

# Towards Greater “Human Security” and Peace in Colombia

*By Michael Shifter*

Colombia features the only continuing armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. This long-standing conflict has exacted an incalculable toll on that country's citizens. The overriding objective for Colombians, along with a concerned international community, is to bring the conflict to an end and achieve a lasting peace. Doing so, however, is a long-term, complex, and overwhelmingly political task. It includes, but goes considerably beyond, reestablishing government authority and protecting Colombian citizens from violent actors. Attaining human security in all its dimensions is a gradual, sequential process.

For two decades, various Colombian presidents have undertaken peace efforts aimed at laying the foundation for achieving human security goals. To be sure, there has been considerable success in some key areas. Agreements have been reached with guerrilla groups such as the M-19<sup>1</sup>, which has subsequently been incorporated into the political process. Some of the M-19's former leaders have served as cabinet officials and are mentioned as possible presidential

candidates in 2006. Still, peace with the two major insurgencies on the left—the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army)—along with the rightist paramilitary group, the AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), has so far proved elusive, despite the country's best efforts. The violence continues to inflict enormous damage on Colombian society—and poses a major challenge for the rest of the hemisphere and, indeed, the entire international community.

Regional and international organizations have an important role to play in assisting the Colombian government to pursue peace. External actors can perform a variety of functions to give the process greater legitimacy and resources, thereby enhancing prospects for success. Many examples in the international arena, including in Latin America—the Central American peace processes of the 1990s stand out—are instructive in this regard and can be useful referents for the Colombian situation.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part argues that it is important to view the Colombian situation and policy challenge within the widely accepted framework of “human security.” Such a framework underlines the importance of a comprehensive and long-term approach in order to deal with the country's multiple challenges

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## Inside:

The Colombian Conflict and the Risk  
of a Regional Human Rights and  
Humanitarian Crisis ..... 20

*By César Montúfar*

<sup>1</sup> In March 1990, the M-19 signed an agreement with the government of President Virgilio Barco.

# Anderson

Working  
Paper

# Foreword

In 2002, the Inter-American Dialogue launched a working paper series on Colombia. We sought to devote sustained and high-quality attention to what is among the hemisphere's most urgent challenges, looking especially at ways of helping the country move toward greater peace and security. The aim was to stimulate a wider public debate on the complex issues facing key decision makers, actors, and analysts with regard to the Colombian conflict. We offered diagnoses and interpretations of the current situation, as well as ideas for policy prescriptions that could usefully contribute to resolving the country's multiple and deep-seated problems.

The Dialogue has extended the focus of the series to the broader Andean region, encompassing Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, as well as a continuing concern with Colombia. The expanded scope reflects the natural evolution of a Dialogue initiative begun in June 2001 – originally known as the Colombia Working Group, and now as the Andean Working Group. The initiative is made up of a select and diverse group of analysts and former policy officials from the Andean region, other Latin American countries, Europe, Canada, and the United States. The working group serves as a core of advisors, a “brain trust” for the Dialogue on the Andes, a central priority for the institution. The group's goal is not necessarily to reach agreement and produce consensus documents. Rather, it is to encourage as much imagination as possible, and generate ideas and proposals that help shape thought and action on Andean challenges in constructive ways.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first, written by Michael Shifter, places the policy challenge facing Colombia within a human security framework. The roles played by key actors in the international community in advancing human security goals are discussed. These include the United Nations, Organization of American States, European and US governments, and various non-governmental groups. The second section is written by prominent Ecuadorian social scientist César Montúfar, from the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito. In accordance with key aspects of the human security framework, Montúfar analyzes the effects of the Colombian conflict on neighboring countries, particularly Ecuador. Montúfar reviews the efforts of individual country governments and international organizations and suggests how they could be more effective in addressing the humanitarian and environmental problems arising from the conflict. Shifter and Montúfar's perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of the Working Group or the Inter-American Dialogue.

Since the situation throughout the Andean region is highly dynamic, with events unfolding with unusual velocity, it is nearly inevitable that some of what appears in these papers will seem out of date, overtaken by new developments. Still, the central points and arguments remain relevant, and we hope that a steady production of thoughtful interpretations of what is affecting the region will lead to better insights on the problems and more realistic and effective policy recipes.

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most effectively. The paper specifically examines the role that the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS)—the hemisphere’s preeminent political organization—can play both in helping to bring about a negotiated solution to Colombia’s conflict and in building the necessary conditions to ensure a sustained and successful peace.

The second part of the paper, prepared by Ecuadorian social scientist César Montúfar, examines the Colombian conflict from a regional perspective and suggests how to prevent a wider human rights and humanitarian crisis from developing in the neighboring countries. Although Montúfar focuses mainly on Ecuador, he also examines Venezuela and Panama. His assessment and recommendations highlight the actual and potential role of outside actors and institutions in contributing to such an effort. Montúfar’s concerns and analysis, too, fall squarely within the overarching framework of “human security.”

### A Human Security Framework

Colombia’s main problems derive from a lack of effective governance and a state that historically has failed to perform its fundamental roles of protecting all citizens and providing basic services. Rampant insecurity and lawlessness have resulted in extremely high levels of kidnappings and homicides. An integrated approach is needed to address such insecurities effectively.

In the outline of the 2003 report of its Commission on Human Security, the UN sets out some fundamental characteristics of human security:

Human security means protecting vital freedoms. It means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, building on their strengths and aspirations. It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood. Human security connects different types of freedoms—freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to take action on one’s own behalf.<sup>2</sup>

The commission’s report stresses that moving towards human security requires two important and mutually reinforcing strategies: protection and empowerment. The first strategy, *protection*, has indeed been the highest priority of the government of President Álvaro Uribe (2002–present). To a nation weary of relentless violence and frustrated by fruitless government attempts to negotiate peace, Uribe’s strong advocacy of “democratic security” acquired broad resonance. When he came to office, Uribe emphasized his commitment to prevent a “failed state” scenario by mobilizing the nation and bolstering the state’s capacity to protect its people. Rooted in the conviction that a strong state is needed to guarantee democracy, Uribe’s notion of democratic security has as its first objective the “consolidation of state control throughout Colombia.”<sup>3</sup> This would mean strengthening Colombian security forces—the military and police—and extending their presence in areas from which they have been absent and into which lawless actors have made significant inroads. Such a change would not only provide more protection to the Colombian people but would also apply growing pressure on Colombia’s insurgent and paramilitary forces to come to the negotiating table to reach a settlement with the government. With a

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<sup>2</sup> Commission on Human Security, “Outline of the Report of the Commission on Human Security” (New York, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Presidency of the Republic and Ministry of Defense, Republic of Colombia, “Democratic Security and Defense Policy” (Bogota, D.C., 2003).

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political solution in place and the conflict contained, Colombia would then be better able to focus on a broader agenda of social and economic development and institutional renewal and reform. In terms of the human security formulation, the country would shift its strategy to *empowerment*.

It is unrealistic to expect to end the violence completely, given its prevalence throughout Colombia’s history. But the hope has been to contain the violence as a starting point for redressing some of the country’s long-standing social inequities. Though previous Colombian governments—including the administration of Andrés Pastrana that immediately preceded Uribe’s—made serious attempts at state strengthening and renewal, these lacked the sharp focus and strong thrust articulated by Uribe’s democratic security message.

The Uribe administration’s rationale and approach is entirely compatible with a central tenet contained in the UN Commission’s report: “Respecting human rights is at the core of protecting human security.” In the Colombian context, it is hard to imagine more effective safeguards for human rights in the absence of corresponding state security institutions capable of exercising their legitimate function, in keeping with the constitutional framework.

Indeed, at least on the specific dimension of “protection” the Uribe administration has undeniably delivered results. His government has improved the effectiveness and increased the professionalism of the country’s armed forces, and has put the military on the offensive against the illegal armed groups. The

military took control of a major portion of a zone in southern Colombia that the Pastrana administration had demilitarized in the hope of winning the confidence of the distrustful FARC. Moreover, Uribe has launched Plan Patriota, a military effort to regain control of the southern part of the country. Uribe has also pledged to devote some 5.6 percent of the country’s total gross domestic product (GDP) to Colombia’s defense budget by the end of his term in 2006; the corresponding proportion was less than 2 percent in 2000. Further, the number of soldiers increased by 50,000 during Uribe’s first two years in office. Training programs were intensified and expanded as well.

The national police has substantially extended its presence throughout the country, thus laying the groundwork for strengthening the rule of law. At the beginning of Uribe’s term, in August 2002, the national police were absent from 158 municipalities; by the end of 2003, that number had dropped to 18.<sup>4</sup> And by early 2004, police—and thus, state—presence extended to all of the 1,098 municipalities in the country for probably the first time in its history. The decline in nationwide indicators of violence has also been particularly noteworthy: kidnappings are down 50 percent from 2002, homicides down 11 percent from 2003, and massacres down 49 percent since August 2002.<sup>5</sup> Recent improvements in security—or protection—are widely acknowledged.

At the same time, any objective appraisal of recent performance in Colombia within the framework of human security would need to recognize a number of important shortcomings and concerns. Both national and international human rights groups, as well as the UN

<sup>4</sup> Presidency of the Republic and Ministry of Defense, Republic of Colombia, “The Effectiveness of the Colombian Democratic Security and Defense Policy: August 2002–December 2003” (Bogotá, D.C., 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., and Fundación Seguridad & Democracia, “Evaluación Semestral de Seguridad 2001–2004,” [www.seguridadydemocracia.org/boletines/boletin5\\_evaluacion2001\\_2004.pdf](http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org/boletines/boletin5_evaluacion2001_2004.pdf).

High Commissioner for Human Rights, consistently point out the continuing high levels of impunity for perpetrators—such as the paramilitary and guerrilla groups—of human rights violations, which goes against one of the key criteria of human security. There are other persistent problems in Colombia as well, such as mass detentions and continued collusion among government security forces and paramilitary groups. Human rights groups also note that, although some categories of violations have declined, most remain unacceptably high.

Perhaps the most dramatic and disturbing problem from the point of view of human security is the country's humanitarian crisis, exemplified by its internally displaced population. According to UN figures, Colombia has the third largest internally displaced population in the world, following Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The conflict involving nonstate and, to a lesser extent, state actors has resulted in an estimated 2 million internal refugees, who tend to live under extremely precarious conditions.

Another problem exacerbating the erosion of the rule of law—a central feature of the human security framework—in Colombia has been the weakening of some critical governmental, mostly judicial, institutions charged with monitoring human rights conditions. For example, there has been a reduction in *consejeros* throughout the country, leaving wide swaths of territory devoid of any effective governmental accountability. In this regard, debate revolves around the extent to which the Uribe government accords equal weight and importance to both the “democratic” and “security” components of its general strategy.

Another central question related to human security goals is the degree to which the

progress that has been made in Colombia is sustainable. For example, it remains to be seen whether the country's violent actors—the insurgents, paramilitary forces, drug traffickers, and other criminals—have been permanently weakened and are on the verge of defeat, or whether they retain a significant capacity for violence but are merely waiting for the right moment to retake the initiative. Some security analysts have argued that the FARC remains a formidable force and has retreated only temporarily.<sup>6</sup> An upsurge in attacks in early 2005 appears to bear out such a concern. Indeed, whatever the accomplishments of the Uribe government in the key area of security, it is clear that “success” will require continuing and significant commitment of resources and political will.

Perhaps the most important concern regarding Colombia from a human security perspective involves timing and sequencing of various components of government policy. There is widespread consensus that strengthening security institutions, although important, is not sufficient to put Colombia on a productive path towards a just, democratic society. Across-the-board reforms are vital if the country's underlying, long-term problems are to be addressed. In other words, “protection” must be complemented by “empowerment.” This point is clearly articulated in the widely discussed report, *El conflicto: callejon con salida (A Way out of the Conflict)*, commissioned by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The report points out that the Uribe administration's approach revolves around an exaggerated and narrow emphasis on security institutions to the relative neglect of the wide-ranging social—and empowerment—agenda. The report argues that it is vital that such reforms be pursued simultaneously.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Alfredo Rangel, “El repliegue de las FARC: Derrota o estrategia,” [www.seguridadydemocracia.org/documentosocasionales/DerrotaoEstrategia.pdf](http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org/documentosocasionales/DerrotaoEstrategia.pdf).



