that was historically marginalized by the government. Government presence in the state was essentially military. Despite this, the illicit cultivation of coca blossomed, bringing with it FARC guerrillas to organise the taxation of this crop.

Lawlessness and the violent resolution of conflicts became the main characteristics of Putumayo. By 1999, inhabitants in the region were trying to change this violent environment and build democratic mechanisms in a context of progressive escalation of paramilitary activity that impacted upon the living conditions of the people. These plans were changed dramatically with the central government's decision to implement Plan Colombia, a programme that was designed without consulting local authorities or the population. (Please see Appendix X: Violence in Putumayo, DASALUD 1999)

Since 1999, two main areas have been sprayed with chemicals aimed at defoliating illicit crops. The Colombian authorities disregarded international recommendations, even those of the UNDCP, which drew attention to the irreversible damage to plantations caused by indiscriminate aerial fumigation. The authorities began implementing phase I of Plan Colombia with their own resources, later continuing with equipment and helicopters provided by the United States. (On Canadian involvement, see: "Concerns Around The Sale Of Helicopters To The Colombian Armed Forces - A brief produced by ICCHRLA in cooperation with Project Ploughshares and Amnesty International Canada," March 2001, which can be viewed at the following website: <http://www.web.net/~icchrla/Colombia/Helicopter%20Brief%20Mar01.htm>)

Testimonies provided to NGOs by peasants and indigenous peoples revealed the destruction caused by the chemical aspersion of glyphosate in the northern area of Putumayo, in the Caqueta River basin, and raised doubts about the composition of the chemical being employed. (Please see Appendix XI: Putumayo Areas of Fumigation 2000-2001)

Stories about small animals dying, water becoming contaminated, and people suffering from intoxication, skin allergies, digestive disorders and headaches, were inconsistent with official statements of the harmless effects of glyphosate. (Please see "Hoja de hechos: Efectos de las fumigaciones aéreas en los municipios del Valle del Guamués y San Miguel, Putumayo Diciembre 2000 – Febrero 2001," at: http://www.mamacoca.org/hoja_de_hechos.htm)

To date, studies conducted by the Ombudsman's Office, which collected samples of the

plants affected ruled out the presence of more powerful defoliators such as Imazapyr and Thetibuiron, whose composition is similar to that of the infamous Agent Orange.

Environmentalists were more concerned, however, because of the discovery of a research plan to be carried out by the Sinchi Institute and the UNDCP to introduce the use of a biological "control agent," a fungus called "Fusarium Oxysporum, variety eritroxil." A general alarm was raised and Colombian and Ecuadorian scientists and environmentalists warned of the possible destruction of the Amazon forest.

Following these protests, the Ministry of the Environment decided to cancel experimentation with this fungus. But Plan Colombia contains a provision which recommends "alternative biological controls" for coca eradication. This remains a deep concern for civil society and indigenous peoples organisations.

Some months after the official launching of Plan Colombia, as US helicopters started to arrive in the Putumayo region and fumigation commenced in the northern area, groups of peasants decided to submit a proposal for manual eradication.

Struggling to have their voices heard, they rejected the "social component" of Plan Colombia, offered by Presidential Advisor Gonzalo de Francisco. Finally, they came to an agreement to start a process in which, with the mediation of the Mayor of Puerto Asis, the main city of the province, more than 200 peasants agreed to sign a deal to eradicate their coca plantations manually. This example is presented today as the official approach of the Pastrana Administration.

However, at a recent seminar held to evaluate the "Social Pacts," as these agreements for manual eradication are called, peasants from the region articulated concerns. Their criticism is based on the ambiguity of terms which stipulate that if those who have agreed to participate have not met the goal of "total eradication," within one year, they must reimburse the equivalent of US\$800 (the amount provided for substitution), and their fields will be subject to aerial spraying.

Opposing the "military side" of Plan Colombia, FARC guerrillas submitted the province of Putumayo to a terrible blockade during the last three months of 2000. Local communities struggled to survive the lack of food and the prohibition of transportation on local roads. In response to the siege, the government sent a convoy of basic implements, together with more weapons, armoured vehicles, military equipment and personnel. This strong show of force obliged the FARC to lift the blockade on December 15, 2000.

Undermining the progress of the agreement made in Puerto Asis, at the end of December 2000, a vast area was targeted for fumigation.

The United States Drug authorities and the Colombian implementers of Plan Colombia distinguish between "small" producers and "industrial" producers. The area selected on this occasion was said to be "industrial," meaning that a great number of the inhabitants from the zone had mainly coca plantations.

Evidence shows that although there was a massive destruction of coca, the operations also destroyed other plants and animals, including "alternative" legal plantations. For every hectare of coca, hundreds of legal crops were eliminated. Justifying its actions, the government argued that

peasants in this area had purposely planted legal crops alongside the illegal coca plants in order to avoid official punishment. Consequently, the state had no responsibility in the losses incurred by the peasants.

