Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR’s Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

COL105522.E

Australia: Organizational structure of the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras), including whether the group operates under a unified command and the nature of cooperation among different Black Eagles groups across the country; activities in 2015; relationship to the government, including instances of infiltration or collusion (March 2015-May 2016)

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1. Overview

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an independent researcher, who is currently a graduate student at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá and who has researched paramilitary violence in Colombia, indicated that to his knowledge, the Black Eagles have influence in [translation] "the urban areas of the main municipalities" of Colombia and in areas such as Bajo Cauca [the northeastern part of the department of Antioquia] and the southern part of the department of Córdoba (Independent researcher 1 May 2016). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor at the Institute for Political Science and International Relations (Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, IEPR) at the National University of Colombia (Universidad Nacional de Colombia), whose research focuses on violence and conflict in Colombia and urban violence in Latin America, stated that the activities of the Black Eagles are often [translation] "very local" (Professor 28 Apr. 2016).

The Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, INDEPAZ), a Bogotá-based organization focused on training, research, and dialogue (INDEPAZ n.d.), which has been monitoring the presence of [translation] "narcoparamilitary groups" since 2006 (ibid. 6 Nov. 2014), reports that in the first three months of 2016, the Black Eagles had a presence in the department of Cauca, and in the cities of Cali, Bogotá, Cartagena and Saravena (ibid. 18 Apr. 2016, 2). On 2 April 2016, the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación), a Bogotá-based not-for-profit organization that aims to generate knowledge to contribute to public debates (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación n.d.), reported that, based on information provided by the Colombian national police, the Black Eagles [translation] "operate" in 62 municipalities in the country (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación 2 Apr. 2016). A map of the presence of the Black Eagles in Colombia in 2016, produced by the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation with information provided by the Colombian national police, is attached to this Response (Attachment 1). For further information on the areas of operation and activities of the group from 2014 to March 2015, see Response to Information Request COL105254.

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of political science and international relations at the Bogotá-based Pontifical Xavierian University (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana), who researches paramilitary groups in Colombia, stated, without providing further details, that [translation]
it is difficult to find information about armed groups in Colombia since the 2006 paramilitary demobilization, due to a lack of interest in the topic on the part of the authorities. When reliable official information exists, it is very difficult to access, given that recognizing those groups would expose the ineffectiveness of authorities in such matters (Associate Professor 27 Apr. 2016).

The independent researcher stated that the police do not identify the Black Eagles as a BACRIM (banda criminal or criminal gang) or any other form of organized crime group (Independent researcher 1 May 2016). Similarly, according to the Professor, the police [translation] "maintain vehemently that the Black Eagles do not exist, that it is a ghost organization" (Professor 28 Apr. 2016). Colombia Reports, a Medellín-based English news source (Colombia Reports n.d.), quotes the Minister of Interior in January 2015, in reaction to death threats sent to 39 people, that "neo-paramilitary group 'Aguilas Negras' does not exist and that death threats sent in the name of the group are authored by 'enemies of peace'" (Colombia Reports 15 Jan. 2015). Similarly, El Nuevo Día, a Tolima-based newspaper, quotes the same minister as saying in March 2015 that the Black Eagles as a group no longer exists, but that [translation] "those opposed to peace [with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC)] continue to use the name to terrorize social leaders" (El Nuevo Día 26 May 2015). For information on the peace negotiations between FARC and the Colombian government, see Response to Information Request COL105467.

2. Organizational Structure

The Professor indicated that the Black Eagles [translation] "make appearances" through threats and other criminal activities; he gave the opinion that it is not a group with a central command or defined structure, like other neo-paramilitary groups (Professor 28 Apr. 2016). The independent researcher similarly stated that he has not seen evidence of centrally commanded actions, such as can be seen in other paramilitary groups (Independent researcher 1 May 2016). The Associate Professor stated that the structure of the Black Eagles is [translation] "unstable and flexible," and that they do not have a unified command structure like other BACRIM (Associate Professor 27 Apr. 2016). InSight Crime, a foundation that studies organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (InSight Crime n.d.a), notes that there is "little evidence that [the Black Eagles] operate as a systematic organization," describing them as a "non-cohesive group" lacking central leadership (InSight Crime n.d.b).

Without providing further details, the independent researcher expressed the opinion that rather than operating as a single group under a unified command, the name Black Eagles tends to be a [translation] "registered trademark" or name used to intimidate and threaten people (Independent researcher 1 May 2016). Similarly, the Associate Professor gave the opinion that the name Black Eagles is a [translation] "brand that different groups or networks use at their convenience" (Associate Professor 27 Apr. 2016). InSight Crime notes that "[i]t is possible that in some areas, low-level street gangs adopt the name to intimidate extortion victims and land theft restitution victims (InSight Crime n.d.b).