**“As the democratic security policy states: There is no greater inequality in Colombia than in the access to security.”**

In contrast, though, President Uribe has given primacy to the security issue, maintaining that it is a precondition for more broadly based development, which should take place once a secure environment is fully established. As the administration's democratic security policy states: "Security is not the only concern of the Government, but it is the first. There is no greater inequality in Colombia than in the access to security."<sup>7</sup>

The debate between the two points of view rests on fundamental assumptions as to what is required to reach a political agreement with Colombia's armed actors. Those associated with the UNDP report believe that the Colombian state should be emphasizing reforms and renewal across the board, with the hope that such a commitment of resources will provide an incentive for the insurgent groups to come to the negotiating table. This argument goes to the question of the root causes of the conflict and maintains that peace will be difficult to achieve unless these causes are at least partially addressed. On the other hand, for those who subscribe to Uribe's position, such an approach has been tried and has failed. They believe that the emphasis should be first and foremost on bolstering traditional security institutions so the government can be in a position of strength that will compel insurgent groups to negotiate in good faith. As former Colombian defense minister and current senator Rafael Pardo has argued, the underlying issue is about power.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever differences may exist about timing and emphasis, it is clear that, over the long term, Colombia faces formidable challenges in state building and renewal—and that the worthy and important aim of human security is a long-term proposition. The 2004 report, *Andes 2020*, prepared by the Council on Foreign Relations, highlights the importance of fiscal and land reform measures in Colombia.<sup>9</sup> Tax enforcement has indeed been lax, as it has in many other Latin American countries, and more effective tax-collection machinery is essential to helping underwrite the country's policy agenda. The report notes that "revenue inflows...are inadequate [due to]...widespread tax evasion...and weak government enforcement. This underperformance is symptomatic of the institutional weakness prevalent in the Andes."<sup>10</sup> In 2002, for instance, tax revenue in Colombia was only 13.3 percent of the country's total GDP. The failure to collect taxes effectively hinders government's ability to reinvest these revenues in areas of state building such as education, infrastructural development, and social programs that would no doubt help achieve greater human security by empowering citizens to become more productive members of society.

In addition, Colombia's land distribution is highly inequitable—1 percent of the population holds 55 percent of all arable land—and helps account for the origins (and persistence) of the country's insurgent groups, particularly the FARC.<sup>11</sup> A greater effort toward land reform would thus be helpful in

<sup>7</sup> "Democratic Security and Defense Policy," op cit., p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Rafael Pardo, "The Prospects for Peace in Colombia: Lessons from Recent Experience," Inter-American Dialogue Working Paper (Washington, DC, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *Andes 2020* (New York, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 71. See also Kate Calligaro and Adam Isacson, "Do Wealthy Colombians Pay Their Taxes?" Center for International Policy, 2004, [www.ciponline.org/colombia/040804cip.htm](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/040804cip.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., and Marcelo Giugale, Olivier Lafourcade, and Connie Luff, eds., *Colombia: The Economic Foundation of Peace* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003), p. xxxiii.

ensuring that such insurgencies do not grow or re-emerge.

The World Bank has also spelled out a variety of development challenges facing Colombia over the longer term. These are very much part of an agenda connected to human security and include agriculture and rural development, as well as reforming the pension, education, health, and judicial sectors. As the authors of a World Bank report note: “[President Uribe’s] mandate for change [has] opened the door for Colombians to think beyond war... Jobs, education, and a clean environment need to be as much a foundation of peace as security and political agreement.”<sup>12</sup>

In the coming years, the debate about President Uribe’s efforts will center on the extent to which the emphasis placed on a narrow, traditional definition of “security” was sufficient to help move the country towards peace. At a conceptual level, there is little disagreement that Colombia’s pending institutional reform is formidable and wide-ranging—and that much needs to be done to satisfy the ambitious goals spelled out in the human security framework. The question is: what is the most practical and feasible way to make progress on a variety of important fronts? While Uribe’s critics have a valid point about his limited accomplishments in terms of empowerment and social reform measures, it is also true that the security challenge was—after many years of denial and neglect—so profound that it required urgent and disproportionate attention. The Colombian experience thus raises important questions about possible trade-offs among different tasks and phases in the pursuit of human security aims.

## The Role of International Organizations

### *United Nations*

**Peace Process.** If Colombia is to move closer towards achieving critical human security goals, it will need effective and sustained contributions from the international community. Whether the shift to empowerment should proceed vigorously and immediately, or if the country should first concentrate on protection, is a subject of debate. But it is clear that under any scenario, Colombia needs at a minimum to find a way to secure a lasting peace. And while that task principally belongs to the Colombians, international organizations—notably the UN—can be vital in achieving success.

In the context of the peace effort launched by President Pastrana with the FARC, the UN Secretary General began to exercise his good offices in Colombia on December 1, 1999, when he established the position of special adviser on Colombia. The special adviser serves as the focal point for the UN system in its efforts to mobilize international assistance for social, humanitarian, human rights, drug control (alternative development projects), and peace-building activities in Colombia. The adviser also serves as a conduit between the secretary general and the Colombian government and other relevant actors, and consults widely within and outside Colombia on how the UN can best promote human rights, humanitarian assistance, development, and peace. Jan Egeland of Norway served as special adviser on Colombia until November 2002; he was replaced by James Lemoyne, whose term ended in April 2005.

There are conflicting interpretations as to why the peace process undertaken by President Pastrana with the FARC at the beginning of his term ultimately failed; the talks between the Colombian government and

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<sup>12</sup> Giugale, Lafourcade, and Luff, op cit.

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FARC representatives collapsed in February 2002. In November 1998, Pastrana, in a bold goodwill gesture, granted a demilitarized zone (*despeje*) in southern Colombia, roughly the size of Switzerland, to the FARC. The core problem, however, was that the Pastrana government had no clear strategy or substantive proposals to push, and the FARC appeared unwilling to engage seriously in the peace process. Negotiations were interrupted and resumed time and again. The on-again, off-again talks—punctuated by continuing, and increasingly brutal, guerrilla violence—tested the Colombian public’s patience and undermined support for the Pastrana government.

In this context, the role of the international community was fraught with difficulties. Neither the Colombian government nor the FARC was particularly interested in outside involvement in the process. The government did not accept offers from the UN, European governments, or the United States for assistance in defining strategy, devising options to put before the insurgents, or reviewing negotiating tactics. The Group of Facilitating Countries—Canada, Cuba, France, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela—was created in March 2001, though its principal function was to observe the aftermath of the talks. As the International Crisis Group notes in its March 2002 report, “In effect, the government and the insurgents met for three years without the presence of third parties, reflecting the declared policy of Pastrana since the beginning to manage the peace process personally.”<sup>13</sup>

Developments both in Colombia and internationally seemed to doom the peace effort when the willingness of the insurgents to

negotiate in good faith was put to the test—and found to be severely wanting. Any remaining sympathy for the insurgents, and for the FARC in particular, disappeared in 2001 and 2002, as the media devoted increased attention to the involvement of both guerrilla and paramilitary groups in drug trading, massive displacement, and kidnapping. Public opinion shifted dramatically. In addition, the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., contributed to a hardening of attitudes against the FARC, which had been on the U.S. State Department’s list of terrorist organizations since 1997. Pressure intensified for Pastrana to show some results in his peace effort, while the FARC’s negative stance on the role of the international community hardened.

In January 2002, in a final attempt to salvage the process, a FARC leader announced that his organization was prepared to meet with UN special adviser Lemoyne, the French ambassador to Colombia (who also was the coordinator of the Group of Facilitating Countries) and a representative of the Catholic Church. On January 20, an agenda for discussion of key issues was agreed to, including such issues as ceasefire proposals and the creation of an international verification commission. The agenda also called for the development of a calendar with specific dates and consideration of a more active role for the international community. But it was too late. Unabated violence by the FARC and virtually no public support for the peace process doomed this final attempt—as well as ended the presidency of Pastrana, in favor of the candidate who most strongly opposed the peace process with the FARC, Álvaro Uribe.

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group, “Colombia’s Elusive Quest for Peace,” Latin America Report No. 1 (Bogotá, D.C./Brussels, 2002)



**Other Human Security Aims.** In addition to peace negotiations, the UN carries out a variety of vital functions in Colombia that bear directly on the challenge of meeting human security aims. Other UN agencies that play critical roles in the Colombian context include the UNDP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

In May 2004, Jan Egeland, who formerly served as special adviser on Colombia and later became the UN under secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs and emergency relief coordinator, called Colombia the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in the Western hemisphere.<sup>14</sup> He tried to mobilize greater support from the international community and the UN, along with from the Colombian private and public sectors, to respond to the tragic situation of the internally displaced population.

As a measure of growing outside involvement, Egeland noted that the UN had quadrupled its presence in Colombia over the last four to five years, and now had some 38 offices in the country. He cited the UN's acute concern that, given the intensifying military campaign directed against the FARC, traditionally poor and internally displaced young people would be more easily recruited into the guerrillas, paramilitary forces, and drug mafias. Indeed, as Human Rights Watch and other groups have noted, there is an alarmingly large number of child soldiers in Colombia, many of them forcibly recruited.<sup>15</sup> Although this issue has been raised and pressed directly with FARC

representatives, there is little evidence that it has been alleviated.

Egeland further identified ten particularly high-risk enclaves where Indian and peasant tribes were trapped and cut off from the international community either because of guerrilla and paramilitary groups or because of government military campaigns. Colombia is a huge country, and it is difficult—and rare—to muster adequate support and protection for its isolated communities. This fact underlines the importance of humanitarian diplomatic efforts, either initiated directly with the parties in the conflict or through the Church.

**The UN Reform Agenda.** While the UN presence in Colombia has grown significantly over the years, the Colombian government has concurrently and increasingly called for UN reform to augment the international community's support for peace and human rights on a global scale. Within Colombia, the present government is committed to attaining higher levels of human security by emphasizing education, promoting human rights, and pursuing counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism efforts. Uribe's democratic security policy has already accomplished a great deal towards reducing the numbers of homicides, kidnappings, terrorist activities, internally displaced persons, and illicit crops throughout the country. However, during the General Debate of the 59th UN General Assembly in September 2004, Uribe acknowledged that there is still much to be done to achieve peace in Colombia and that human security cannot be fully attained without additional help from a unified international

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<sup>14</sup> UN News Centre, “Colombia Has Biggest Humanitarian Crisis in Western Hemisphere, UN Says,” May 10, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Watch, “Colombia: Armed Groups Send Children to War,” February 22, 2005, and “You’ll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia,” September 18, 2003. See also Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Colombia: The War on Children,” February 2004.

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community.<sup>16</sup> He stressed the need for UN reform to place higher priority on endorsing peace and fighting terrorism worldwide.

The Colombian government has played an active role in promoting UN reform for over half a century, calling for changes in outdated clauses of the charter that do not reflect the current global order. Colombia has reiterated its views in areas such as its opposition to the veto (article 27), the need to extend UN membership to more states, and the call to give certain regions such as Africa greater representation. President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966 to 1970), the first Colombian president to travel to the UN, gave a speech to the Security Council which “called for UN reform to establish more effective means of providing peaceful solutions to conflicts, that would give this international organization a truly compelling power.”<sup>17</sup> At Restrepo’s request, the Colombian ambassador to the UN, Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez, presented a project in 1969 calling for reform of the UN Charter, which was successfully passed as Resolution 2697. In the same year, Alfonso López Michelsen, minister of Foreign Affairs, led Colombia’s proposal for additional reform of the charter; this was passed as Resolution 2552.