Preliminary surveys undertaken by the Health Department of the region also showed serious health effects in humans as a result of the fumigation. The surveys were not backed by the financial resources necessary to carry out more systematic and scientific research. However, the United States government has expressed interest in funding such a study.

The long-term effects of aerial spraying on the soil, vegetation, animals and humans have not been studied. However, the short-term effects to date of Plan Colombia can be described as follows:

1. Humanitarian crisis due to the loss of food security for the population
2. Internal displacement for those affected by sprayings and political violence

At the moment, there are dozens of demands by peasants for compensation from the state in order to replace what they lost. There is a scarcity of food in some plots affected by the fumigation. Lacking money to buy their food, because coca was the only profitable crop, many peasants have decided to abandon their lands. Some have moved to urban areas, others to Mocoa, the capital of the province, or to the bordering provinces of Nariño and Huila.

Approximately 5,000 Colombians have fled to Ecuador. Coinciding with the action of helicopters and police aircraft that carried out the aerial spraying, paramilitary groups took control of towns where the FARC had been strong. Places like Puerto Caicedo and La Dorada are now in the hands of paramilitary groups that forcibly disappeared local leaders, including some indigenous authorities. The official armed forces, trained and equipped with US funds, have turned a blind eye on the situation there.

Fumigation continues at this moment in the eastern part of the province. Indigenous communities have felt the strongest impact, and many have been forced to seek asylum in Ecuador.

This fumigation is taking place in a region where international corporations are interested in making profits from oil exploitation and exploration. No forest is needed when it comes to oil exploitation. For this reason, indigenous and social leaders in Putumayo consider that the goal of Plan Colombia is to expel them from the area in order to allow a smooth process of globalization.

International Effects of Plan Colombia

According to the Centre for International Policy (CIP), “[t]he most significant aid programme in the Foreign Operations Bill is International Narcotics and Law Enforcement.... In 2001 INL will support what the State Department is calling an 'Andean counter-drug initiative' or ACI.” CIP states that ACI will distribute \$731 million in 2002 through the INL budget as outlined in the table in Appendix XII: Distribution of US Budget for Andean Initiative.

This Andean Initiative is based on the assertion that the countries bordering Colombia must react to the "spill over" caused by the internal war and to the potentially negative impacts of Plan Colombia, particularly in reference to the guerrillas crossing international borders.

The results of this initiative have been a greater militarization of frontiers, to the detriment of those who live in those areas, especially indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians. Indigenous peoples who hold dual citizenship are amongst the most victimised.

Reports by human rights organisations, churches and ethnic communities living in Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador indicate that the growing presence of military or police forces along the Colombian border act as a barrier preventing asylum seekers from entering these countries.

Currently, approximately 500 asylum seekers in Panama are threatened with deportation by the Panamanian authorities, who granted them only "transitory permission" to stay in that country. A similar situation faces Colombian asylum seekers in Venezuela, where the Chavez government treats them not as refugees, but as "displaced peoples in transit," a status that does not exist in international law.

The situation in Ecuador is more positive because Colombian asylum seekers have a greater chance of being granted refugee status. The Ecuadorian government has signed an agreement with the (UNHCR) to establish a permanent office in Quito and has implemented a process in which the Catholic Church is playing a key role. However, higher levels of poverty, lack of economic opportunities in Ecuador and increasing paramilitary incursions into that country dissuade some Colombians from going into exile there, choosing instead to flee to another part of Colombia, where they face the continued risk of human rights violations.

Ethnic minorities and the internal conflict

The two largest ethnic minorities in Colombia are indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians. They represent 1.5 to 2 percent and 15 to 25 percent of the total population respectively, and live in areas that Western economic development strategists did not consider "productive." Thus, for centuries, these communities managed to preserve the rain forest of tropical jungles in the country, particularly in the Amazon basin, in the Darien Region, along the borders with Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil, and the Pacific Coast, where they also preserved mangroves and fish stocks.

For decades, these populations struggled to obtain legal recognition of their right to their way of life and their territories. These rights were enshrined in the 1991 Constitution, in which Colombia is defined as a "multi-ethnic and pluricultural society" that allows indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples to have their own forms of government and justice, in harmony with national laws.

Legislation introduced three years after the 1991 Constitution was approved guarantees legal title to vast areas of forests for Afro-Colombians and representation in Congress for leaders of these communities, along with representatives of indigenous peoples.

However, powerful economic interests behind the armed conflict are reversing these achievements. The territories disputed by the warring parties are areas which are rich in minerals, petroleum and timber; the areas are also of strategic economic interest where there are hydroelectric dams, highways, railways, ports, oil pipelines or tourist projects. That is what Plan Colombia is about – development as post-modern capitalism understands it.

In areas designated as national parks or reserves, where the indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples live, corrupt officials and drug traffickers threaten these communities. The armed conflict also represents a huge threat to these cultures, whose survival is already precarious at best, by bringing new invaders to their territories, historically neglected by the national government.

