



Colombia

Colombia has faced a protracted intra-state conflict for over 50 years. The political violence began in the 1940s when socio-economic grievances from the population mounted. The majority of the population was excluded from the political process which in turn prompted the growth of armed revolutionary groups (guerilla groups) in the 1960s. Paramilitary forces began to form when both the government and wealthy land owners began seeking protection from guerillas.

The conflict has three main actors: the guerillas, the paramilitaries and the armed security forces. Although there were many more guerilla groups in the 1960s, the most prominent groups that still exist today include the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia/ Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional/ National Liberation Army (ELN). The main paramilitary group was called the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia/ United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), but they have now been replaced with new illegally armed groups (NIAGs). The Colombian armed forces are involved in the conflict and have been connected with paramilitary groups.

The conflict has continued with various attempts at peace negotiations by many governments. None of these attempts at peace have been successful and the control of the drug trade has fuelled more



SSR Snapshot

Reforms Started: 2002

Key SSR Activities: Paramilitary Demobilization, Justice and Peace Law, Democratic Defense and Security Policy, National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation

Key SSR Challenges: Ongoing civil conflict, human rights violations, continuing impunity

Key International Stakeholders: United States (Plan Colombia), Organization of American States (OAS), UN High Commissioner for Refugees, European Union (EU)



conflict between guerilla groups and paramilitaries. This conflict has left millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia and human rights violations continue by all the actors involved.

Outline of the Security Sector

Institution/Agency	Mandate/Function
Ministry of Defence	Responsible for internal and external defence and security; comprises

	Army, Navy (including Coast Guard), Air Force, and National Police
National Army	Body responsible for external security
National Police	Body responsible for internal security and law enforcement as well as narcotics interdiction, some counterinsurgency, and riot control
Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS)	Responsible for investigating crimes against the internal security of the state, and crimes affecting individual liberties and human rights
Organization of American States (OAS) – Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de la Paz (MAPP)	Aids the Colombian government in the peace process including DDR, justice and reconciliation, democratic consolidation
Ministry of the Interior and Justice	Responsible for reforming the formal justice sector; implementing the Justice and Peace Law, and transitional justice mechanisms
United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR)	Assists in the development, organization, implementation and coordination of programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia
Non-State actors	Includes guerilla groups and paramilitaries as well as other criminal gangs. The two main guerillas groups are Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia/ Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional/ National Liberation Army (ELN). The main paramilitary group was called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia/ United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). The majority of this group has demobilized but new illegally armed groups (NIAGs) have formed to replace them.

SSR Process Overview

Though not officially termed an SSR program, after several failed attempts at peace negotiations and many government leaders having been unable to tackle the severe security situation, in 2002 Alvaro Uribe was elected as President of Colombia under a platform of *Democratic Security*. A domestically driven process, the *Democratic Security Policy* aims to consolidate state control throughout Colombia by increasing the presence of the military security forces. The goal is not only to reduce drug-trafficking, which is the main source of income for non-state actors, but also protect the population from human rights violations and reduce violence (Embassy of Colombia, 2003). In essence, the government policy has a strong focus on expanding military forces and internal security.

The Democratic Security Policy has been successful at curbing violence in Colombia with

the assistance of the US-sponsored *Plan Colombia*. The anti-narcotics plan was conceived in the late 1990s, but the “war on drugs” of which this is part, has been discussed in US Congress since the 1970s. Plan Colombia was envisioned as an anti-narcotics, counter-insurgency plan and provides the Colombian government with hundreds of millions of dollars in primarily military aid. This funding has allowed the Uribe administration to recruit new security personnel (including military and police), arm and train them in counter-insurgency measures as well as bolster intelligence services (Embassy of Colombia, 2003).

Key SSR Activities

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

Paramilitary Demobilization – In 2005, the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) took part

in negotiations with the government, which led to a mutual agreement to demobilize their forces

By April 2006, over 32,000 AUC members had been demobilized (ICG, 2009: 10).

Justice and Peace Law – The *Ley de Justicia y Paz* or Law 975 was established in July 2005 to help facilitate paramilitary demobilization.

The program grants benefits, such as reduced prison sentences, to individuals of illegally armed groups which agree to demobilize (Amnesty International, 2005)

Defence Reform

Democratic Security and Defense Policy – Starting in 2002, there was a push to increase the security forces and defence spending. This has led to the recruitment of new soldiers, new police officers and civilian informants. Civilian informant networks are meant to supplement and increase intelligence in both urban and rural areas.

Justice Reform

Fortalecimiento del Sector Justicia para la Reducción de la Impunidad en Colombia – A project which began in December 2004 between the government of Colombia and the European Union

Its main objective is to strengthen the rule of law by reducing impunity and improving the capacity of the justice system. The project is executed by the Ministry of the Interior and Justice. Project website can be found [here](#).

Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (CNRR) – The National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation was established in 2005 as part of the Justice and Peace Law.

The goal of the Commission is to provide the government of Colombia with recommendations for their reparations program and to ensure the participation of victims affected by violence in the justice process. Project website can be found [here](#).

SSR Resources

United States – Colombia's principal donor for military aid. Through Plan Colombia, it has contributed more than US\$5 billion to date (Lindsay-Poland, 2009). The 2009-2010 budget's total aid for military and police will be approximately US\$450 million dollars (Center for International Policy, Latin America Working Group Education Fund and Washington Office on Latin America, 2010).

European Union – Approximately 160 million euros has been earmarked in the period from 2007-2013. Funding will be used for the following programme areas: peace and stability; rule of law, justice and human rights; competitiveness and trade (European Commission, 2007: 27).

Organization of American States/Mision de Apoyo al Proceso de la Paz (MAPP) – Works with the Colombian government to support the peace process, develop justice and peace initiatives, and promote DDR.

United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) – Financial support for individuals internally displaced by the conflict. Budget for 2010-2011 is approximately US\$30 million dollars. The presence in Colombia includes fourteen offices and 158 staff members (UNHCR, 2009).

Problems & Challenges

A key challenge for Security Sector Reform in Colombia involves the continued human rights violations and unrelenting impunity occurring in the country. Though the internal security situation has improved, there is still an active civil conflict engaging actors including paramilitaries, guerilla groups and security forces. The Democratic Security, demobilization, and Justice and Peace Law initiatives continue to be criticized due to ongoing violations such as extrajudicial executions of civilians by security forces, the failure to effectively transfer human rights cases from the military to the justice system and not having enough emphasis on victims' rights (ICG, 2009). The justice system is weak, slow and unable to try cases in an efficient manner, often being criticized of extortion and corruption.

In addition, the demobilization of the AUC has not been successful. While the government states that over 32,000 paramilitaries have demobilized, new armed groups have formed to replace them. The new illegally armed groups (NIAGs) emerged after the AUC demobilization effort. These groups include former paramilitaries and those paramilitary groups that never demobilized. The government has labeled them *bandas criminales* or BACRIMs which translates into “criminal bands” (ICG, 2009).

A related challenge revolves around the various government scandals which have surfaced over the last five years. In 2006, numerous investigations and court cases found abundant evidence of close associations between department governors, former and current legislators, senior government officials and military figures and paramilitary groups. This has been labeled the “para-politics” scandal. Similarly in October 2008 the “false positive” scandal was publicized where it was discovered that military forces killed civilians to increase the death statistics of left-wing guerillas and paramilitaries. Most recently, between 2008 and 2009, the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS) was accused of spying on members of the media, the judiciary and the political opposition. This led the Uribe government to announce that DAS will be replaced with another intelligence agency in 2010 (ICG).

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