Colombia has also stressed the need to reform the International Court of Justice. Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, President Misael Pastrana Borrero’s minister of Foreign Affairs from 1970 to 1974, suggested that the International Court of Justice should not only play a larger role in peace efforts, but also uphold and defend human rights worldwide.

Colombia has recommended reform of the Security Council, criticizing its tendency to weaken other bodies of the system as the

council is strengthened and its propensity to give too broad a definition of what represents a threat to peace. In presentations made to the General Assembly in 1993 and 1994, Ambassador Luis Fernando Jaramillo stated that the Security Council’s responsibilities conflicted with those of the Human Rights Commission and the International Court of Justice, especially with regard to issues of human rights and humanitarian aid.

Under President Ernesto Samper (1994 to 1998), Colombia continued to stress the need to limit the power of the veto and to allow UN membership to be extended to more countries in the developing world. Samper emphasized that to improve the effectiveness of the UN, reform should be focused on the reduction of poverty and the strengthening of institutions and programs aimed at social and development issues.

From Colombia’s perspective, its role in the UN and its persistence in pushing for UN reform demonstrate the emphasis it places on multilateral institutions and its commitment to ensuring that these institutions operate as effectively as possible. The fact that the Uribe administration is calling for UN reform to give higher priority to peace and terrorism highlights Colombia’s commitment to these issues and the need for the international community to play a bigger role in ending Colombia’s conflict. Although Colombia is steadfast in its efforts to attain human security, this can only be accomplished with the continued and increased engagement of all relevant actors, including the UN and its member states.

Colombia’s concerns fit well with a comprehensive reform package put together by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which will

<sup>16</sup> “Palabras del Presidente Álvaro Uribe ante la Asamblea de las Naciones Unidas,” September 29, 2004, <http://www.presidencia.gov.co/discursos/2004/sept/onu.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Álvaro Tirado Mejía and Carlos Holguín Holguín, “Colombia en la ONU 1945–1995,” [www.colombiaun.org/english/modelo\\_onu.htm](http://www.colombiaun.org/english/modelo_onu.htm).

be proposed in September 2005 at the UN Summit in New York. The main goal of the reform package is to readjust UN priorities to better reflect the international context of the 21st century. Most of the reforms call for greater investment in developing countries to combat terrorism and promote human rights. The report, titled “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All,” emphasizes the human security perspective when it states:

Accordingly, we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed. In this new millennium, the work of the United Nations must move our world closer to the day when all people have the freedom to choose the kind of lives they would like to live, the access to the resources that would make those choices meaningful and the security to ensure that they can be enjoyed in peace.<sup>18</sup>

The report reiterates the interrelationship among development, security, and human rights, and points out that a lack of any or all of these creates a context for terrorism, civil war, instability, and violence. The importance of effective governability is also stressed; a strong state is better equipped to avoid conflict and overcome obstacles to development. The report’s key word, however, is “freedom”: “freedom from want” emphasizes the need to overcome poverty, “freedom from fear” calls for greater attention to be given to security threats and the prevention of terrorism, and “freedom to live in dignity” points to the importance of the rule of law and human rights. All of these factors build upon the

Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

Colombia will no doubt embrace the reforms, as the country has been criticizing the outdated nature of many articles of the UN Charter for decades, and has been pressing for much-needed reforms to better reflect today’s world. The fact that the reforms will be focused on development, terrorism, and human rights issues means that international attention and assistance will be increasingly directed to countries such as Colombia, which confronts all three simultaneously. The Colombian government will try to take advantage of this new opportunity to invite and engage a variety of new actors in the international community to a more constructive involvement in attempting to resolve its own long-standing conflict.

#### *Organization of American States*

Throughout the Pastrana administration, the OAS played no role in Colombia beyond election monitoring. With the election of Álvaro Uribe, however, that situation has changed.

Uribe, who had reached the presidency on a hard-line platform and strong criticism of the Pastrana administration’s handling of peace talks with the FARC, made unilateral ceasefire a precondition for peace. On December 1, 2002, the AUC declared such a ceasefire, prompting the government to undertake a first-ever—and highly controversial—peace initiative with that group. By February 2004, more than 750 paramilitaries had been demobilized.<sup>19</sup> Given the peculiar nature of the paramilitary forces in Colombia, there was no precedent for any government to pursue a peace process with such a group.

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<sup>18</sup> UN Secretary General, “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All,” [www.un.org/largerfreedom/chap1.htm](http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/chap1.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Sistema de Información de la Defensa Nacional, at [www.mindefensa.gov.co/desmovilizacion/desmovilizados.html](http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/desmovilizacion/desmovilizados.html)

**“ The role of the  
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contentious. ”**

To make up for this experience gap, in January 2004, the OAS became involved in the Colombian conflict for the first time ever. Specifically, it developed an agreement authorizing the establishment of a Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OEA).<sup>20</sup> The OAS secretary general, former Colombian president César Gaviria, argued that the organization had the necessary experience to undertake such a mission based on its efforts to monitor the demobilization of some 22,000 “contra” fighters in Nicaragua in the 1990s. Gaviria stressed that the OAS mission would have a fundamentally technical role and would not intervene in matters that were the responsibility of Colombia’s democratic institutions and elected government. Since its inception, the mission has been headed by Sergio Caramagna, who oversaw the demobilization in Nicaragua and has, in recent years, directed the OAS national office in that country.

Gaviria also pointed out that, although the OAS had not previously been involved in the Colombia conflict, its member countries had affirmed their support for the Colombian government on several occasions, including at the June 2003 General Assembly and at the Special Conference on Security, held in October 2003 in Mexico. The OAS Permanent Council had also condemned an attack by Colombian guerrillas in February 2003 and had reiterated its “unequivocal support for the efforts of the Government of Colombia to find a firm and lasting peace in that country.”<sup>21</sup>

The role of the OAS mission has been contentious. Critics maintain that its purpose is essentially to legitimize the Colombian government’s position, and not to perform

an independent function that would enjoy broad credibility. As a result, they argue, any verification of the process of demobilization is suspect. In a March 31, 2004, letter from Human Rights Watch directed to all OAS foreign ministers, the point was forcefully made: “If the OAS were to be directly associated with the negotiations, its credibility as an institution could be seriously damaged. The negotiations in Colombia are extraordinarily complex and dangerous. It is in the OAS’s best interests to preserve the clearly delineated limits on its involvement.” Another concern is the mission’s lack of capacity to monitor the demobilization and disarmament process itself. According to some observers, especially those in the human rights field, there has been no serious, reliable effort to ensure that, once demobilized, the paramilitary fighters are reintegrated into society in a peaceful fashion.

Defenders of the process counter that, even with limited resources and capacity, the mission can still perform a useful role; they argue that there would be considerable improvement in meeting international standards given growing political and financial support from OAS member governments. It has been difficult for Colombia to obtain funding through voluntary contributions. The U.S. government has provided some support, as have the governments of Sweden and Holland. (Support from these last two has been particularly important in giving the very complicated and difficult process greater legitimacy.)

In February 2004, the OAS Permanent Council invited the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to provide advisory services to the mission and

<sup>20</sup> General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, “Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States on Monitoring the Peace Process in Colombia,” (Bogotá, D.C., 2004) [www.oas.org/documents/OEA-Colombia/ConvenioOEA-ColombiaE.asp](http://www.oas.org/documents/OEA-Colombia/ConvenioOEA-ColombiaE.asp).

<sup>21</sup> Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, “Condemnation of Terrorist Acts in Colombia, CP/RES. 837 (1354/03),” (Washington, D.C., 2003), [www.oas.org/consejo/resolutions/res837.asp](http://www.oas.org/consejo/resolutions/res837.asp).

“ensure that the role of the OAS is fully consistent with the obligations of its Member states with respect to the effective exercise of human rights and international humanitarian law.”<sup>22</sup> In December 2004, following a special IACHR delegation to Colombia led by vice president and rapporteur for Colombia Susana Villarán, the Commission reported:

The demobilization mechanisms have not been accompanied by comprehensive measures to provide relief to the victims of the violence nor to clarify the many criminal acts that remain unpunished, and therefore the factors generating the conflict in large measure persist. In addition, many of those who have benefited from past demobilizations have been victims of retaliatory attacks and others have eventually chosen to join other illegal groups, re-engaging in the conflict. In any event, the mechanisms for demobilizing armed groups have not had the impact required to break the cycle of violence in Colombia. Given this context, the complexity of the situation will no doubt require extraordinary efforts to regain peace and ensure the rule of law for all Colombians.<sup>23</sup>

The controversy surrounding the role and performance of the OAS mission has been heightened by the political disagreements concerning the elaboration of an adequate legal framework to handle the demobilization process. As of May 2005, there was still no agreement on an acceptable law to guide this complicated process. In its statement, the IACHR outlined some of the key principles that apply and that need to be taken into account in assessing whether the demobilization of illegal armed groups satisfies the requirements of truth, justice, and reparation for the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The controversy

reflects differing views about how best to advance both peace and justice in Colombia. Still, the lack of clarity poses serious obstacles to moving forward with demobilization. At a meeting of donors in Cartagena de Indias in February 2005, many governments expressed concern about the continued disagreements that were blocking legislation that would be both helpful to Colombia and in accordance with international standards and obligations. Though many acknowledge that a successful negotiation with the AUC could set an important precedent and open up possibilities for reaching agreements with the FARC and ELN, the sticking points must be resolved among the relevant parties.

Given the overriding importance of meeting the goals of human security, it is crucial that every effort be made to make the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the paramilitary fighters work. In its August 2004 report, the International Crisis Group underlines just how delicate and sensitive this process has been. It notes that the international community has been largely absent from the negotiations, “in part due to its distaste for the paramilitaries’ links to drug trafficking and involvement in atrocities, but also because of lack of transparency in the process itself.” The group also warned against granting impunity to major human rights violators. The report states that:

Only the Organization of American States (OAS) has stepped forward, accepting the role of monitoring and providing information on the ceasefire. It has put its credibility on the line in associating with a controversial beginning to the peace process but if it is to make a serious contribution, its capacity and political will to monitor the ceasefire in all

“The controversy surrounding the OAS mission has been heightened by the political disagreements over a legal framework to handle the demobilization process.”

<sup>22</sup> Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, “Support to the Peace Process in Colombia, CP/RES. 859 (1397/04),” (Washington, D.C., 2004), <http://www.oas.org/consejo/resolutions/res859.asp>.

<sup>23</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “Report on the Demobilization Process in Colombia,” (Washington, D.C., 2004).



“There is need for greater convergence between U.S. and multilateral agendas to ensure that Colombia enhances both its protection and empowerment strategies.”

Colombia as well as its inadequate funding will have to be addressed.<sup>24</sup>

As the Crisis Group notes in its recommendations, to play an effective role in the peace process with Colombia's paramilitary forces, the OAS will need to undertake a more professional and complete monitoring effort—not only of the disarmament and demobilization, but also of the AUC compliance with its stated ceasefire. In addition, to enhance the operation's credibility, it might well facilitate greater access by nongovernmental groups in Colombia to its work.

### The Role of the United States

The United States has played, and will continue to play, a fundamental role in Colombia. In addition to its own efforts, it is also important for the United States to back those of such international organizations as the UN and the OAS to facilitate projects and initiatives that address the human security agenda in Colombia. Indeed, to some extent, the substantial development aid provided by the United States contributes to this end. But there is need for greater convergence between U.S. and multilateral agendas to ensure that Colombia enhances both its protection and empowerment strategies and moves closer to meeting its human security goals.