In the past ten years, casualties among indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians have increased dramatically. Not only are they subject to forced displacement, but the numbers of assassinations and disappearances have also increased dramatically. In declarations to the press, for instance, the National Ombudsman and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia said that the Embera-Katio ethnic group which inhabits the province of Córdoba is under serious threat. Last year alone, this community of 2,400 people suffered the loss of 18 of its leaders, who were assassinated or detained-disappeared. Most of these crimes are the responsibility of the guerrillas and paramilitary groups in the region where international capital has supported the construction of the Urrá I hydroelectric mega-project.

Indigenous populations in the province of Putumayo are also under enormous threat. Their lands have been targeted by aerial spraying with chemicals that endanger their environment and health, as well as the sacred, medicinal plants that lie at the centre of their religious beliefs and practices. Groups of Kofan and Siona indigenous peoples have been forced to flee from Putumayo into Ecuador and Peru.

In the north-eastern part of Colombia where there have been attacks by guerrillas and paramilitaries, other groups of Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples from the Embera and Wuaunaan communities have been forced to flee into the jungles of the Darien Gap in Panama. Today, they live in fear of being forcibly returned to Colombia by the Panamanian authorities.

On the border with Venezuela, incursions of paramilitaries into the Perija and Motilones Sierras have forced the local indigenous populations to flee to more insecure areas where they now face increased poverty and hunger, as well as war.

Meanwhile, this year, during the celebration of Holy Week, groups of paramilitaries assaulted a peaceful region in the highlands of Cauca province, killing more than 50 people. The majority of them were Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples. The caravan of death continued down towards the mouth of the Naya River, inflicting more casualties and terror. The majority of the paramilitaries were Afro-Colombians themselves, hired to kill their brothers and sisters. Despite clear evidence and repeated advance warnings of their presence in the zone, neither the army nor the navy took action to prevent the killings. Some days later, following a national and international outcry, the President reported from the zone that more than 60 paramilitaries had been captured while hiding along the nearby Yurumanguí River. FARC guerrillas allegedly killed seven Afro-Colombians in reprisals some days before. Now, more than 4,000 people from this region have sought protection in improvised camps in the city of Buenaventura, the largest port on the Pacific

Coast.

Impoverished communities which continue to claim their land rights are terrified to go back. However, they are also afraid they will lose their collective property, or that it will be usurped by private corporations interested in exploiting the rich natural resources in the region. There would be no obstacle to this, as the grass-roots organisations which might oppose these practices and defend the rights of the communities have been severely weakened by human rights abuses.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the humanitarian crisis that Colombia is experiencing, there are important signs of hope because of the incredible resilience and capacity of its people to overcome adversity. Everywhere in rural and urban areas, individuals, communities, and NGOs are co-ordinating their efforts to reinvent their nation.

From the relatives of imprisoned police and army officers to the family members of those detained or disappeared for political reasons and those kidnapped for ransom, sectors of Colombian civil society are giving lessons about how to raise awareness and build solidarity.

Perhaps the most courageous examples of sacrifice for peace come from ethnic organizations that have been forcibly displaced.

One is that of the Afro-Colombians and poor peasants organized in so-called Peace Communities in northern Choco province, which borders Panama. With more than 57 people killed, some by guerrillas but most by paramilitary forces, the Peace Communities have managed to design their own understanding of international humanitarian law. In order to be respected as non-combatants, they have decided not to collaborate with any of the warring parties, including the state's armed forces, which have not accepted the communities' decision. These courageous people have paid a heavy price, including being attacked while harvesting their corn and sugar cane in rural Antioquia, in the Uraba Gulf region. However, they have continued to maintain a non-military response to the armed conflict, and have maintained unity even among displaced communities.

Some of these groups have even risked returning to their homelands. After gaining international recognition for their peace work, they rely on the accompaniment of international groups. Peace Brigades International delegates, church activists, European NGOs and governments, along with the International Red Cross, illustrate how working together for peace is worthwhile.

Indigenous peoples organisations are another good example of tenacity in the face of adversity. Although recently the Embera-Katio declared their intention to follow a decision by the U'wa indigenous people to commit collective suicide if their demands are not met, they have effectively used their scarce resources to draw attention to their struggle for survival. Indigenous peoples threatened by the parties in conflict in several parts of Colombia are calling for a humanitarian mission to visit the country and verify the conditions they are facing in order to put pressure on policy makers.

Violence and war are present in almost every corner of Colombia. But at the same time, peace is being debated everywhere, and proposals are emerging from important segments of the population that do not believe in a military solution to the conflict.

Despite the powerful and pervasive influence of mass media which have helped polarize a public which is tired of war and desires a "strong and rapid" solution to the conflict, we still have hope that efforts to address Colombian problems from a non-violent perspective can succeed.

Individuals and groups that joined *La Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres* (Women's Peaceful Route) recently obtained an important international award in New York. In April 2000, Flor Romero, a

human rights professor from the National University of Colombia, was awarded the UNESCO Annual Human Rights Education Prize for her efforts to disseminate and teach non-violent and peaceful ways of dealing with conflict.

