

# U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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## Colombia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	COL03002.OGC
<b>Date:</b>	March 25, 2003
<b>Subject:</b>	Colombia: Information on the Former Guerrilla Group M-19
<b>From:</b>	CIS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Colombia / Guerrillas / Political parties / Political violence

### Query:

What happened to the M-19 guerrilla group during the 1980s and 1990s?

### Response:

MOVIMIENTO 19 DE ABRIL

According to information available to the RIC, most guerrilla groups in Colombia emerged from the era of "La Violencia" which ended in the mid-1960s. (Watson Jun 2000, 533). The exact year of the founding of the Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19 Movement, M-19), however, is not clear. One source reported that Jaime Bateman and Carlos Pizarro left the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) in 1972 to form the M-19 because they were frustrated with the FARC's focus on remaining in the countryside (Otis 3 Aug 2001). Another source stated that the group emerged in 1973 (Bushnell 1993, 245). Still other sources report that the M-19 appeared in January 1974 when it stole a sword that belonged to Simón Bolívar. (Kline 1999, 18; UK IND 2003). What is clear is that the M-19 took its name from the date of a 1970 presidential election that its members believed was stolen from the National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular, ANAPO) candidate, former dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, by Conservative candidate Misael Pastrana Borrero (CNN, OnWar.com).

Having established itself as an urban guerrilla group, the M-19 reportedly set up units in each of Colombia's major cities. As noted above, one of its founders, Jaime Bateman

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Cayón, had been a member of the FARC, but many M-19 members came from universities or unions, and "many had families with deep roots in the system they wanted to overthrow." Another founder, Carlos Toledo Plata, was a physician and an ANAPO representative in Congress (Kirk, 63; OnWar.com).

In the late 1970s, the M-19 began to kidnap drug traffickers, or their children, for ransom. In retaliation, a group of traffickers, including Pablo Escobar, created the death squad, Death to Kidnappers (Muerte a Secuestradores, MAS). The police cooperated with the traffickers by capturing suspected M-19 guerrillas, their associates, and "probably innocent victims" who were then turned over to MAS to be tortured and killed. In 1982, M-19 leader Iván Marino Ospina met with Escobar and pledged never to kidnap traffickers or their families again (Kirk, 104-107).

Following the arrest of the M-19 commander Jaime Bateman by the Colombian army in 1980, his followers took over the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Bogotá (Goodsell 4 Mar 1980). They held over fifty people hostage, but released them after 61 days in exchange for ransom and safe passage to Cuba. In 1983, Bateman either mysteriously disappeared, or died in an air accident, on a flight to Panama (LAWR 28 Mar 1991; Kirk, 112, 136). Around the same time, Toledo Plata was shot and killed by men thought to be connected with MAS (OnWar.com).

President Belisario Betancur Cuartas negotiated an amnesty with some factions of the M-19 in 1984. These factions then became a legal political entity, the Acción Democrática-Movimiento 19 (Democratic Action-Movement 19, ADM-19 - also referred to as the Alianza Democrática M-19, Democratic Alliance M-19). However, some elements of the original guerrilla group retained their arms and continued the violent struggle, and the military continued to view the ADM-19 as a fifth column determined to undermine the Colombian government (Watson Jun 2000, 533; IGC 4 Oct 2002, 28).

By mid-1985, the agreement between the government and M-19 foundered and M-19 leader Alvaro Fayad announced that the group would return to combat. In November of that year, two dozen guerrillas of the remaining M-19 seized the Palace of Justice, the main judiciary building, in Bogotá and held its occupants hostage. Security forces attacked and destroyed the building resulting in the deaths of every M-19 member inside and nearly half of the Supreme Court judges, including Colombia's chief justice. According to Robin Kirk, the M-19 claimed that it intended to hold a public hearing on President Betancur's failure to negotiate a peace with the guerrillas, but others saw it as a favor for Escobar who wanted the chief justice killed and papers constituting a criminal case against traffickers burned to block extraditions to the United States (Bushnell 1993, Watson Jun 2000, 533; Kirk, 136; Kline 1999, 20-21).

Losses in the Palace of Justice attack and the killing of its top political and military strategist, Alvaro Fayad, in March 1987 dealt severe blows to the M-19. In July 1989, the

government and M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez negotiated a pact. By March 1990, most of its members had disarmed and joined the ADM-19 political party. Fearing that they would be targeted and killed, as Patriotic Union members had been earlier in the decade, the M-19 commanders struck a deal with MAS before turning in their weapons. In exchange for ADM-19's support for a ban on the extradition of traffickers, MAS guaranteed that former M-19 members would not be hunted down, or, if they were targeted, they would be warned in time to leave the country before being killed (Kirk, 116, 137-138; Kline 1999, 42-43).

One M-19 faction, the Movimiento Jaime Bateman Cayón, refused to take part in the transition to a political party. In August 1994, the Bateman group kidnapped a British diplomat and a Colombian colleague near Tolima Department demanding ransom for the release of the diplomat (U.S. DOS Apr 1996). After engaging in and then breaking off talks with the government in early 1996, the group kidnapped then President Ernesto Samper's press secretary William Parra and radio journalist Luis Eduardo Maldonado in December 1997. They were released later that month (Notisur 19 Dec 1997). In late 1998, the Bateman group claimed responsibility for a spate of ATM bombings in Bogotá (Kroll 2002). The group was also accused in the June 2001 kidnapping of a Spanish-born psychologist in Calí; he was released a month later (El Rescate).

#### ACCIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA-MOVIMIENTO 19

In the 1990 constituent assembly elections, ADM-19 won nearly a third of the seats partly because of support from the indigenous sector (Bell & Howell 2001). Despite this popularity, or perhaps because of it, and despite the agreement with MAS, between 1984 and the 1990 and 1994 elections, many ADM-19 members who tried to run for office were assassinated by death squads (Watson Jun 2000, 534; UNHCR Sep 2002). Of these, ADM-19's presidential candidate, Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez, was murdered in April 1990. He was succeeded by Antonio Navarro Wolff, also a founding member of the M-19 (LAWR 28 Mar 1991, OnWar.com).

In an attempt to hold ADM-19 responsible for the takeover of the Palace of Justice in 1985, a judge issued warrants for the arrest of 31 of its leaders in 1992. The targeted leaders included party chief Navarro Wolff, senators Vera Grave, Hebert Bustamante and Eduardo Chavez, and three representatives in the lower chamber of Congress. They were charged with terrorism and arson even though they had been granted immunity by the 1990 law of amnesty and pardon (LAWR 4 Jun 1992).

By the next round of elections, ADM-19's brief popularity had waned. Navarro Wolff came in a distant third in presidential elections in 1993, and in elections held in May and June 1994, the party lost 22 of the 24 Congressional seats it had won during the 1990 elections (AP 30 May 1994, COPPPAL).

By 1998, ADM-19 was teetering on the brink of extinction due to deep internal divisions and its inability to bring about change in the Colombian political system (Robberson 27 May 1998). Nonetheless, Navarro Wolff won a Senate seat in 2002 with the second highest number of votes cast (Notisur 15 Mar 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.

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