U.S. policy towards Colombia has been driven essentially by drugs.<sup>25</sup> Roughly 90 percent of the cocaine and two-thirds of the heroin consumed on the East Coast in the United States comes from Colombia. Since 1999, when Colombia became the largest recipient of U.S. security assistance in the world outside of the Middle East, the United States has pushed to eradicate and interdict drugs produced in Colombia. In late September of that year, Plan Colombia was developed, featuring

a heavy security and counter-narcotics focus. The initiative, committed to advancing “peace, prosperity and the strengthening of the state,” would cost some \$7.5 billion. The idea was that \$4 billion would come from Colombian funds and \$3.5 billion from contributions by the international community. In practice, however, Plan Colombia became nearly indistinguishable from the U.S. contribution to Plan Colombia, which was an emergency aid package of \$1.3 billion for 2000 and 2001, of which \$860 million benefited Colombia (the rest went to neighboring countries). Of that \$860 million, 75 percent—\$642 million—went to Colombia's military and police. Training for counter-narcotics battalions and equipment made up the bulk of the overall assistance.

Although the assistance package enjoyed broad bipartisan support in the United States, it nonetheless was controversial and raised a variety of concerns. For one thing, there was a risk of “mission creep,” with the United States becoming involved in a quagmire in Colombia. There were also serious doubts about the wisdom of spending so much on an anti-drug policy that was unlikely to yield positive and sustained results. And there were questions about the human rights consequences of providing substantial support to the Colombian military, in light of the documented relationship—at various levels and in different regions—of the military and paramilitary forces.

The main thrust of Plan Colombia became inextricably linked to U.S. policy towards Colombia, and led other countries in Europe and Latin America to distance themselves from the overwhelmingly security-oriented, anti-drug approach. While the focus helped—at least indirectly—improve the capacity of state forces such as the military and police to protect its citizens, critics

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, “Demobilizing the Paramilitaries in Colombia: An Achievable Goal?” (Bogotá, D.C./Brussels, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy toward Colombia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

argued that the policy was heavily skewed and did not give adequate resources to social development and programs aimed specifically at empowerment. Although the initial idea was that Europe and other donors would contribute to this component of human security, the effect was, rather, to dissuade their involvement altogether.

The attacks of September 11 had an important impact on U.S. Colombia policy. The predominant concern with security in the United States, coupled with the collapse of peace talks with the FARC, the Pastrana and government, led the U.S. Congress in August 2002 to change the law to enable U.S. security aid to be used directly in the armed conflict, not just to fight drugs. In the context of the “war on terror,” Colombia has fit neatly with the U.S. foreign policy agenda. As a result, in Washington, the anti-drug and anti-terror aims have been fused in fashioning an approach to deal with Colombia.

Plan Colombia is scheduled to end in 2005, although the United States is likely to maintain its commitment to Colombia at roughly the same level as before. The budget request for 2006 presented by the Bush administration differs very little from that of previous years. Skepticism remains about the efficacy of U.S. drug policy, despite the fact that U.S. government figures—buttressed by figures provided by the United Nations—show that drug production dropped by some 20 to 30 percent in 2003. It is unclear whether this short-term gain, however important, will translate over the longer term in waging a successful war on drugs. In fact, the latest figures underscore this concern, as they reveal that there was no change in the area under coca cultivation in Colombia in the year 2004.

Clearly, U.S. drug policy needs to take a more comprehensive approach, providing

adequate compensation for social development programs and facilitating greater cooperation among the countries in the region. (Presently, each country simply deals with and responds to targets set by the United States.) The emphasis and thrust of the next phase of U.S. support to Colombia should shift to the empowerment dimension of the human security framework. This does not mean ending security aid, as Colombia would still benefit enormously from a more professional and better trained military and police force. But it does mean a more balanced and comprehensive program, which would signal to Colombia’s neighbors, Europe, and others that the United States is not seeking a military solution to Colombia’s conflict and is genuinely concerned about helping meet human security objectives.

Aside from its substantial security-related funding, part of Plan Colombia’s multifaceted approach included components geared towards social development. This assistance was to be implemented through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Perhaps the biggest contribution made by the United States—or by any international actor, for that matter—to ensure human security in Colombia is demonstrated by USAID’s efforts. Over the course of five years (2000–05), USAID has budgeted an estimated \$624.3 million to development programs in Colombia.<sup>26</sup> These programs are focused on three overlapping areas: promoting alternative development to substitute illicit crop production, promoting democratic consolidation and effectiveness, and supporting internally displaced persons and other portions of the population adversely affected by Colombia’s ongoing internal conflict. In addition, USAID has been asked to help in the demobilization process and the reintegration

“ In the context of the ‘war on terror,’ Colombia has fit neatly with the U.S. foreign policy agenda. ”

<sup>26</sup> USAID, “Colombia: USAID Program Profile,” [www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/colombia/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/colombia/).

**“It is vital  
that USAID provide  
human security  
assistance to displaced  
persons.”**

of armed groups into society. However, the controversies surrounding the Colombian government's policies and laws regarding the terms of demobilization are causing the U.S. government to question whether it should get involved in this area at all. In addition, U.S. law prohibits negotiating with groups included in the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, and the FARC, ELN, and AUC are all on this list.

USAID pursues a variety of objectives and lines of programming. First, it attempts to strengthen the Colombian government by promoting reform of its judicial system, improving local governance and transparency, and facilitating civil society participation. The idea is that democratic consolidation will not only help attain higher levels of security by strengthening the state and its presence, but will also empower citizens to become fully productive members of society. Moreover, USAID strategies of improving local governance are focused on strengthening human rights institutions, providing security to those citizens who help promote human rights, and strengthening the government to better deal with threats it faces from the armed groups.

Second, USAID is assisting in the Colombian government's eradication of illegal coca and poppy crops by providing farmers with alternative means to make a living. This is accomplished through the promotion of legal crops as well as by dedicating significant funding to infrastructural construction, marketing, and support of commercial and business techniques. Efforts are directed at strengthening whole communities and towns and giving the people the tools they need so that they will not have to resort to illicit cultivation to survive. In the absence of any systematic assessments, however, it is hard to know with any confidence how successful

the alternative development and employment programs have been.

Lastly, USAID has helped over 1.4 million people displaced by Colombia's conflict, the majority of whom are from Afro-Colombian or indigenous communities.<sup>27</sup> Funding is provided for both emergency situations and long-term support, focused on physical and mental health services, shelter, water, sanitation, education, employment, and the strengthening of communities. Assistance is provided as well to help rehabilitate former child soldiers. USAID's role in this area is especially important, as most displaced persons are in areas of the country with little or no state presence and who therefore cannot rely on the government for help. It is therefore vital that USAID—in collaboration with other international organizations, especially nongovernmental organization (NGOs)—provide human security assistance to displaced persons. In the long-term, however, the only solution is for the Colombian government to regain state control and provide state-wide security.

### **The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations**

Like USAID, NGOs play a very important role in helping those areas of society in which there is little or no state presence. This is extremely critical in a country such as Colombia where many communities are isolated and out of state reach or are under the control of guerrilla or paramilitary groups. Without government presence, these areas are not only subject to the violence and disorder caused by the armed combatants, but also do not have access to such basic services as education and health facilities. Therefore, the involvement of international organizations and NGOs can help fill the void in those areas where the state is absent and government assistance is insufficient. During internal conflicts, “non-

<sup>27</sup> USAID, “USAID Lends Lifeline to Many Afro-Colombians Caught in the Country's Violent Crossfire,” [www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/colombia/afrocolombians.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/colombia/afrocolombians.html).

state actors benefit from closer involvement with the local community and have greater potential for local capacity building than traditional actors. Non-state actors can and do play many roles in the protection of human security.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, “non-state actors can more effectively build a network with civil society representatives and focus with them on longer-term perspectives... these actors are often more flexible than state actors especially in internal conflict situations.”

In addition, in many areas of the country, there is a lack of trust in the government, as it has failed repeatedly in providing the people with the services and protection they need. The hope is that NGOs, working alongside the government, can help restore people’s confidence in state authority.

International NGOs help provide citizens and their communities with basic needs; they also, in many cases, work with civil society and local governments to promote alternative development, design and implement social programs, and strive to improve quality of life in general. Strengthening local governance is an integral part of human security, as it not only helps to ensure the security of the people in the community but also helps empower its citizens by giving them access to the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to get involved in the community and actively participate in society.

One of the main goals of NGOs in achieving human security in Colombia is to prevent child soldier recruitment. Without basic services, security from violence or threats, or any alternative means to survive or make a living, many children are easily recruited into the armed groups or are forced to join. Through NGO efforts to provide both security and empowerment, it is hoped that children will have a safe

and protected environment in which their daily life will not be threatened.

## Conclusion

The persistent insecurities that wrack Colombia mean that the country has a long way to go before it is both “free of want” and “free of fear,” in the words of the UN Commission on Human Security. Although some progress has been made in recent years in strengthening the state’s capacity to protect its citizens—a fundamental element of the human security framework—many Colombians still do not enjoy basic safeguards. Moreover, institutions and governance structures remain weak, and poverty and inequality are high. Addressing these deep-seated problems is a long-term task—one that has already begun, but that needs to be sustained and adjusted according to changing realities and most urgent needs.

It is widely accepted that in order to pursue the aims contained in the human security framework, support provided by the international community and international organizations is essential. Both the United Nations and the Organization of American States are currently engaged in Colombia; their contribution to moving towards peace, and to a viable post-conflict environment, is critical. Bilateral donors such as Japan also could contribute successfully in a variety of areas.

One key priority involves helping Colombia come up with an acceptable legal framework to regulate the process of demobilization and disarmament of paramilitary forces and reparations for victims of violence. Without this, the process may not move forward at all. Once such an agreement has been reached among relevant actors, the international community must provide increased resources to ensure that former combatants are successfully reintegrated into society. Otherwise, and especially in view of the

**“Progress has  
been made in recent  
years in strengthening  
the state’s capacity  
to protect its  
citizens.”**

<sup>28</sup> Claude Bruderlein, “The Role of Non-State Actors in Building Human Security: The Case of Armed Groups in Intra-State Wars,” [www.humansecuritynetwork.org/docs/report\\_may2000\\_2-e.php](http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/docs/report_may2000_2-e.php).

**“ Territorial  
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continuing drug problem in Colombia, there is a real risk of their returning to criminal activity. Given the complexity and enormous regional variation in Colombia, this is a formidable policy challenge that will, even under the best of circumstances, be difficult to implement. Territorial differences need to be borne in mind in devising appropriate programs for reintegration. Japan, along with other bilateral and multilateral donors concerned with peace in Colombia, should lend their support to this challenge.

Another priority is to focus greater resources and policy attention on the country's internally displaced population, which is disproportionately from the Afro-Colombian community. According to Amnesty International, there are currently 2.5 million displaced persons in Colombia; one out of three is Afro-Colombian.<sup>29</sup> The country's constitutional court has ruled that the government needs to assume greater responsibility on this question, given its magnitude and the depth of the humanitarian crisis. Some programs are already in place—several supported by the World Bank—but they need to be strengthened. The Japanese government has made an important contribution in this area, but greater efforts are required in terms of both protection and satisfaction of basic needs.

In addition, although significant funding has been made available for alternative development efforts, a lack of viable employment opportunities is causing farmers to rely increasingly on coca and poppy cultivation as their main sources of income. Support from Japanese and other bilateral donors could help the Colombian government develop the necessary infrastructure to increase the range of economic options.

Three final points for a concrete plan of action merit attention. The first is the tragedy of child soldiers in Colombia. Human rights groups and international organizations have focused attention on the phenomenon, which is pervasive within both insurgent groups and paramilitary forces. Development programs that prevent vulnerable populations from being recruited into the illegal armed groups are urgently needed. Sustained pressure by the international community on key representatives of the armed groups about this appalling practice is also essential.