Every day, internally-displaced youth learn new ways to help their families survive in Colombia. In 1999, Colombian children who participated in the Children's Mandate for Peace were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and have won significant international recognition. But there are many other young people, our sons and daughters, who express their fears and most of all, their expectations by supporting cultural projects in their schools and communities. These anonymous leaders of the future need a chance to show their abilities.

These and other projects and efforts need decisive support and solidarity from academics and civil society organizations in other parts of the world. As the Colombian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers has stated, we cannot take children out of war without investing in productive and educational projects.

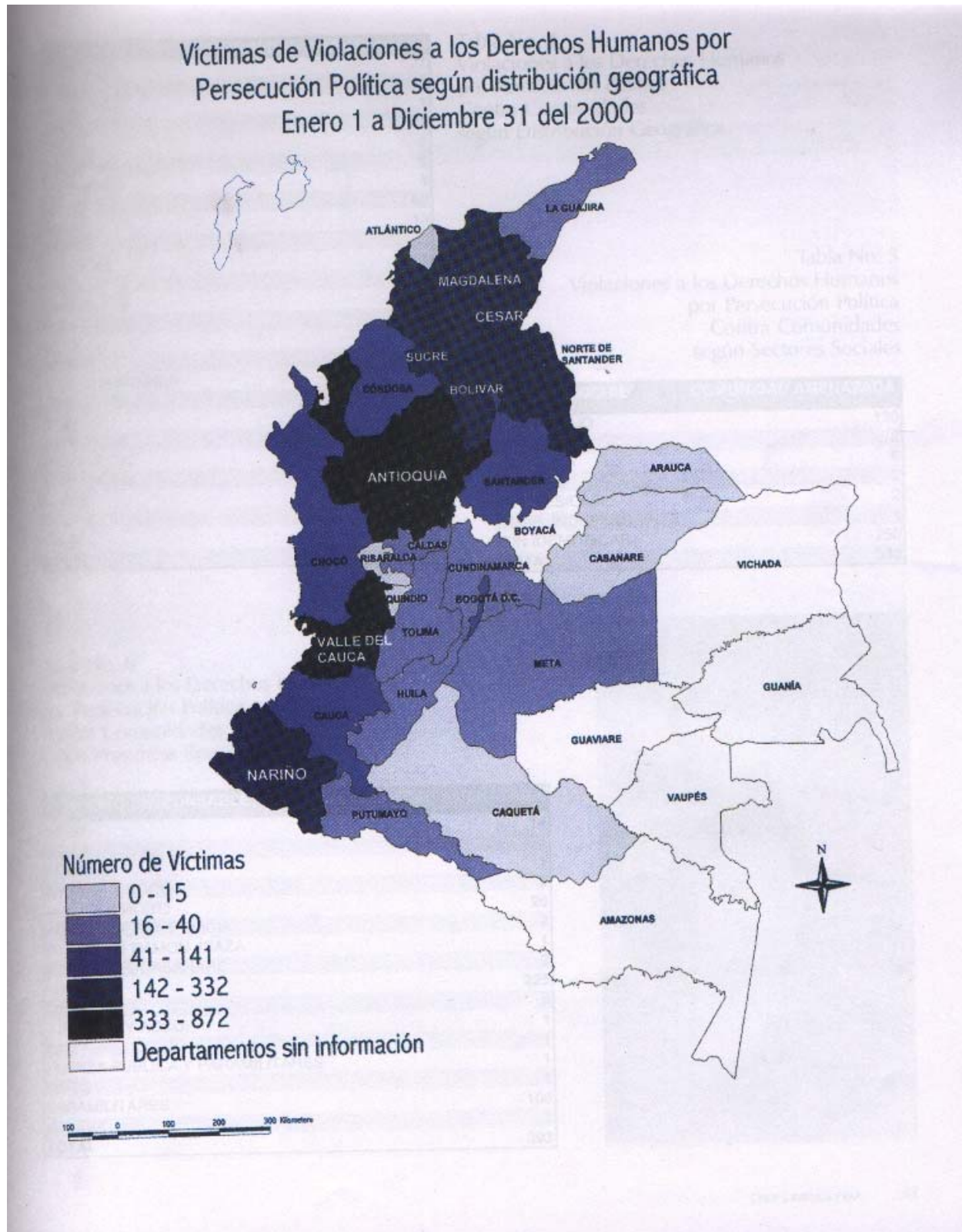
My own organization, the Latin America programme of the American Friends Service Committee has made it a priority to work "to change US policy in Colombia and promote peaceful alternatives by educating the US public about US involvement and the crisis in Colombia." I urge Canadian citizens also to mobilize and pressure the Canadian government to increase its support for the peace process in Colombia and publicly distance itself from military solutions.

Ethics of democracy require that the international community see beyond the long-standing myths that have misrepresented Colombia's humanitarian crisis as exclusively the result of drug trafficking. Real links need to be forged between civil society organisations in order to help construct a lasting peace based on justice and respect for human rights to end a complex, but not unsolvable, conflict.

