

## U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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## Colombia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	COL02006.ZMI
<b>Date:</b>	August 11, 2002
<b>Subject:</b>	Colombia: Information on the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS), Security Administrative Department
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Colombia / Activists / Extrajudicial executions / Paramilitary forces / Peasants / Security forces / Students / Teachers / Torture

### Query:

What is the likelihood that the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS), Security Administrative Department – the investigative agency often described as “Colombia’s FBI” – would have been involved in human rights violations in the northern Colombian department of Sucre during 1983-1996?

### Response:

The June 1996 Amnesty International report, “Colombia: Extrajudicial Killings, Disappearances, Death Threats and Other Political Violence in the Department of Sucre,” does not specifically mention the DAS. However, the report is relevant because it links Colombia’s “security forces,” which would include the DAS, with right-wing paramilitary groups in political repression in the department. The report states: “The recent spate of political violence in the department of Sucre is not a new development. Over recent years many popular activists, teachers and peasant farmers have been among the victims of human rights violations committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies” (AI June 1996, p. 1).

The Amnesty International report further states: “The failure of security forces to curtail paramilitary activities and halt paramilitary operations in Sucre in recent months is

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indicative of the support paramilitary groups have received from the security forces since the development of these groups in the region" (AI June 1996, p. 5).

The report connects the increase in rights violations in Sucre to the government's counter-insurgency efforts and emphasizes that the behavior of the security forces and the paramilitary groups "involves the deliberate targeting of those in the civilian population suspected of sympathizing with guerrilla forces. In practice, this often means that those members of the civilian population who are active in legal opposition parties or organizations...are often considered subversives" (AI June 1996, p. 6).

According to the report, the security forces, as part of the counter-insurgency strategy, "routinely permit paramilitary groups to patrol and intimidate the civilian population whilst they withdraw or turn a blind-eye. In several towns in the department of Sucre, members of the security forces have withdrawn and allowed paramilitary groups to enter communities and commit serious human rights violations" (AI June 1996, p.6).

It therefore appears likely that DAS units would have been involved in rights violations in Sucre, to one degree or another, either directly or indirectly through complicity with the paramilitary groups. As noted above, the Amnesty International report does not specifically mention the DAS when describing the behavior of the security forces in Sucre. However, there are media reports, statements by government officials and reports by human rights organizations that indicate a pattern of abuses by DAS units in Colombia generally:

--In June 1987, Carlos Eduardo Lozano, a high government official with responsibility for law enforcement matters, admitted that in some human rights violations, "the participation of the armed forces and of members of the Security Administrative Department, DAS, is evident" (Latin American Regional Reports: Andean Group June 1987).

--Also in 1987, an armed DAS agent was found to be operating undercover at the Universidad de Antioquia, carrying a list of fifty students. In a six-week period during 1987 five students and two professors were shot in the head, with members of the DAS reportedly responsible for at least one shooting. The Universidad de Antioquia is in the department of Antioquia, which is just south of the department of Sucre (Latin America Weekly Report August 1987).

--According to the Colombian office of the Attorney General, between April 1991 and July 1992 the government received 106 complaints of torture involving the national police, 93 involving the army, and 9 involving the DAS (IACHR October 1993).

--In May 1991 charges were filed against two DAS agents for the murder in Barranquilla of a local Communist youth leader in November 1990. Barranquilla is the capital of Atlántico department, which is just up the Caribbean coast from Sucre (US DOS 1992).

--In March 1994 Amnesty International stated that members of the DAS office in Villavicencio, capital of the eastern department of Meta, had a list of members of the Unión Patriótica (UP), Patriotic Union, a left-wing political party, one of whom was shot dead by unknown gunmen between two police posts, without any response from the police themselves. Others on the list were reportedly followed by individuals believed to be working for the DAS. Some were threatened and shot at (Bull June 1994).

--In September 1995 a government appointed board of inquiry called the Commission of Verification on Urabá released its report on violence in that region, a report which reached conclusions similar to the report by Amnesty International cited above regarding political violence in Sucre. The Urabá comprises the three northeastern departments of Chocó, Antioquia and Córdoba, and Córdoba borders the department of Sucre. The Commission's report accused the army, the police, as well as the DAS, of aiding and abetting right-wing paramilitary death squads operating in Urabá (Diebel November 1995).

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.

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