The Professor stated that Black Eagles has become an expression that can be used by [translation] "any person" who wants to engage in "social or political extermination" threats and activities (Professor 28 Apr. 2016). For information on "social cleansing" in Colombia, see Response to Information Request COL104418. According to InSight Crime, Black Eagles seems to be a "blanket name" for paramilitary successor groups (InSight Crime n.d.b). According to the same source, Black Eagles "is often used as a generic term to describe the many fragments of ex-paramilitaries" still involved in the drug trade, as well as a name used by paramilitary successor groups to threaten or murder journalists, lawyers and human rights activists (ibid.). Without providing further details, the Associate Professor stated that the name Black Eagles [translation] "is used as a wild card by the counterinsurgency units of the Colombian military and their local allies for different purposes" (Associate Professor 27 Apr. 2016). He added that [translation] "if there is no national organization of the Black Eagles, strictly speaking, there is a broad, but clear, 'national agenda' when it comes to what is considered a 'threat' to the local order" (ibid.).

A more detailed profile of the Black Eagles by InSight Crime is attached to this Response (Attachment 2).

Sources report instances of groups operating under variations of the name Black Eagles, including:

- Black Eagles' Capital Bloc (Bloque Capital) in Bogotá (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 36);
- Black Eagles' Central Bloc (Bloque Central) (El Espectador 1 Dec. 2015);
- Black Eagles' Military Bloc of Valle del Cauca (Bloque Militar del Valle del Cauca) (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 26-27);
- Black Eagles' Northern Bloc (Bloque Norte) (El Colombiano 23 Oct. 2015);
- Black Eagles' Northern Atlantic Coast Bloc (Colombia Reports 15 Jan. 2015);
- Black Eagles' Southern Bloc (Bloque Sur) (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 44);
Information on the ability of different Black Eagles groups to coordinate or cooperate across different regions of Colombia and the nature of such coordination or cooperation could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Activities and Targets

Information on the activities of the Black Eagles from 2015 to 2016 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Professor indicated that in general, the Black Eagles are involved in the "social and political extermination" of social and political activists, as well as disappearances, homicides and extortion (Professor 28 Apr. 2016). Similarly, without providing further details, the independent researcher stated that [translation] "local elites ... [use] the brand [of the Black Eagles] to intimidate and kill left-wing leaders, union leaders, land restitution claimants, and anyone who threatens to undermine the established social classes" (1 May 2016). In April 2016, COLPRENSA, the national press agency of Colombia, reported on [translation] "[s]elective killings, threats and the circulation of pamphlets alluding to organizations involved in social cleansing, the Black Eagles in particular," targeting social organizations representing farmers, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and "other social voices," primarily in southern Colombia, in departments such as Cauca and Putumayo (COLPRENSA 4 Apr. 2016).

3.1 Incidents

Sources report that on 6 February 2015, two indigenous persons were assassinated by unknown assailants, their bodies showing signs of torture, in Caloto, department of Cauca, where the Black Eagles had announced that it was time to "cleanse" the area, by way of a pamphlet distributed the previous day (AI 23 Feb. 2015) or week (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 23-24).

Without providing further details, Diario Occidente, a Cali-based newspaper, reports that the community of Tumaco [department of Nariño] asked the authorities for protection, because the Black Eagles were distributing pamphlets where they announced a curfew that would start on 15 June 2015 (5 June 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On 1 December 2015, El Espectador, a Bogotá-based newspaper, indicated that since the beginning of 2015, the human rights observatory of Affirmative Caribbean (Caribe Afirmativo), a sexual diversity organization (Caribe Afirmativo n.d.), had recorded 4 murders against the LGBTI community in San Marco, in the department of Sucre, and 17 threats in [translation] "the rest of the Caribbean region of Colombia," mostly against LGBTI leaders (El Espectador 1 Dec. 2015). The same source reports that these crimes were attributed to several criminal gangs, including the Black Eagles (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that the following groups received threats from the Black Eagles, or variations on that name, in 2015-2016:

- members of the indigenous community of Pradera, in the department of Valle del Cauca, on 8 March 2015 and 16 May 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 25-27); indigenous leaders and the Association of Indigenous Councils of North Cauca (Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca) in Caloto and Buenos Aires, department of Cauca, on 15 March 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 25);
- 14 people, including human rights activists and demobilized insurgents involved in social, political or humanitarian activities, on 9 March 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 44);
- eight environmentalists in Bogotá on 10 March 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 41);
- people who initiated the establishment of a memorial hall in Bogotá on 12 March 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 41);
- two human rights activists and leaders involved with the displaced community in Bogotá on 6 April 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 42);
- leaders or members of the Patriotic March (Marcha Patriótica), a political movement, as reported by media sources on the following dates: 8 April 2015 (COLPRENSA); 29 March 2016 (El País); and 15-16 April 2016 (El Espectador 15 Apr. 2016; Caracol Radio 16 Apr. 2016);
- the president and other candidates of the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica) political party at its Bogotá location on 4 May 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 45);
- 11 student leaders at the National University in Bogotá on 7 May 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 36); students at the same university on 11 May 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 36); a human rights activist and 3 students of the Universidad Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca (UCMC)
in Bogotá on 27 May 2015 (CINEP/PPP 30 Sept. 2015, 36); 4 UCMC students around 1 June 2015 (Agencia EFE 1 June 2015);
• people living in Ituango, a town located in northern Antioquia, who were ordered to vote a certain way on 25 October 2015, in the [regional] elections (El Colombiano 23 Oct. 2015);
• a group of female victims of the conflict seeking reparations, as reported on 12 March 2016 (Caracol Radio);