Appendix I: Flows of Internal Displacement

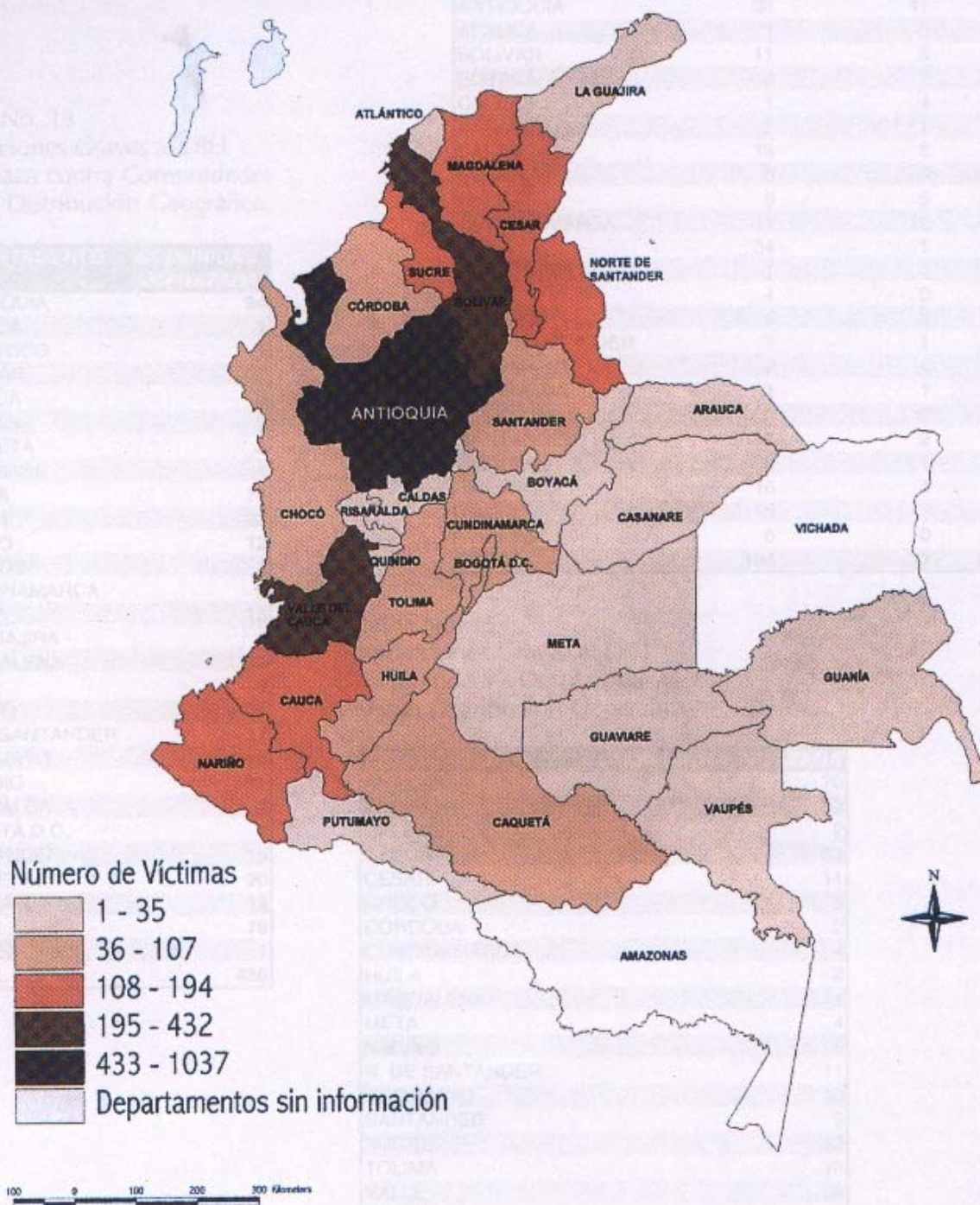


Appendix II: Human Rights Violations in Colombia (1)