Second, growing concerns over the dangers of landmines have arisen: thousands of people have been injured or killed by landmines over the past decade. In Colombia, landmines planted by the insurgent groups are endangering the lives of innocent civilians and children, who often mistake the explosives for toys. According to UNICEF, 20 percent of the victims of landmines are under 18 years old.<sup>30</sup> The ELN has begun removing landmines in certain regions of the country. Not only is this making it safer for children to walk in the streets, but it is also a sign that the ELN is inching forward in its steps towards negotiating peace.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, in the minds of many, Colombia is strongly associated with the practice of kidnapping. Although the Uribe administration has successfully brought down the level of kidnappings, Colombia still has the unhappy distinction of having more kidnappings than any other country in the world. In 2001, Pax Christi of Holland issued an excellent report on this question, “The Kidnapping Industry in Colombia: Should It Concern Us?”<sup>32</sup> A variety of efforts, from increased outside pressure to

<sup>29</sup> See USAID, op cit. [www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/colombia/afrocolombians.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/colombia/afrocolombians.html).

<sup>30</sup> See UNICEF, “At a Glance: Colombia,” [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/colombia.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/colombia.html).

<sup>31</sup> “Colombian Kids Tread Safely as Rebels Clear Mines,” *Washington Post*, March, 17, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Pax Christi Netherlands, “The Kidnapping Industry in Colombia: Should It Concern Us?” (Utrecht, 2001)



more professional anti-kidnapping training programs, are urgently needed to address this problem, which is at the heart of the initiative to improve human security in Colombia.

The skepticism of the international community towards the Colombian situation creates obstacles to achieving human security. Many international organizations are reluctant to get involved in the complex web of Colombia's internal conflict. The various groups involved in combat and the lines that separate them are so often blurred that international organizations would rather not step anywhere near the mix of violence, human rights violations, child soldier recruitment, and related chaos. Recently, increased doubts about the Colombian government's demobilization strategies and laws granting amnesty to former combatants have provoked negative reactions from the international community. Some international organizations are calling for the peace process with the paramilitary groups to deny requests for amnesty and to include justice and reparations for the victims of human rights abuses. At the same time, it is clear that President Uribe's priority is to end the 40-year-long conflict; this

entails weighing the costs of sacrificing some measure of justice in the interests of peace. In any event, the reluctance of the international community to assist in the peace process is a concern that needs to be addressed.

The bottom line is that in order for Colombia to attain human security, the lens needs to focus on both the security of the state and the security of the people. Although Uribe's democratic security policy is centered on the state, he is also making great efforts to ensure the protection of human rights and is emphasizing such areas as education and poverty reduction. With continued and increased help from the international community, it will be possible to work towards state security and human security—equally and simultaneously. Leaving either of these on the back burner for any long stretch of time will reduce the likelihood of finding an enduring solution to Colombia's conflict. Only by focusing creative and sustained attention on both dimensions can a long-lasting peace be realized.

“Many international organizations are reluctant to get involved in the complex web of Colombia's internal conflict.”

# The Colombian Conflict and the Risk of a Regional Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis

## A Perspective from the Ecuadorian Northern Border

*By César Montúfar<sup>1</sup>*

This paper evaluates the risk of a regional human rights and humanitarian crisis resulting from the spillover effects of the Colombian conflict into neighboring countries. The paper also explores initiatives currently under way by governments and international organizations, and presents some conclusions and recommendations regarding human development, conflict prevention, human rights, and humanitarian concerns. The principal focus of the paper is the Ecuadorian northern border. Ecuador is not only the Andean country in which the effects of the Colombian conflict have been most keenly felt, but also its government and international agencies have developed the most coherent and articulated approach to tackle the problem. There are thus important lessons to be learned by the rest of the region from the Ecuadorian experience.

### **The Problem**

The Colombian internal conflict has far-reaching implications for neighboring countries. These include both transnational and national security issues, as well as human development, human rights, and humanitarian issues. The trafficking of Colombian drugs through neighboring

countries; the possibility of coca or poppy plantations expanding throughout the Andes; the illegal movement of precursor chemicals, arms, and explosives through permeable and uncontrolled borders; and illegal Colombian armed actors using frontier zones as sanctuaries for training and rest are only some of the security threats to which the Colombian internal conflict gives rise in neighboring countries. This paper argues that such security issues must be sharply and clearly differentiated from humanitarian and human rights concerns in order to best focus on the protection of the population living within or near conflict areas. Building on this crucial distinction, the paper identifies and explores two key issues of major concern:

- the migration of Colombians into neighboring countries (mainly Ecuador) in an effort to escape the violence and harassment of illegal armed actors, and
- the social and economic conditions of border populations and their effect on human development and human rights.

The security and humanitarian aspects of these issues, though related, must be treated separately at both the analytical and policy levels.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful for the research assistance provided by Yamile León.

### Colombian Border Regions

Colombia's border regions are, in general, notorious for their isolation, poverty, and lack of public services. Such minimal state presence is an enabling condition for the activity of groups linked to the drug trade and organized crime. It also creates the conditions for human rights violations, impunity, and nearly nonexistent rule of law. Colombia and Ecuador share a 586-kilometer-long border, comprising three Ecuadorian provinces and two Colombian departments (see chart 1). A total population of 2.7 million—2.05 million in Colombia and 667,000 in Ecuador—reside near the border.

Chart 1. Colombian-Ecuadorian Border Population	
Province/department	Total population
Carchi (Ecuador)	152,939
Esmeraldas (Ecuador)	385,223
Sucumbíos (Ecuador)	128,995
Nariño (Colombia)	1,719,162
Putumayo (Colombia)	359,990
Sources: INEC—Ecuador, Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda, 2001; DNP—Colombia Información Básica Departamental, 2003.	

Historically, Colombians and Ecuadorians share social, cultural, and familial bonds. In the east (east Nariño and Esmeraldas), the population is primarily of African descent; the rest of Nariño and Carchi have large *mestizo* populations; and, in Putumayo and Sucumbíos, *mestizo* peasants and indigenous groups make up the majority. Strong commercial ties have always existed between the two countries. Most of these flows are facilitated by the Pan-American highway, which goes through Nariño and Carchi. Since 1990, and in spite of the increasing violence on the Colombian side, Colombian exports to Ecuador have increased steadily. Overall, the Colombian-Ecuadorian border population has had strong social and economic

interactions, despite sharing territory with armed groups engaged in illegal activity on both sides of the border. Although the military activity of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the paramilitary groups is limited to the Colombian side, they frequently cross the border to rest or buy supplies to sustain their activities. Public security problems, particularly kidnapping and extortion, are on the rise in Ecuador too, although there is no evidence that these are due to guerilla or paramilitary actions.

The Colombian-Ecuador border regions share similar levels of institutional development, public infrastructure, and social conditions. These areas are poorly served by public services, and social indicators are consistently low compared to the rest of their respective countries. Judicial and security institutions do not occupy the entire territory of either country. The absence of state institutions appears to be less of a problem in Ecuador than in Colombia; this may be because Ecuador does not face the direct challenge of illegal armed actors and criminal organizations. Colombia's conflict, and the lawlessness that results from widespread drug trafficking, is one of the most important factors in explaining the inability of the Colombian state to fulfill its obligation to protect human rights and provide essential services for all its citizens.

Colombia's border with Venezuela is approximately 2,000 kilometers long. Some 4.7 million Colombians live in departments along the border, and 6.1 million Venezuelans populate border states (see chart 2). This densely populated region is extremely wealthy, with large expanses of both tropical rainforest and arid desert. On the Venezuelan side, states

“Colombia's conflict is one of the most important factors in explaining the inability of the Colombian state to fulfill its obligation to provide essential services for all its citizens.”

“Chocó features high rates of public insecurity, vast expanses of illegal coca and poppy cultivation, and an increasing number of internally displaced persons.”

such as Zulia and Táchira are rich in oil and conducive to agriculture; in Colombia, departments including Arauca and La Guajira have important reserves of oil and coal. Notwithstanding its resources, the region suffers problems similar to those of the Colombia-Ecuador border region. Poverty, isolation, lack of basic services, and weak or nonexistent law enforcement institutions predominate. In addition, it is widely known that the FARC, ELN, and United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) operate on the Venezuelan side. Although there is no evidence that any of these organizations is directly responsible for extortion and kidnapping in Zulia and Táchira, public security has become one of the region's main problems.<sup>2</sup>

Chart 2. Colombian-Venezuelan Border Population	
State/department	Total population
Zulia (Venezuela)	3,209,628
Táchira (Venezuela)	1,031,156
Apure (Venezuela)	466,931
Bolívar (Venezuela)	1,306,650
Amazonas (Venezuela)	100,324
La Guajira (Colombia)	3,209,628
Cesar (Colombia)	1,031,156
N. Santander (Colombia)	466,931
Boyacá (Colombia)	1,306,650
Arauca (Colombia)	100,324
Vichada (Colombia)	91,357
Guainia (Colombia)	40,786
Sources: DNP-Colombia, Información Básica Departamental, 2003; Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas-Venezuela, 2001.	

The Colombia-Panama border is an extremely poor and scarcely populated area, home to approximately 96,000 Panamanians and 411,844 Colombians. In Panama, the Darien province is marked by high rates of illiteracy and extreme poverty. An impenetrable rainforest covers most of the Darien where various indigenous communities, including the the Emberas, Waunanas, and Kunas, have lived for centuries. Similar social conditions prevail in the Colombian department of Chocó. Moreover, Chocó features high rates of public insecurity, vast expanses of illegal coca and poppy cultivation, and an increasing number of internally displaced persons.<sup>3</sup>

#### Humanitarian And Human Development Threats In Colombian Border Regions

The massive flow of Colombians to neighboring countries in response to Colombia's long-standing internal conflict is one of the greatest humanitarian concerns in the Western Hemisphere. This problem has increased in recent years given the intensification of coca fumigation in conflict zones, the military offensive made possible by U.S. assistance to Colombia and the rest of the region through Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative, and the continuing activity of illegal armed actors in Colombia's border regions. The civilian population living in conflict and coca cultivation zones is caught in the confluence of these factors. They are also the primary victims of the increasing violence and degeneration of the Colombian conflict. The deterioration of their human rights and the chronic insecurity in which they pursue their day-to-day activities force them to

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group, "Las Fronteras de Colombia. El eslabón débil de la política de seguridad de Uribe," No. 9, September 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *El Tiempo*, "En los confines de Colombia," August 2004.

leave their homes and displace themselves throughout Colombia—or even beyond, into Ecuador, Venezuela, or Panama—to achieve a better and more secure future.<sup>4</sup> Aside from emigration, their only other options are to stay in their rural communities, controlled by illegal armed actors who systematically practice extortion, various forms of coercive collaboration for their activities, selective and mass killings, and forced recruitment of adults—and even children—to their cause.<sup>5</sup>

Statistics on internally displaced Colombians and international migration are imprecise and inconclusive. Several organizations have established that, since 1985, there have been approximately 3 million Colombians internally displaced for reasons associated with violence and the country's internal conflict. In terms of international flows, nongovernmental sources estimate that between 100,000 and 200,000 Colombians have escaped to neighboring countries over the last three years.<sup>6</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures indicate that refugee petitions by Colombians have increased considerably, rising from 2,000 per year at the end of the 1990s to more than 20,000 per year since 2001; the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, and Ecuador are the main recipients of Colombian refugees.<sup>7</sup> Personal security considerations and neglect

on the part of public officials in receiving countries preclude a complete and objective assessment of the magnitude and pervasiveness of human rights vulnerabilities of these migrant Colombians.

