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Ecuador: Activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) in Ecuador, including criminal activities such as extortion (particularly of Colombian nationals); the possible reprisals for refusing to pay a ransom (2003-2005)

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Border activities

Ecuador and Colombia share a border of approximately 600 kilometres (Reuters 30 June 2005). Freedom House indicated "a growing number of incursions from both [the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC)] and their paramilitary enemies into Ecuadorian territory" (11 Aug. 2005). A sociologist at Simon Bolivar Andean University noted that the border zone has become a place where anything is possible (*La Hora* 2 Oct. 2005). FARC is reportedly "making increased use of the border with Ecuador to smuggle chemical precursors and arms, buy basic supplies, and evacuate wounded fighters" (ICG 16 June 2005; *El Tiempo.com* 20 May 2005). Ten border corridors are apparently being used by FARC's Front 48 (Frente 48) (*ibid.*).

Some sources confirmed the presence of FARC military camps inside Ecuador, close to the Colombian border (Latin America Weekly Report 21 Mar. 2005; *La Hora* 2 Oct. 2005). Oswaldo Jarrin, the Ecuadorian Minister of Defence, noted that the FARC has set up a certain number of camps in Ecuador (AFP 27 Sept. 2005; see also Fundación Seguridad y Democracia Sept. 2005).

According to the Colombian authorities, in June 2005, FARC used a camp in Ecuador to launch an attack in the Putumayo region (in southern Colombia), during which 22 soldiers were killed (AFP 12 July 2005; *La Hora* 23 Sept. 2005). Ecuadorian soldiers discovered the base and destroyed the cocaine-processing laboratory they found there (*ibid.*). It was the largest FARC camp in Ecuador (Europa Press 23 Sept. 2005).

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported another attack in October 2005 in which 300 of FARC's Front 48 guerrillas, based in Ecuadorian territory, attacked the Colombian villages of Puerto Colon and San Miguel, leaving six dead (25 Oct. 2005).

La Hora indicated that thousands of peasants in the border region are considered to be supporters of various Colombian armed groups, [translation] "whether they want to be or not," because they maintain trade relations with them (11 Oct. 2005); most Ecuadorian border villages are adjacent to the Colombian zones controlled by the FARC, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) and the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) (Latinamerica Press 7 Sept. 2005).

FARC also controls some Ecuadorian border towns, where, according to the locals, it imposes curfews and helps with conflict management (ICG 16 June 2005; *El Tiempo.com* 20 May 2005). A network of informers, including Ecuadorian soldiers, warns FARC of the Ecuadorian army's movements (*ibid.*).

Killings are common in the province of Sucumbios: settlements of accounts go unpunished, such as the November 2005 murder of two Ecuadorian peasants who were linked to FARC (*La Hora* 11 Oct. 2005).

Despite certain indications to the contrary, (Fundación Seguridad y Democracia Sept. 2005), the Ecuadorian authorities denied that negotiations to free hostages ever took place in their country (*La Hora* 11 Oct. 2005).

Arrests of FARC members in Ecuador

In January 2004, the Ecuadorian police captured Ricardo Palmera, a FARC leader also known as Simon Trinidad (AFP 4 Jan. 2004; Reuters 3 Jan. 2004). The Ecuadorian authorities then handed Ricardo Palmera over to the Colombian government (AFP 4 Jan. 2004). According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), before the arrest, "Ecuadorian authorities had turned a blind eye" to FARC's use of Ecuador as a safe haven (16 June 2005, 15). Some sources reported a possible agreement between former president Lucio Gutierrez and FARC, under which Gutierrez agreed not to attack FARC in Ecuadorian territory; FARC used the agreement to fight the arrest and extradition of its members by the Ecuadorian authorities (*ibid.*; AFP 10 Mar. 2005).

In February 2005, the authorities arrested 10 FARC members who were recovering from combat injuries received at clandestine health clinics (AP 24 Feb. 2005). Seven of them were extradited in March 2005 (AFP 12 July 2005). Ecuador extradited a total of 11 FARC members to Colombia between January 2004 and July 2005 (ibid.).

Marcial Campaña, one of the men in charge of finances for FARC's Front 48, was one of two FARC members captured in September 2005 (AFP 23 Sept. 2005; Xinhua 24 Sept. 2005). Both were extradited to Colombia (AFP 23 Sept. 2005).

Other activities, including extortion

According to the daily *La Hora*, repercussions from the violence linked to the Colombian conflict are being felt almost everywhere in Ecuador (2 Oct. 2005).

In May 2004, the Ecuadorian authorities discovered a shipment of uniforms on its way to FARC that were made in a northern district of Quito (AFP 20 May 2004). The authorities also arrested Ecuadorian citizens who were smuggling guns with FARC (*La Hora* 2 Oct. 2005).

Very little information on FARC's extortion practices in Ecuador was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, and no information on the possible reprisals for refusing to pay a ransom was found.

However, EFE reported the story of a Colombian who was kidnapped by FARC and detained in Ecuador; he escaped his captors by jumping into the San Miguel River after noticing an Ecuadorian military patrol in the area (21 Nov. 2003). In return for saving him, he provided the Ecuadorian soldiers with information that enabled them to locate a FARC camp close to General Farfan's parish in the province of Sucumbios (EFE 21 Nov. 2003). According to the *National Post*, the border region offers little police protection and the employees of a Canadian petroleum company "are vulnerable to kidnapping for ransom" by Colombian organized crime groups and FARC (28 July 2004). The article cited two examples of kidnappings of petroleum workers, one in 1999 and another in 2001, and indicated that there were about 250 kidnappings in Ecuador in 2003, versus 3,000 in Colombia (*National Post* 28 July 2004).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: It was not possible to reach the Ministerio de Gobierno y Policia or a sociologist from the Universidad Andina Simon Bolívar within the time constraints for this Response.

Internet sites, including: Colombia Week, *Country Reports 2004*, Ministerio de Gobierno y Policia del Ecuador, Resource Center of the Americas, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).

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