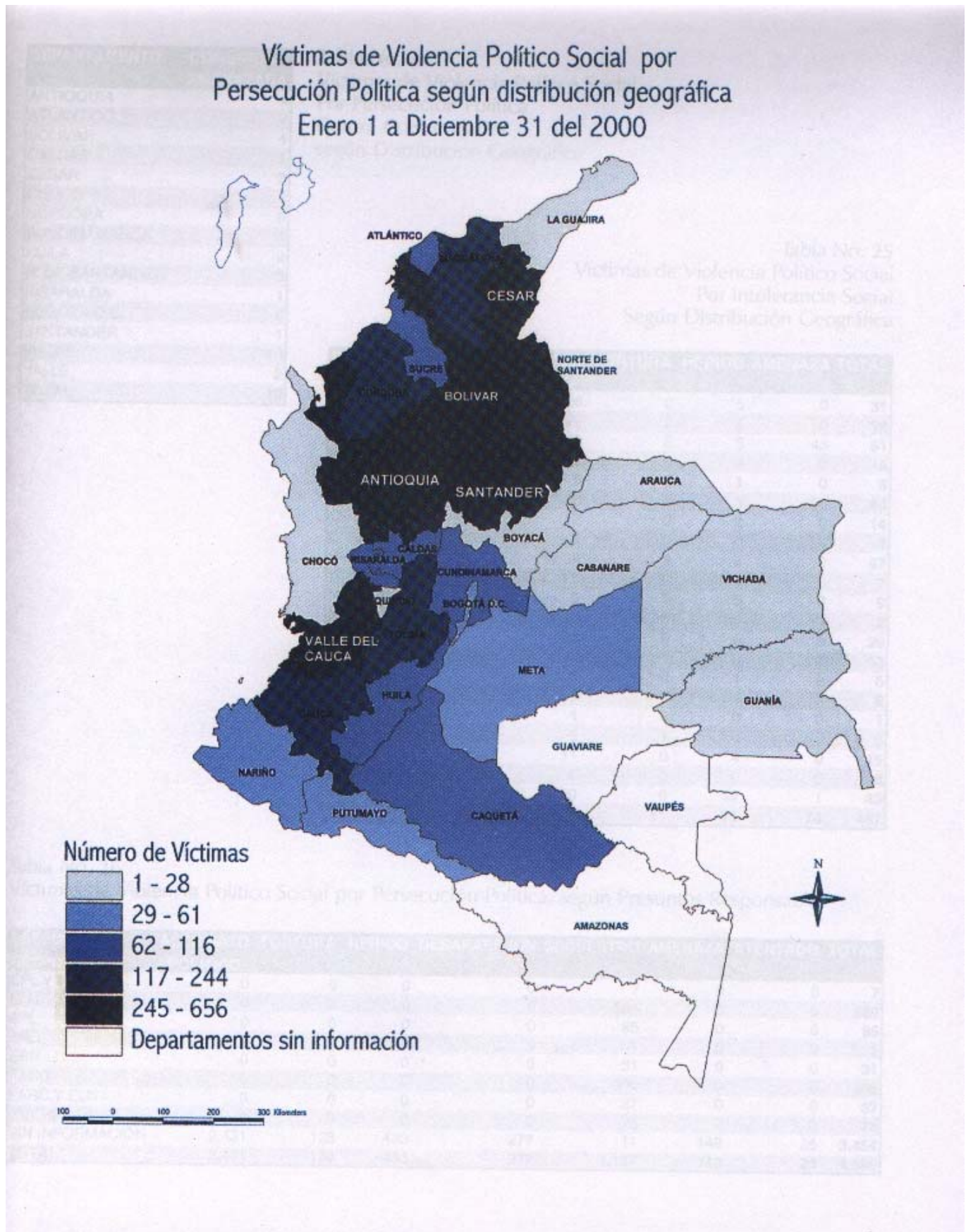


Appendix III: Human Rights Violations in Colombia (2)

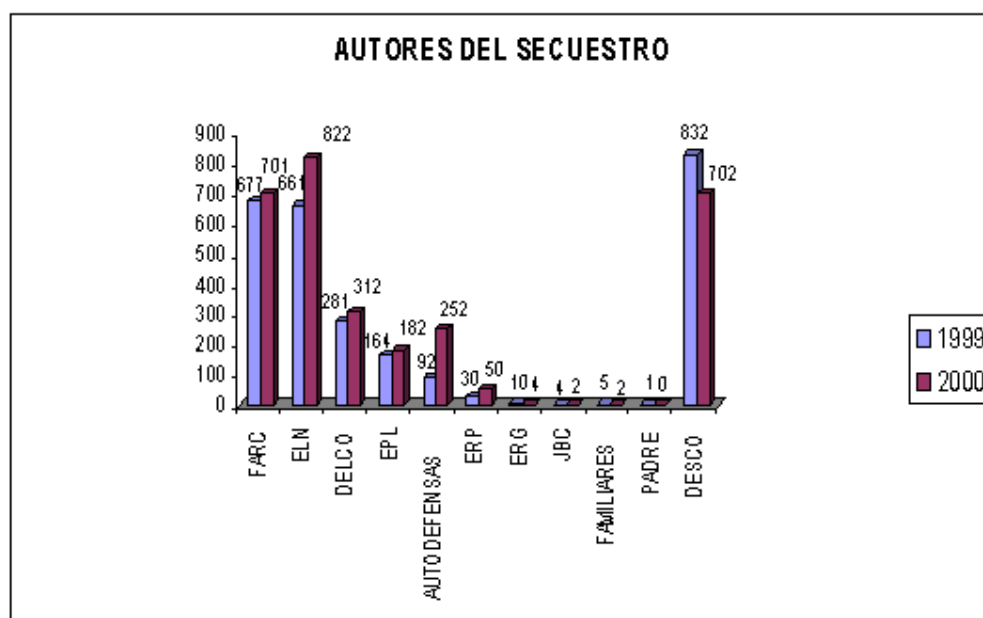
Víctimas de Violaciones graves al DIH contra Personas según distribución geográfica Enero 1 a Diciembre 31 del 2000



