

This Web page has been archived on the Web.

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Home > Research Program > Responses to Information Requests

## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

### Archived Content

Information identified as archived is provided for reference, research or record-keeping purposes. It is not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards and has not been altered or updated since it was archived. Please "[contact us](#)" to request a format other than those available.

17 January 2006

#### COL100908.E

Colombia: Treatment of religious leaders by the authorities, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) or the paramilitaries; whether religious leaders are targeted for their beliefs (2003 - 2005).

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### Catholic Church

According to *The Christian Science Monitor*, the Catholic Church has been instrumental in negotiations between armed groups and government authorities (20 May 2004). Sources indicated that in the past 20 years, at least 50 Catholic priests have been killed in connection with their involvement in these negotiations (AP 12 Apr. 2005; *ibid.* 20 Aug. 2005; RCN 21 Aug. 2005; VOA 16 Aug. 2005). According to the Catholic Church, an archbishop, a bishop and three nuns were among the victims (AP 20 Aug. 2005; RCN 21 Aug. 2005).

At the end of August 2005, following the killings of three Catholic priests, President Alvaro Uribe agreed to have the Catholic Church be the mediator during upcoming negotiations with the rebel groups; Uribe had earlier refused to negotiate with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) until they would agree to a truce (BBC 23 Aug. 2005).

A priest accused of being too close to the paramilitaries, Cesar Dario Pena, was kidnapped in March 2004 and by November 2005 had not yet been released (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

On 18 August 2005, Jesus Adrian Sanchez, a Catholic priest, was executed by unidentified gunmen in Chaparral County south of Bogotá (*The Commercial Appeal* 19 August 2005).

#### The National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN)

Earlier in August 2005, two priests were killed by the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) (AP 20 Aug. 2005; RCN 21 Aug. 2005; VOA 16 Aug. 2005). The armed group claimed responsibility for the assassination of Vicente Rosso Bayona and Jesus Emilio Mora, declaring that the killings had been a mistake (AP 20 Aug. 2005; RCN 21 Aug. 2005).

As well, in July 2005, the Bishop of Yopal (Casanare) was reportedly kidnapped by the ELN and "released a few days later" (AI May 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2c).

#### FARC

According to *Country Reports 2004*, most of the violent actions against religious leaders have been conducted

---

**This Web page has been archived on the Web.**

---

In December 2004, Catholic priest Javier Francisco Montoya was kidnapped and killed by the FARC in the province of Choco ([AFP 24 Dec. 2004](#); *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2c).

FARC members are believed to have kidnapped five members of a religious organization named Justicia y Paz in Choco on 2 April 2005 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

**The paramilitaries**

According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2005*, members of religious organizations are "occasionally" targeted by paramilitary groups (8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

A Putumayo Catholic Church office stated that Wilson Hurtado, priest in Puerto Asis (Southern Colombia), had to leave the province following detention and death threats from "right-wing" paramilitaries (EFE 4 Aug. 2005).

Through a "pretty aggressive" email, a Catholic priest involved in negotiations with the ELN was accused by a right-wing group of being too close to the leftist organization (*Christian Science Monitor* 20 May 2004).

**Targeting of evangelical churches' leaders**

The Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action (Centro Cristiano Para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta, Justapaz) denounced the increase of "human rights violations committed against members of evangelical churches" (Justapaz 6 Dec. 2005). Among violent events, a Mennonite pastor died of a bomb attack in November 2004 (*ibid.*). As well, guerrillas requested many evangelical churches to close (*ibid.*).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Justapaz and the Comisión de Restauración Vida y Paz have indicated that at least 133 evangelical church leaders have been killed since 2001 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005).

The Evangelical Council of Churches (CEDECOL), an umbrella organization of hundreds of small evangelical churches (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2c) and Justapaz indicated that violence against evangelical churches members has been equally attributed to guerrillas and paramilitaries while another organization, the Christian Union Movement, believes that the FARC is behind 90 per cent of the killings (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

According to the *Country Reports 2004*, the FARC forced the closing of hundreds of evangelical churches in areas it controlled (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2c).

**Reasons behind attacks on religious leaders**

Information on whether religious leaders are targeted for their beliefs was limited; however, *Country Reports 2004* indicated that religious leaders were generally targeted for political reasons (28 Feb. 2005). Associated Press mentioned that in Colombia, "dozens of priests have been killed for their straightforward talk" (12 Apr. 2005).

According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2005*, the Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office has 31 ongoing investigations related to the assassinations of clergy members "believed to have been killed because they were outspoken critics of terrorist organizations" (8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

Indigenous people practising animist religions were targeted for reasons other than their religious practices, including land issues (*International Religious Freedom Report 2005* 8 Nov. 2005, Sec. 2).

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.

**References**

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 24 December 2004. "Colombian Church, UN Reject Priests' Murder." (Factiva)

Amnesty International (AI). May 2005. "Colombia." *Amnesty International Report 2005*. <<http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/col-summary-eng>> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2005]

Associated Press (AP). 21 August 2005. Juan Pablo Toro. "Colombia Rebels Sorry for Priest Killings." (Aberdeen News). <<http://www.aberdeennews.com/mld/aberdeennews/news/12436258.ht>> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2005]

\_\_\_\_\_. 12 April 2005. Javier Baena. "Cardinal From Violence-Wracked Colombia Is Seen as Man of Courage and

---

**This Web page has been archived on the Web.**

---

British Broadcasting Corporation ([BBC](#)). 23 August 2005. "Peace Role for Colombian Church."  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4175736.stm>> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2005]

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), 22 August 2005. "Third Priest Murdered in Colombia."  
<[http://www.cafod.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/news/more/third\\_priest\\_murdered\\_20050822](http://www.cafod.org.uk/news_and_events/news/more/third_priest_murdered_20050822)> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2005]

Centro Cristiano Para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Justapaz). 6 December 2005. "Human Rights Violations Committed Against Members of Evangelical Churches (January to July, 2005)." <[http://www.justapaz.org/imprimer.php3?id\\_article=56](http://www.justapaz.org/imprimer.php3?id_article=56)> [Accessed 9 Jan. 2006]

*The Christian Science Monitor*. 20 May 2004. Rachel Van Dongen. "Colombia's Priests Keep Paths of Peace Open."  
<<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0520/p07s02-woam.html>> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2005]

*The Commercial Appeal*. 19 August 2005. "Priest Is Slain, Third this Week." (Factiva)

*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004*. 28 February 2005. "Colombia." United States Department of State. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41754.htm>> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2005]

EFE News. 4 August 2005. "Priest Driven from Colombian Province by Death Threats." (Factiva)

*International Religious Freedom Report 2005*. 8 November 2005. "Colombia." United States Department of State. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51632.htm>> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2005]

Radio Cadena Nacional ([RCN](#)) [[Bogotá](#), in Spanish]. 21 August 2005. "Colombia's Uribe Calls On ELN to Begin Peace Talks after They Admit Killing." ([BBC Monitoring/Factiva](#))

Voice of America ([VOA](#)). 16 August 2005. "Colombian Police: Two Priests Killed in Ambush by Rebels." (Factiva)

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** The Fundación Seguridad y Democracia did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International, ECOI.net, Freedom House, Fundación Seguridad y Democracia.

[Click here for tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

Date modified: 2013-07-17 [Top of Page](#)