The movement of Colombians and Ecuadorians across the border is not a recent phenomenon, especially in the Esmeraldas and Carchi provinces and the Nariño department. What is new, coincident with the intensification of the Colombian conflict in late 2000, is the massive migration of Colombians escaping violence in their country and seeking refuge not only in the aforementioned locations but also in Sucumbíos, an Ecuadorean province bordering Putumayo in southeast Colombia.<sup>8</sup> Since 2000, the presence of displaced Colombians in Ecuadorian territory has been much more frequent—and permanent. In many cases, émigré Colombians are looking to stay permanently in Ecuador and are officially seeking refugee status. According to information provided by the government of Ecuador, refugee petitions by Colombians in Ecuador increased 3,000 percent between 2000 and 2003. The year of greatest increase was 2003, when Ecuador received 11,388 such petitions—almost 1,000 petitions per month. Overall, in the period 2000–2004, Ecuador has received 27,851 refugee petitions from Colombian citizens. Of these, the govern-

“Since 1985, there have been approximately 3 million Colombians internally displaced for reasons associated with violence.”

<sup>4</sup> Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos, “La Seguridad Democrática: Una política que socava el Estado de derecho.” Bogotá-París, mimeo, 2004; “Informe del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas sobre la situación de los derechos humanos y del derecho internacional humanitario en Colombia,” 2003, [www.hchr.org.co](http://www.hchr.org.co)

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF-Coalición Regional para Acabar con la Utilización de Niños Soldados, “Informe sobre Impacto del Conflicto Armado en Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes,” Panamá, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Sistema de Información sobre Desplazamiento Forzado y Derechos Humanos, SISDHES-CODHES, [www.codhes.org.co](http://www.codhes.org.co); FUNPADEM, “El Rostro Ignorado de los Desplazados Colombianos más allá de las Fronteras: Diagnóstico,” San José, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, “Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Latin America and the Caribbean: Levels and Trends, 1980–2003,” [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch).

<sup>8</sup> Despite a lack of precise information, it is believed that Colombian migrants do not always remain in border provinces but travel to Ecuador's interior to cities such as Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, and—especially—Santo Domingo, an inner city that has housed an extensive and established Colombian population since the 1960s and 1970s.



“Given that not all Colombians seek refugee status, the number of Colombians crossing the border to escape violence is presumably much greater than that reported.”

ment has accepted only 7,990.<sup>9</sup> Although data on class, ethnic, and social variables are scarce, it is believed that most of these Colombians are peasants from Putumayo or middle-class professionals (human rights activists, in some cases) from an urban background. Children, single mothers, and poor and vulnerable women make up a large proportion of the total.<sup>10</sup> Given that not all Colombians seek refugee status, the number of Colombians crossing the border to escape violence is presumably much greater than that reported. Some studies suggest that approximately 50 percent of Colombian migrants to Ecuador do not register themselves in any form, nor do they ask for refugee status, fearing that, if their petition is not accepted, they will be deported to Colombia or suffer retaliations from armed groups back home.<sup>11</sup>

Lack of legal protection and marginalization are two of the most significant problems affecting Colombian legal and illegal residents in Ecuador and the rest of the Andes. In Ecuador, these conditions lead to further problems, such as labor and sexual abuses, arbitrary detentions, and

social discrimination and harassment. A key problem is the lack of access to education for Colombian children. Moreover, Ecuadorians' image of Colombians has changed over the last years, shifting from a perception of a naturally ingenious and hard-working people to a stereotype of dangerous individuals associated with illegal activities and a source of insecurity in the country.<sup>12</sup> This change has even been endorsed by the Colombian government. In a September 2004 interview published in an Ecuadorian newspaper, President Uribe warned Ecuadorians that the country should strengthen its border controls to prevent Colombian kidnappers, terrorists, and drug dealers from operating in Ecuador.<sup>13</sup>

Life in northern Ecuador is hard not only for Colombian migrants. Given its proximity to one of the hottest spots of the Colombian conflict, the region faces serious problems pertaining to its social and economic conditions and human development (see chart 3). In fact, two of Ecuador's four border provinces, Esmeraldas and Sucumbíos, are considered the poorest and most insecure zones of the country.

Chart 3. Social Conditions on the Colombian-Ecuadorian Border				
Province/department	Illiteracy (%)	Potable water coverage (%)	Sewer system coverage (%)	Electric power coverage (%)
Carchi	6.6	94.4	67.3	79.4
Esmeraldas	11.0	58.9	53.2	61.8
Sucumbíos	8.1	62.9	39.1	38.1
Nariño	19.5	73.6	48.9	78.7
Putumayo	7.5	49.0	45.0	58.0

Sources: INEC-Ecuador, Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda, 2001; DNP-Colombia, Información Básica Departamental, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> CSMM, “Refugiado/a Colombiano/as en Ecuador: Tendencias y Respuestas del Estado y de la Sociedad Civil,” 2004.

<sup>10</sup> CODHES, “Caracterización del Desplazamiento y del Refugio en la Frontera Colombo-Ecuatoriana,” 2002, [www.codhes.org.co](http://www.codhes.org.co).

<sup>11</sup> CSMM, “Refugiado/a Colombiano/as en Ecuador: Tendencias y Respuestas del Estado y de la Sociedad Civil,” 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Marcela Zapata, “Discursos frente a la migración transfronteriza de Colombia a Ecuador,” Area de Estudios Sociales y Globales. Tesis de Maestría, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with President Álvaro Uribe, Diario *El Universo*, Guayaquil, October 14, 2004.

In sum, institutional weakness, social exclusion and poverty, and proximity to Colombia, where most of the world's cocaine is produced and violence is intense, are the three main characteristics of the northern provinces of Ecuador. Additionally, the border region faces enormous pressures regarding exploitation of its natural resources, mainly oil extraction and rainforest destruction. And, since Ecuador embraced dollarization in 2001, social and economic conditions have worsened in the northern provinces, because the exchange rate differential with the Colombian peso makes Ecuadorian exports less competitive. The economy of Carchi Province, in particular, has been seriously affected, leading to the bankruptcy of numerous small businesses and increasing unemployment rates.<sup>14</sup>

Given these conditions, human development and the protection of Ecuadorians' social and economic rights are almost nonexistent in northern Ecuador. Moreover, many portions of the Colombian-Ecuadorian border are controlled by paramilitaries and guerrilla groups, and the region is full of clandestine roads and border gates facilitating drug, precursor chemical, arms, and explosives trafficking. All of this makes northern Ecuador particularly vulnerable to human rights problems; in fact, no other region in Ecuador presents such a serious challenge for human development and the protection of human rights.

The Colombian-Ecuadorian border presents another very serious threat to human rights, and one that has been almost totally neglected by national and international actors: the environmental destruction caused by cocaine and heroine production and the indiscriminate fumigation of illegal crops as part of U.S.-led eradication policies. According to the U.S. government, drug production has destroyed 4.4 million hectares of rainforest in Andean countries over the last few years. The use of chemical precursors and toxic substances in cocaine and heroin processing seriously contaminates the soil, groundwater, and rivers.<sup>15</sup> However, environmental damages do not result just from drug cultivation and processing. Acción Ecológica, an Ecuadorian nongovernmental organization (NGO), has reported that Ecuadorians living within a 10-kilometer radius of the border exhibit symptoms of poisoning due to fumigation of coca crops on the Colombian side. The NGO notes that animals and legal crops have also been seriously affected.<sup>16</sup> In 2003, the Ecuadorian government appointed an interagency commission to verify these findings. The commission found that Roundup Ultra, the substance being sprayed in Colombia, was being borne into Ecuador by the wind, within a realm of 4 or 5 kilometers of the borderline. The commission noted that some affected communities had even experienced deaths—including of children—days after intense spraying had taken place in Colombia.<sup>17</sup> Despite these findings,

**“According to the U.S. government, drug production has destroyed 4.4 million hectares of rainforest in Andean countries over the last few years.”**

<sup>14</sup> César Montúfar, “Conflicto Colombiano: Evaluación de Amenazas y Oportunidades para la Seguridad del Ecuador,” Centro Andino de Estudios Internacionales, UASB, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Embassy in Colombia, “Los Andes en peligro. Consecuencias ambientales del narcotráfico,” March 2001, [www.usembassy.state.gov/colombia](http://www.usembassy.state.gov/colombia).

<sup>16</sup> Adolfo Maldonado, “Reporte de la investigación de los impactos de las fumigaciones en la frontera ecuatoriana,” Acción Ecológica, June 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Misión de Verificación, “Impactos en el Ecuador de las fumigaciones realizadas en el Departamento de Putumayo dentro del Plan Colombia,” July 2003.

“Neither the Ecuadorian nor the Venezuelan government has articulated an integrated, comprehensive response to the humanitarian risks and human development deficits affecting their Colombian border regions.”

**Chart 4. Social Conditions of the Colombian-Venezuelan Border**

State/department	Illiteracy (%)	Potable water coverage (%)	Sewer systems coverage (%)	Electric power coverage (%)
Zulia	8.2	62.5	70.5	—
Táchira	—	97	85	—
Apure	—	—	50	—
Bolívar	—	—	—	—
Amazonas	—	39.7	—	—
La Guajira	11.30	76	48	83
Cesar	14.8	87	64	85
Norte de Santander	9.9	94	82	82
Boyacá	12.1	93	89	72
Arauca	12.2	84.6	49.5	81
Vichada	18.6	38.3	7.3	25
Guainía	19.9	70	—	18

Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Venezuela, 2000; Departamento Nacional de Planeación de Colombia, Información Básica Departamental, 2003.

the Colombian government does not accept that the spraying has any negative effect on people or the environment. The impact of aerial eradication remains an urgent issue for clarification by independent research.

Though not to the same extent as in Ecuador, there is a constant flow of Colombians crossing the international border into Venezuela. It is estimated that more than 130,000 Colombians are living illegally in Venezuela near the border.<sup>18</sup> Socioeconomic conditions along the Colombian-Venezuelan border are practically identical to those of Ecuador-Colombia. Though data are incomplete, especially for Venezuelan states, universal access to basic services is not guaranteed for the border population (see chart 4), and illiteracy remains high throughout the region. There is little government presence, and isolation and abandonment appear to be the dominant characteristics.

#### **What Are The Ecuadorian And Neighboring Governments Doing?**

While the Chávez government in Venezuela has opposed Plan Colombia and Uribe's

approach to Colombia's internal conflict, Ecuador's government has cooperated fully with U.S. and Colombian anti-terrorist and anti-narcotics policies. However, neither the Ecuadorian nor the Venezuelan government has articulated an integrated, comprehensive response to the humanitarian risks, human rights violations, and human development deficits affecting their Colombian border regions. In fact, besides some weak preventive, humanitarian, and development responses in Ecuador, the pervasive tendency has been to package all policies within a security framework. Fostering human development and guaranteeing human rights to the border populations and Colombian refugees have not been official priorities.

In Ecuador, former president Lucio Gutiérrez declared that his government would be the United States' best friend and ally in the Andes; he repeatedly offered President Uribe his cooperation with the democratic security policy. In that sense, a regional security approach defined by Washington and Bogota has dominated the policies the

<sup>18</sup> Project Counseling Service and Norwegian Refugee Council, "Colombia Regional Report: Borders," May 2004.

Ecuadorian government has implemented to deal with the impact of the Colombian conflict; humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives have been regarded as secondary.

However, to say that a security approach dominates does not mean that no economic, social, or institutional considerations have been taken into account. As early as 2000, the Ecuadorian National Security Council, COSENA, defined a Security Policy for the Northern Border. This policy described the threats Ecuador might face due to the effects of the Colombian conflict and forcefully argued for a “multidimensional” approach in which several government agencies should coordinate military, police, economic, social and other institutional initiatives in the northern frontier region. Based on this perspective, the government began work at three levels.

- It implemented an unprecedented defense policy in the northern provinces, mobilizing approximately 12,000 soldiers to secure the border.
- With support from, and in coordination with, UNHCR, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and International Organization for Migration (OIM), several initiatives were launched to confront a possible refugee crisis in the north.
- The government put in place a policy for preventive and alternative development, through a newly created agency in the president’s office, Unidad de Desarrollo Norte (Northern Development Agency, UDENOR)

Since military initiatives respond directly to the security threats, this paper focuses exclusively on the second and third levels outlined above.