Appendix IV: Human Rights Violations in Colombia (3)



Appendix V: Kidnappings in Colombia 2000



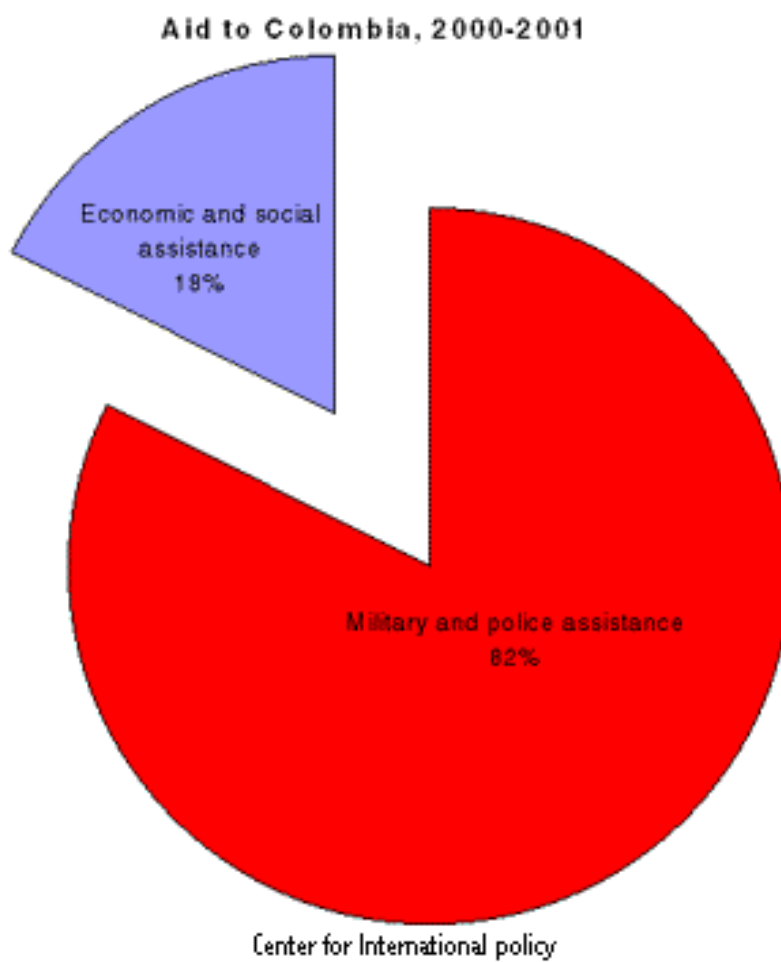
Appendix VI: Economic growth and internal war in Colombia

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT 1991 – 2000

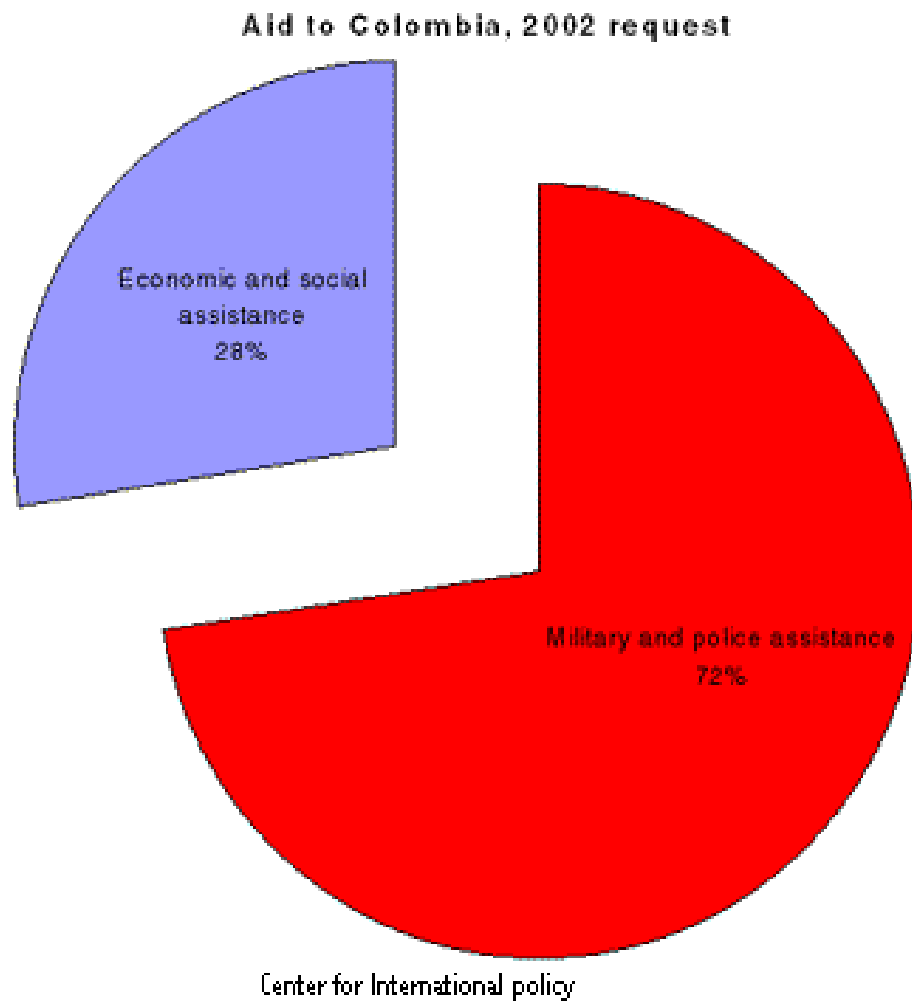
YEAR	GDP Growth %	Unemployment rate	Poverty by income			Gini coefficient per person		
			Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
1991	24	9.8	53.8	47.3	68.4	0.5489	0.527	0.504
1992	38	9.2						
1993	53	7.9	51.7	43.6	70.7	0.562	0.534	0.505
1994	53	7.6						
1995	54	8.7						
1996	20	11.9	52.8	42.8	77.4	0.544	0.503	0.503
1997	32	12.1	50.3	39.1	78.9	0.555	0.524	0.497
1998	0.6	15.7	51.5	41.8	75.8	0.563	0.525	0.565
1999	-4.8	19.5	56.3	47.2	79.6	0.556	0.522	0.539
2000	2.8	20.8	61.5	49.5	84.9	0.571	0.539	0.552