3.2 State Response

Information on the Colombian state response to the activities of the Black Eagles was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Sources reported on 19 June 2015 that the police had captured two alleged members of the Black Eagles in Cartagena, on charges of extortion (El Espectador 19 June 2015; Caracol Radio 19 June 2016).

The Office of the Attorney General (Fiscalía General de la Nación) reported on 7 April 2015 on the arrest in Bojayá, department of Chocó, of a presumed member of the Black Eagles who was suspected of homicide (Colombia 7 Apr. 2015), and on 13 April 2015 on the arrest of a person in Herveo, department of Tolima, noting that he had pretended, along with his accomplice, to be a member of the Black Eagles in order to extort money and that he had killed someone for not paying (ibid. 13 Apr. 2015). Further information on these cases could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On 8 April 2015, COPLRENSA cited the chief of the Attorney General's National Anti-Organized Crime Unit as stating that they established that a bodyguard and driver of a member of the Patriotic March Movement sent a threat to a leader of this same party by way of a pamphlet in name of the Black Eagles (COPLRENSA 8 Apr. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Relationship to the Government

Information on specific incidents of collusion or infiltration of the Black Eagles in public institutions could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Associated Professor, without providing further details, gave the opinion that [translation] "the relationships between the paramilitary successor groups, also called BACRIM, and the military might continue to exist based on testimonies from affected local groups, or that counterinsurgency units operate without proper identification or under the name Black Eagles or other similar names" (Associate Professor 27 Apr. 2016). Similarly, the New Rainbow Corporation (Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, CNAI), a Bogotá-based think tank and research centre for peace (CNAI n.d.), in a report on an expert panel discussion held on 2 February 2016 on paramilitarism, quotes political scientist Carlos Medina Gallego as describing the Black Eagles as an example of a paramilitary network [translation] "that is used by the state 'to put pressure on regional social movements'" (CNAI 5 Feb. 2016). Without providing further details, the independent researcher gave the opinion that [translation] "it is common that subsequent to military operations, threats against left-wing politicians and 'social cleansing' threats increase," and he stated that there have been "various" cases of human rights activists receiving a Black Eagles death threat "immediately after" filing reports of abuse with the local Attorney General's office (1 May 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agencia EFE. 1 June 2015. "Asesinan a un líder sindical y defensor de derechos humanos en Colombia." (Factiva)

Associate Professor of Political Science, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. 27 April 2016. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.


Caribe Afirmativo. N.d. "¿Quiénes somos?" [Accessed 2 May 2016]


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El Espectador. 15 April 2016. "Águilas Negras amenazan de muerte a Piedad Córdoba." [Accessed 2 May 2016]


_____. 1 December 2015. "Comunidad LGBTI de San Marcos (Sucre) está amenazada." (Factiva)


Independent researcher. 1 May 2016. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.


_____ N.d. "¿Quiénes somos?" <http://www.indepaz.org.co/quienes-somos/> [Accessed 2 May 2016]

Professor, Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (IEPRI), Universidad Nacional de Colombia. 28 April 2016. Telephone Interview.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Colombia – Policía Nacional; Director, Center for Latin American Studies, Georgetown University; Director, Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos; Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz; Professor of political science, Universidad de los Andes; Senior Research Fellow, Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael."

Internet sites, including: Americas Society/Council of the Americas; BBC; Brookings Institution; Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos; Colombia – Centro de Memoria Histórica, Defensoría del Pueblo, Policía Nacional; Diario Nacional; eci.net; El Nuevo Siglo; El Tiempo; Factiva; Freedom House; Fundación Ideas para la Paz; Human Rights Watch; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; International Federation for Human Rights; IRIN; La República; North American Congress on Latin America; Organization of American States; Programa Somos Defensores; Radio France Internationale; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; RCN Radio; RCN Televisión; Red Nacional de Programas Regionales de Desarrollo y Paz; Semana; Teleantioquia; United Nations – Refworld, ReliefWeb; United States – Department of State, Drug Enforcement Agency; Verdad Abierta; Vivir en el Poblado.com; Washington Office on Latin America.

Attachments

