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.

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12 April 2007

COL102407.FE

Colombia: Kidnappings and extortion in rural and urban regions, especially Bogota, and protection available to victims (February 2006 - February 2007).

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Kidnappings and extortion

The Free Country Foundation (Fundacion Pais Libre), a non-profit organization that provides assistance to kidnap victims (AP 17 Feb. 2007), presented statistics from the National Fund for the Defence of Individual Freedom (Fondo Nacional Para la Defensa de la Libertad Personal, FONDELIBERTAD) in a report on kidnappings in Colombia (Fundacion Pais Libre 2006). According to that report, in 2006, four departments (Tolima, Antioquia, Bogota and Meta) stood apart from the others, with over 61 kidnappings; between 42 and 48 took place in three other departments (Cundinamarca, Cauca and Valle) (Fundacion Pais Libre 2006, 6). That same report indicates that, of 687 kidnappings in 2006, 407 individuals were released, 147 were rescued, 30 died in captivity and 11 escaped (ibid., 2).

Statistics provided by the Presidential Program Against Extortion and Kidnappings (Programa Presidencial contra la Extorsion y el Secuestro) indicate that, during the first 11 months of 2006, the total number of kidnappings dropped from 766 to 621, a decrease of 19 percent compared with the same period in 2005 (Colombia 22 Dec. 2006). For the first 11 months of 2006, the number of kidnappings for extortion dropped from 360 to 243 (ibid.). In 2006, the departments most affected by that type of kidnapping were Antioquia (32) and Valle (27), as well as the city of Bogota (22) (ibid.).

With respect to the situation in the cities, the Foundation for Security and Democracy (Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia) indicates that 27 kidnappings took place during the fourth quarter of 2006 in Barranquilla, Cartagena, Medellin, Bogota (16 cases), Cucuta and Cali (Feb. 2007). In the fourth quarter of 2004, the capital city had three kidnappings, compared with seven during the same period in 2005 (Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia Feb. 2007). As for extortion cases, 34 of 75 cases reported in the six cities above took place in Bogota (ibid.).

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) indicates that the kidnappings, with or without extortion, took place primarily in rural areas and that "businessmen and public figures are targets . . . [for] guerrillas and common criminals" (20 Nov. 2006).
Kidnapping and extortion protection measures

The Web site of the Presidential Program Against Extortion and Kidnappings indicates that about 400 people were to receive training on kidnapping and extortion investigation methods at the start of March 2007 (Colombia 6 March 2007).

In May 2006, the Administrative Security Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS) indicated that 16 of its officers were fired because of their involvement in various crimes, including kidnapping and extortion (AP 21 May 2006). Associated Press reported that director Andres Penate had fired 70 agents since his appointment to DAS in October 2006 (ibid.).

Articles from the DAS Web site provide details about the arrest, by DAS members, of guerrillas known for their involvement in kidnappings and extortion (Colombia 19 Jan. 2007; ibid. 12 Jan. 2007) and announce the dismantling of a criminal gang that was practising extortion in the municipality of Ibagué (department of Tolima) (ibid. 29 Sept. 2006).

EFE indicates that a police operation in Antioquia led to the arrest for extortion of a group of 21 people with ties to paramilitary groups (14 Mar. 2007). In August 2006, during a military operation, six men who had just kidnapped a merchant in the city of Baranquilla were killed (EFE 15 Aug. 2006).

In April 2006, the Colombian national police announced that Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom (Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal, GAULA), the army and the police were working together on an awareness campaign to stop kidnappings and extortion in the department of Huila (Colombia 19 Apr. 2006).

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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**Additional Sources Consulted**


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