Source: DNP-UDS-DIOGS, Bulletin SISD, no. 26, 2000.

Appendix VII: Aid to Colombia 2000-2001



Appendix VIII: Plan Colombia request proposal



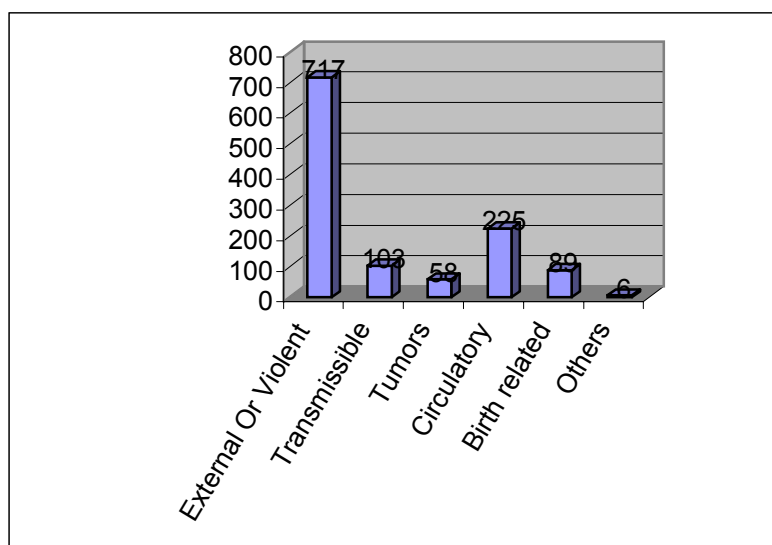
Appendix IX: Colombia 2002 Request**ESTIMATES FOR AID THROUGH ALL CHANNELS**

COUNTRY	MILITARY AND P of US dollars)			SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AID (millions of US dollars)		
	2000- 2001 average	2002 request	Percent change	2000- 2001 average	2002 request	Percent change
COLOMBIA	486.57	386	-21	104	147	+29
Peru	48.62	90	+85	26	79	+204
Bolivia	53.87	64	+19	59	47	-20
Ecuador	19.68	31	+58	4	20	+500
Brazil	4.72	17	+260	0.2	0.2	0
Venezuela	5.79	14	+142	0.3	0.03	0
Panama	3.83	13	+240	0	0	0
Total	623.08	615	-1	193.23	293	+52

Source: Center for international policy

Appendix X: Violence in Putumayo, DASALUD 1999

External Or Violent	717
Transmissible	103
Tumors	58
Circulatory	225
Birth related	89
Others	6



Appendix XI: Putumayo Areas of Fumigation 2000-2001



Appendix XII: Distribution of US Budget for Andean Initiative

DISTRIBUTION OF US BUDGET FOR ANDEAN INITIATIVE (US Million Dollars)

Country	Military and Police Assistance	Economic and Social assistance	Total
Colombia	\$252,5	\$146,5	\$399
Perú	\$77	\$79	\$156
Bolivia	\$54	\$47	\$101
Ecuador	\$19	\$20	\$39
Brazil	\$15	*	\$15
Venezuela	\$10	*	\$10
Panamá	\$11	*	\$11
Total	\$438,5	\$292,5	\$731

* According to the State Department, aid for these countries is "primarily for interdiction [military/police assistance], although also available for institutional development, to the extent feasible."