In terms of initiatives related to Colombian displaced persons and refugees, Ecuador is the most prepared country in the region, according to the human rights NGO, Centro Segundo Montes Mozo (CSMM). In the nineties, Ecuador developed legislation pertaining to refugees in accordance with international norms. Accordingly, it is the Andean country where most Colombians have received refugee status since the latest crisis started in 2000. Statistics provided by UNHCR indicate that, between 2000 and 2003, 6,510 Colombians were recognized as refugees by the Ecuadorian government, 860 by Panama, 90 by Brazil, and 20 each by Venezuela and Peru.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, Ecuador is adhering to an increasingly restrictive legal interpretation in an effort that seems designed to allow authorities to discard as many applications as possible. This disparity between the stated objectives of the law and its application by Ecuadorian officials apparently derives from the belief that Colombian immigrants are responsible for public insecurity in Ecuadorian cities or belong to Colombian illegal organizations looking to carry out activities in Ecuador. Ecuadorian officials—and even some public opinion leaders—have thus interpreted the immigration of displaced Colombians to Ecuador as a security problem. Several Ecuadorian human rights organizations have expressed their concerns regarding the increasing rate of rejection of refugee petitions by the Ecuadorian government. According to CSMM, 86 percent of Colombian petitions for refugee status were accepted in 2001, while only 31 percent were accepted in 2004. The trend is clear: acceptance rates for 2001, 2002, and 2003 were 78 percent, 56 percent, and 41 percent, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

“To say that a security approach dominates does not mean that no economic, social, or institutional considerations have been taken into account.”

<sup>19</sup> CSMM, “Refugiado/a Colombiano/as en Ecuador: Tendencias y Respuestas del Estado y de la Sociedad Civil,” 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

**“In 2003,  
the governments  
of Colombia and  
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bilateral agreement to  
better regulate the flow  
of people across the  
border.”**

On the other hand, Ecuador—unlike other countries such as Panama and Venezuela—has not implemented forced return policies. Instead, the emphasis has been on establishing border controls and entrance restrictions at the northern border. Several official entry points, such as the one at the Rumichaca Bridge, have been closed, and, since August 2004, all Colombians crossing the border have been required to provide a document confirming that they have undergone a criminal background check.

Neighboring countries have implemented similar policies. In 2003, the governments of Colombia and Venezuela signed a bilateral agreement to better regulate the flow of people across the border, and the Venezuelan government established a Refugee Commission. According to some reports, there are approximately 15,000 Colombians living in dire conditions in Venezuela near the border; there appears to be little political will to attend to their problems.<sup>21</sup> Similar conditions are apparent in Panama as well.

With the creation of UDENOR, the Ecuadorian government sought to articulate an effective response to the poor access to basic needs and public services of most of the population of northern Ecuador. In the view of public officials, these conditions made Ecuador particularly vulnerable to possible spillover effects from the Colombian conflict. Since its creation, UDENOR has framed all its programs within the 1988 UN Action Plan for the Eradication of Drugs and Alternative Development and the Ecuadorian National Anti-Narcotics Plan. UDENOR emphasizes alternative development as a

component of an anti-drug strategy in the context of articulating security and development concerns along the northern border.<sup>22</sup> No specific initiative like UDENOR has been established in Venezuela or Panama. Social, economic, and human development programs in these countries are part of their respective social agencies and give no special emphasis to the vulnerabilities of border populations.

UDENOR works at various levels: the generation of new development projects, the procurement of national and international funding for development initiatives, and the coordination and implementation of development projects in coordination with local governments and beneficiary communities. Since 2002, UDENOR has implemented—with the support of several international donors—a five-year program for Preventive and Alternative Development and Social Reactivation. The program plans to invest \$435 million in five years, 20 percent of which will come from national resources. The program has five major components: social infrastructure, productive infrastructure, social and economic development, democracy and governance, and environment conservancy. These components aim at promoting sustainable development in northern Ecuador by targeting investment toward human development, strengthening of civil society, and fostering of good local governance. Pursuit of these objectives is seen as fundamental in preventing violence and drug production and trafficking, which might spill over from nearby Nariño and Putumayo.<sup>23</sup> Since 2003, UDENOR has developed three additional subprograms: Northern Border

<sup>21</sup> Project Counseling Service and Norwegian Refugee Council, op cit.

<sup>22</sup> UDENOR, “Informe de Actividades 2004,” Quito, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> UDENOR, “Informe: Para Crear un Nuevo Futuro,” Quito, 2002.



Development, Economic Development and Local Administration, and Sustainable Development of the Amazon Northern Border.<sup>24</sup> In the four years since it was started, UDENOR has only partially fulfilled the expectations it generated at its inception. Its work has focused almost entirely on infrastructure building, while other components have scarcely been pursued.

The agency has suffered many political pressures at both the national and local levels; its programs are regarded as an important asset for political clientelism and power bargaining by national and provincial politicians. There has also been a conflict between UDENOR and INECI, the government agency that coordinates all international assistance, over UDENOR's capacity to directly administer international resources. Moreover, in 2003, UDENOR passed from the jurisdiction of the presidency to the Foreign Relations Ministry; one year later, it returned to the presidency. Such instability has caused delays and uncertainty in the implementation of its programs and has diminished confidence on the part of donor organizations.<sup>25</sup>

In a separate initiative, the Ecuadorian and Colombian governments are in the process of discussing and approving a Binational Development Plan. This initiative is the result of coordination between Colombian and Ecuadorian agencies with the participation of the Binational Neighbor Commission of both Foreign Ministries. The Binational Plan's goals are to implement development programs along the Colombia-Ecuador border, strengthen coordination among local institutions

in both countries, and enhance regional integration as a means of solving the basic problems of the border population. Similarly, SENPLADES, the Ecuadorian Planning Secretary, is preparing a Northern Border Development Plan aimed at integrating all internal and international efforts focused on the northern provinces.<sup>26</sup> Given the proliferation of development plans by various government agencies, coordination problems and internal disputes for national and international resources will doubtless continue to impinge on the effectiveness of development initiatives in border provinces.

Not a single government program has addressed the environmental effects in Ecuador of drug production and coca fumigation. For UDENOR and other government agencies, the problem seems simply to not exist. In 2002, the Ecuadorian Foreign Relations Ministry officially asked the Colombian government not to spray within an area of 10 kilometers from the border. Colombia did not respond positively to that petition, although in 2004, fumigations near the border were temporarily suspended.

#### **What Are International Organizations Doing?**

The presence and influence of international donors in regions bordering Colombia, though significant, do not add up to a coordinated strategy toward addressing the critical human rights and humanitarian threats that border populations confront. With few exceptions, most international cooperation agencies direct their aid to border regions within the country programs they already have in place without specifically addressing the humanitarian issues stemming from the Colombian conflict.

“Not a single government program has addressed the environmental effects in Ecuador of drug production and coca fumigation.”

<sup>24</sup> See UDENOR, 2005, op cit.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Glauco Bustos, Executive President of UDENOR, January 8, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mauricio Montalvo, Foreign Relations Ministry, December 15, 2004.

**“International agencies have a larger presence in northern Ecuador than they do in any of Colombia's neighbors.”**

All international agencies have a larger presence in northern Ecuador than they do in any of Colombia's neighbors. Over the last five years, international cooperation for the Colombia-Ecuador border region has increased considerably. Concessionary loan grants have been channeled through UDENOR, other executive agencies, and local NGOs or granted directly by multilateral or bilateral cooperation agencies. According to a 2004 assessment produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), international donations to the border region can be classified as either cooperation by multilateral and bilateral organizations, including UN agencies; cooperation by governments; or cooperation through UDENOR and the Brussels Consultative Group.<sup>27</sup>

The first type of cooperation provides for technical assistance, institutional strengthening, infrastructure, and sustainable development. UN agencies—specifically the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNHCR, World Alimentary Program, UNDP, UNESCO, UNIFEM, and Pan-American Health Organization (PHO-WHO)—focus on the provision of humanitarian support, assistance to Colombian refugees, basic social services, assistance to local governments, and nutritional security. Between 2004 and 2007, these UN entities plan to invest approximately \$7.5 million.<sup>28</sup>

The second type of cooperation, which includes assistance from governments, is basically directed at human development programs. The contributions of Spain, Belgium, the United States, the Netherlands,

and Germany are among the most important. According to INECI, bilateral cooperation to the region reached \$133.2 million between 1996 and 2003. For the period 2004 to '07, it is expected that this group will invest nearly \$26.4 million in a variety of human development projects.<sup>29</sup>

The third type of cooperation includes all assistance channeled through UDENOR and other government agencies. This cooperation has focused on basic public services, education, and infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.). Also, this type of support has contributed to projects aimed at decentralization and strengthening of local governments and social participation, and the management of natural resources. Funding has also supported repatriation of refugees and humanitarian assistance for immigrant Colombians. Donor entities providing this support include USAID, OIM, the European Commission, German Development Agency (GTZ), and the Canadian-Ecuadorian Fund. For the period 2004–09, it is expected that their collective contribution will reach \$63.8 million. In addition, the Brussels Consultative Group, convened by the Ecuadorian government and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in October 2001, formalized a cooperation compromise of \$266 million, of which \$66 million has already been received by UDENOR. The IADB has recently approved a concessionary loan of \$10 million. This loan will fund the AMAZNOR program, which comprises several human development initiatives in the northeastern provinces of Ecuador.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In 2004, the UN agencies in Ecuador produced a comprehensive assessment of the threats and problems of northern Ecuador as well as of the government and international organizations' efforts in the region. See Sistema de las Naciones Unidas en el Ecuador, "La frontera norte del Ecuador: Evaluación y recomendaciones de la Misión Interagencial del Sistema de Naciones Unidas en el Ecuador," Quito, July 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Having established the context of international cooperation in the northern provinces of Ecuador, the paper next focuses specifically on the initiatives directly related to human rights, humanitarian and refugee assistance, and human development. The programs carried out by key international agencies working in these areas are presented, and the extent to which they are making a real contribution in addressing the humanitarian challenges of the region are assessed. Finally, the paper presents some conclusions and recommendations.

#### *Human rights and humanitarian assistance programs*

UNHCR is doubtless the organization with the largest and most coherent presence in terms of promoting human rights and humanitarian assistance in the region. UNHCR objectives in the Andean region are to provide protection and solutions to Colombian refugees migrating to other countries. UNHCR has also worked to strengthen the protection networks in Colombian border areas in concert with such actors as the Catholic Church, NGOs, and other UN agencies. The organization has tried to increase the visibility of the humanitarian problem many Colombians face as a result of their forced migration, placing particular attention on the protection of their rights in accordance with national and international law. There has been an effort to respond to the basic needs of migrants through community-based and microcredit projects in host countries. These projects also aim at reducing the impact on receiving communities and improving their relations with refugees. UNHCR has also worked on improving national refugee legislation,

extending protection networks, registration and assessment of Colombians in neighboring countries, and capacity building for state authorities, especially in Ecuador and Venezuela. Beginning in 2004, the UNHCR emphasis has been on women and child refugees.

In January 2003, UNHCR opened a regional resettlement office in Quito. This office aims to offer solutions to individuals facing personal security threats in their host country by resettling them to a third one.<sup>31</sup> UNHCR policy has not been the repatriation of Colombians from neighboring countries. If voluntary repatriation occurs, UNHCR's role has been to inform individuals, on a case-by-case basis, of the security situation in their home town.

