

# Colombia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	COL02002.ZAR
<b>Date:</b>	March 11, 2002
<b>Subject:</b>	Colombia: Information on People Involved in the Pharmaceutical Industry as Potential Targets for Kidnapping and Extortion by Guerrilla Groups
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Extortion / Guerrilla forces / Kidnapping

## Query:

Have Colombians involved in the pharmaceutical industry—for example, as owners of companies or distributors— been targeted by guerrilla groups for kidnapping or extortion, and forced to turn over pharmaceutical products in lieu of or in addition to cash?

## Response:

David Buitrago, legal director of Fundación País Libre, Free Country Foundation, the principal non-governmental organization in Colombia monitoring kidnapping and extortion, says that Pais Libre has firsthand knowledge of cases in which Colombian guerrillas have extorted pharmaceuticals and/or cash from companies or from people with access to such drugs, for example, doctors. Pais Libre interviews and assists victims and families of victims throughout the country, tabulates the number and types of incidents and regularly prepares detailed reports (Buitrago 11 March 2002).

Bruce Bagley, a Colombia expert at the University of Miami, says that he also has heard of cases in which people involved in the pharmaceutical business have been extorted by guerrillas for pharmaceutical supplies (Bagley 10 March 2002).

Buitrago adds that guerrilla groups, in kidnapping and extortion operations, can demand cash, goods, services or any combination of the three, depending on the needs of the particular guerrilla unit carrying out the operation. As an example of extorted services, he said that a doctor might be forced to provide medical care to members of a guerrilla group (Buitrago 11 March 2002).

Contextually, the targeting of people involved in the pharmaceutical industry makes sense on at least two counts. First, an individual or family owning a pharmaceutical company or a pharmaceutical distributorship or supply company certainly would be targeted by the largest Colombian guerrilla group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, under the so-called Law 002 declared by the FARC in spring 2000. Under Law 002, people worth \$1 million or more are required to pay a "peace tax" of 10-30 percent to the FARC or be kidnapped and held for ransom. The \$1-million limit has turned out to be flexible, as the FARC also has targeted middle and upper middle class people, such as doctors and other professionals, and average business people, such as shop owners and jewelers (El Tiempo 9 September 2000, Miami Herald 17 September 2000, New York Times Magazine 3 June 2001).

Second, the FARC, as a guerrilla group, would be in need of prescription drugs such as antibiotics and painkillers. It therefore would make sense that they would demand such drugs from a pharmaceutical company owner or supplier in lieu of or in addition to cash. Moreover, it is known that the FARC had set up at least one clandestine hospital in a slum area of Bogota (it was recently dismantled by Colombian security forces), and probably

operates others elsewhere. Supplying such medical installations in urban as well as rural areas would be a priority for the guerrillas (El Espectador, 9 March 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

**References:**

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