Because Ecuador receives the greatest number of Colombian asylum seekers in the Andes, it is host to UNHCR's largest regional program. In 2001, UNHCR put in place a \$2 million contingency plan aimed at receiving approximately 5,000 displaced Colombians, mainly in Sucumbíos province. The plan was designed with the intent of seeking the participation of local people and grassroots organizations. In 2002, UNHCR expanded the plan to the Carchi Province. UNHCR's annual budget in Ecuador is \$1.8 million. Estimates of how much it would cost to provide acceptable living conditions for all Colombian refugees in Ecuador run as high as \$3.5 million.<sup>32</sup>

UNHCR also provides technical assistance to government officials. Since February 2003, the agency has, in coordination with the Ecuadorian government, implemented a new system to provide identification documents to all Colombians requesting asylum

**“UNHCR has worked to strengthen the protection networks in Colombian border areas in concert with such actors as the Catholic Church, NGOs, and other UN agencies.”**

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR, *op cit.*, pp. 257–58.

<sup>32</sup> [www.globalaware.org](http://www.globalaware.org), “Plan Colombia y los efectos en el norte del Ecuador,” 2003.

“In general, the programs established in northern Ecuador are the most comprehensive in the region.”

and refugee status in Ecuador. UNHCR has also supported the initiatives of other organizations dealing with displaced people and refugees such as the Red Cross, the Catholic Church, UNIFEM, and several NGOs. UNHCR personnel provide support and medical assistance to new arrivals, identifying their needs and facilitating their adaptation to their new homes. Special attention is given to vulnerable groups and families.<sup>33</sup>

In Venezuela, UNHCR provides logistical and operational support to national and provincial authorities in the Migration Department, Ministry of Interior and Justice, and the armed services. Attention has been devoted to training relevant personnel in registration procedures; registration of displaced Colombians has been a priority in Venezuela. In frontier zones, UNHCR has carried out awareness campaigns on national asylum and refugee legislation as part of a broader mass media campaign to inform Venezuelans on the humanitarian consequences of the Colombian conflict.<sup>34</sup>

UNHCR programs in Panama and Peru are small. In Panama, UNHCR has established a temporary presence to support implementation of national legislation regarding refugees. Working with other UN and international entities, UNHCR is monitoring the situation of Colombians in the border region of Darien. Similarly, in Peru, the government has asked UNHCR to train border officials in refugee issues and to monitor migrant conditions in border areas.<sup>35</sup>

There are other organizations besides UNHCR supporting refugees along Ecuador's northern border. USAID and OIM

have provided equipment for refugee shelters and support for repatriation to third countries. Working closely with UNHCR, both organizations have provided legal assistance to refugees. UNIFEM has carried out research on the condition of female refugees, and PAHO has a project in place to deal with refugee emergencies. Similarly, GTZ provides credit and has put together productive and educational projects for refugees. Finally, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an NGO, offers psychological assistance to Ecuador's Colombian refugee population.

There is a consistent effort, especially on the part of UNHCR, being made to alleviate, and provide legal and social solutions to, the problems of displaced Colombians in Ecuador. In general, the programs established in northern Ecuador are the most comprehensive in the region. Nonetheless, there is no integrated, comprehensive plan to prevent human rights violations and an imminent humanitarian crisis stemming from the massive influx of Colombians and the conflict's spread beyond Colombia's borders. Most efforts, including those of UNHCR, are reactive rather than proactive. No specific conflict prevention initiatives are being implemented, despite broad consensus that the Colombian conflict might deteriorate due to implementation of the Patriot Plan and other military initiatives that the Colombian government plans to execute very near its southern border.

#### *Human development programs*

As mentioned earlier, multi- and bilateral agencies have launched several programs in northern Ecuador to encourage progress in

<sup>33</sup> “ACNUR en Ecuador,” [www.acnur.org](http://www.acnur.org), 2003.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, *op cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

human development. UN agencies develop small and dispersed projects in several communities. UNHCR promotes localized education initiatives and provides microcredits for productive activities in communities hosting Colombian refugees. FAO and the World Alimentary Program have established programs dealing with nutritional security in the region. UNICEF and UNESCO support educational infrastructure, nutrition programs for children, and training for teachers and parents in the region. UNICEF promotes participatory planning and budgeting in selected municipalities of northern Ecuador and education programs on children's rights. PAHO promotes immunization programs throughout the region, including throughout Ecuador. Finally, UNDP funds several projects in sustainable agriculture and small business development.

Bilateral agencies have made a broader impact in terms of the focus of their programs and weight of their investment. Besides their work with refugees, USAID and WMO support grassroots organizations and local governments; they finance infrastructure projects and rural land titling programs. Most of these efforts are channeled through UDENOR. Germany's GTZ funds several educational programs in poor communities, provides equipment to schools and health centers, and trains grassroots organizations in environmental programs. The European Commission maintains a large and important presence in the region, focusing on decentralized management of natural resources, health and nutrition projects, and strengthening of local governments and grassroot organizations. With USAID and UNHCR, the European Commission is the most decisive international actor in Ecuador's northern border region. The Canadian-Ecuadorian Fund also has some influence on human development programs. The fund finances several projects related to

environmental management, rural production and marketing, and the strengthening of community organizations.

There is also assistance provided directly by governments. Belgium, Spain, Luxemburg, and the United States are the largest donors. Belgium supports the construction of infrastructure, decentralization, strengthening of local governments, and microcredit to the poor. Spain focuses all its aid on rural development; Luxemburg on the education sector; and the United States on urban development. Other countries, including Canada, France, and the United Kingdom, maintain small projects in the area addressing such issues as good governance and participation, rainforest conservancy, education, tourism, and housing, among others.

The last few years have witnessed a growing presence of NGOs, especially in environmental programs. ALTROPICO, an NGO funded by the Global Conservation Organization (WWF), works on environmental conservation and sustainable development in Esmeraldas province. International Conservation, an NGO funded by Japan and the United States, focuses on environmental education and management of protected areas. The Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio, with funding from Belgium and the Netherlands, works on issues related to environmental management and agriculture. Other NGOs in the region have similar but smaller and more localized projects.

Overall, international cooperation efforts in northern Ecuador are extremely uncoordinated. Most projects only seem to follow directives coming from donors and local governments and communities without any broad, strategic perspective. Despite the increasing resources available, a comprehensive human development strategy is lacking. Most projects have only a limited

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reach and, even taken together, do not have a marked impact on the general well-being and human development of the region. There are numerous small projects but no connection among them and no integration into a systemic approach to the region’s most pressing problems.

In theory, UDENOR could coordinate all international cooperation in northern Ecuador. However, it is unclear whether this agency, functioning within the presidency, can be immune to partisan influence and clientelistic practices. INECI, within the Foreign Relations Ministry, could be an alternative to UDENOR. However, disputes between these two agencies have precluded effective coordination of international efforts.

#### **Recommendations**

The recommendations emerging from this case study of Ecuador’s northern border can be used as a guideline for the entire region. International cooperation should focus on the following five areas:

- Coordination of international efforts
- Development of early warning systems to detect and prevent humanitarian crises and human rights violations
- Strengthening of judicial and law enforcement institutions
- Education on human rights
- Independent and technical assessment of the effects of drug processing and fumigations on people and the environment

#### *Coordination of international organizations efforts*

One of the conclusions of the report prepared by the UN agencies in Ecuador on the

northern border is the need for a comprehensive, strategic, and preventive plan capable of coordinating all national and international efforts in the region.<sup>36</sup> This paper fully endorses this recommendation and poses some additional elements. First of all, international organizations can assist the Ecuadorian government in preparing a plan for the promotion of human development and human rights and coordinate all national and international initiatives. The crucial question here is to determine which government agency or agencies will administer and coordinate such a plan; a single agency, namely UDENOR or INECI, could coordinate such initiatives, receiving and channeling all international assistance funds. Given the strongly partisan nature of UDENOR, INECI might be the more desirable alternative. Thus, all international resources would be channeled through normal procedures within the Foreign Relations Ministry. In addition, INECI could distribute international aid funds to all national and local government agencies, including UDENOR, preventing centralization of funding within a single agency. In any event, there is a need to work within UDENOR to prevent clientelism and partisan influence. Foreign donors can support the enhancement of UDENOR’s technical capacities and its articulation to municipal and provincial governments. This paper suggests that the UDENOR experience can be a sound alternative for other countries. If they are careful to avoid politicizing them, Venezuela and Panama can organize similar agencies to establish an aggressive human development strategy in their border regions.

Second, international agencies should develop a regional perspective on the humanitarian and human rights problems resulting from the Colombian conflict.

<sup>36</sup> The report recommends the elaboration of a special plan for Ecuador’s northern zone. See Sistema de las Naciones Unidas en el Ecuador, op cit.

Currently, only UNHCR, USAID, and OIM use regional approaches in performing their work. To place their national programs with Colombia's border countries in a regional approach, international agencies will need to adjust, redefine, and broaden their national projects, aligning them with ones being launched in Colombia. By doing so, they can provide a multilateral perspective to regional humanitarian and human rights problems.

*Development of early warning systems to detect and prevent humanitarian crises and human rights violations*

Colombia's neighbors lack any warning system to detect and prevent humanitarian crises and human rights violations. In 2002, UN agencies in Colombia established a Humanitarian Action Plan; this needs to be expanded to neighboring regions, as was suggested in a recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia.<sup>37</sup> In that vein, international donors should launch a concerted drive to fund this action plan at a regional level. The international community must not wait until an uncontrollable humanitarian crisis takes place in neighboring countries due to a dramatic increase of Colombian immigrants or a spillover of the violence of the Colombian conflict. Both scenarios are feasible given a possible exacerbation of the Colombian conflict in the years to come. The plan must include development of early warning systems with the participation of local governments and the grassroots. Military and police should be key participants in this endeavor, working in close coordination with civil government agencies. The plan should strengthen information sharing and coordination among

Colombian authorities and public officials from other countries. Similarly, the efforts that have been made by international agencies such as UNHCR, USAID, and OIM must strengthen their preventive rather than their reactive capabilities.

*Strengthening of judicial and law enforcement institutions*

If impunity is to be solved in border regions where crime grows more quickly than the capacity of the state to sanction wrongdoers, there should be a consistent effort—supported by the international community—to strengthen judicial and police entities in the region. Although this process should be part of a larger national reorganization of both institutions, certain elements are essential: information and intelligence capacities must be enhanced, jails and local courts must be improved, and the police must be educated on and sensitized regarding human rights topics. International donors must understand that Colombia's neighbors make considerable efforts to keep state military and police presence throughout their territories, but that this is particularly difficult in Colombian border areas where they constantly interact not only with Colombian authorities but with illegal armed actors. International organizations can support this very complex and difficult objective.

*Education on human rights*

People in Northern Ecuador, as in all regions neighboring Colombia, live very near or in the middle of violent situations. Combined with a weak state presence, the possibility for violence to expand is extremely high. For that reason, education and training on human rights issues must be emphasized by international organizations. Programs in this

“The international community must not wait until an uncontrollable humanitarian crisis takes place in neighboring countries.”

<sup>37</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *Andes 2020: A New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region*, 2004; Oficina en Colombia del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, Bogotá, marzo 2004, [www.hchr.org.co](http://www.hchr.org.co).

**“Programs on human rights issues should be targeted at military, police, and civil officials at all levels of government.”**

area should be targetted at military, police, and civil officials at all levels of government. Similarly, education activities for the general population—particularly children and adolescents—are critical in promoting a culture of peace throughout border communities. Public education officials at the national and local levels must include human rights and humanitarian content in school curricula and actively promote a culture of peaceful conflict resolution in all situations.

*Independent and technical assessment of the effects of drug processing and fumigation on people and the environment*

There is active debate on the effects on human life and the environment resulting

from drug processing and the fumigation of illegal crops. Still, no study has been able to generate conclusions accepted by both government and civil society actors. International organizations can make a significant contribution by commissioning a scholarly, independent report on this issue. Given that U.S. military aid to Colombia funds fumigation, the best alternative is to have non-American donors and academics be in charge of producing such a report. If negative effects are actually proven, the international community must act immediately to stop fumigations and mitigate their damaging consequences.

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