

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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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.

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Colombia: Whether the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN), paramilitary groups and criminal groups (Bandas Criminales, BACRIM) pursue victims who relocate to another area; whether these groups track their victims over the long term, even if the latter return to Colombia after an extended period of time (2010-March 2013)
 Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Department of Political Science at the Universidad de los Andes said that, even though guerrillas [FARC and the ELN] and paramilitary groups are not present everywhere in the country, they have the ability to track down their victims throughout Colombia and the probability that they do so is [translation] "high" (Director 5 Mar. 2013).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of Ideas for Peace Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, FIP), an independent think tank that "promotes understanding of all the issues related to the armed conflict in Colombia" and that is financed by Colombian and foreign companies, foreign governments and international cooperation agencies, and by donations from philanthropic organizations (FIP n.d.), said that, according to several media reports, people who have been displaced or deprived of their lands have been located by perpetrators and become the object of [translation] "intense re-victimization" (ibid. 5 Mar. 2013). According to the FIP representative, re-victimization occurs when victims have participated in activities or organize in order to reclaim property that has been stolen from them or when they promote or defend their interests and rights (ibid.). Human Rights Watch wrote in a 2012 report on the rights of displaced persons that they face violence at the hands of armed groups that [translation] "sometimes [are] the very same groups from which they fled" (Nov. 2012, 1). Sources report that, according to the Director of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, CODHES), leaders of victims' organizations working to reclaim stolen lands continue to be [translation] "re-victimized" (Agencia EFE 9 Apr. 2012; *El Espectador* 9 Apr. 2012). The representative of FIP indicated that this is especially the case with paramilitary groups, members of which are [translation] "afraid of letting their victims or victims' heirs live because they could return to claim their stolen lands" (5 Mar. 2013). Regarding guerrillas, the FIP representative said that

[translation]

guerrillas have a tradition of persecuting and killing public servants who have "damaged" these organizations ... or those who have openly and effectively defended political points of view that go against those of the guerrillas. There are also cases of "executions" of former guerrilla members who had demobilized or deserted with resources belonging to the organization or when they cooperate with the armed forces or security agencies. Guerrillas have displaced religious groups in territories under their control and have assassinated leaders from among the people. (ibid.)

The US *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* for Colombia indicates that FARC "killed persons it suspected of collaborating with government authorities or alleged paramilitary groups" (US 24 May 2012, 17).

Country Reports 2011 indicates that both guerrillas and organized criminal groups "continued to use forced displacement to gain control over strategic or economically valuable territory, weaken their opponents' base of support, and undermine government control" (ibid., 25). They also "continued to use force, intimidation and disinformation to discourage IDPs [internally displaced persons] from registering with the government" (ibid.). Sources report that leaders of displaced communities and victims of displacement continued to be threatened (Freedom House 2012; AI 2012) and killed (ibid.). Amnesty International (AI) indicates in its *Annual Report 2012* for Colombia that female human rights defenders and those working with displaced persons were threatened and killed (2012). Freedom House indicates in its *Freedom in the World* report for Colombia that "at least" nine campaigners for victims and land rights were killed in 2011 by illegal armed groups

(2012). Caracol, a Bogotá-based news radio station, reported on 26 January 2011 that authorities identified FARC guerrillas who had infiltrated a group of displaced peasants in Anorí [Antioquia], and on 24 February 2011, it reported that the army identified a FARC guerrilla who had infiltrated a group of displaced peasants in Tarazá [Antioquia].

2. Persons Returning From Abroad

The FIP representative, in 5 March 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, provided the information in the following paragraph:

The identification of a returning person from abroad by illegal armed groups and guerrillas depends on the behaviour of the returnee when he or she returns to the country, rather than on a permanent structure to detect the immigration or emigration of people. However, the family and assets of a person considered an "objective of high value" can be watched by these groups and, if he or she returns and makes contact with them, these groups can locate the person. It is not clear whether the information collected by these organizations is national in scope or has an international reach, or whether that information is centralized and used to persecute victims related to the armed conflict; nevertheless, the exception would be when the person is considered a [translation] "high value objective."

The Director of the Department of Political Science at the Universidad de los Andes also noted that the "value" of victims plays a role in guerilla efforts to track them down, but usually the efforts of the paramilitaries is not governed by the "value" of their victims (5 Mar. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Information Networks of Paramilitary and Criminal Groups

3.1 In Colombia

The Director of the Department of Political Science at the Universidad de los Andes indicated that, although paramilitary groups have an espionage network more sophisticated than that of guerrillas, both groups possess a military structure supported by social networks established through informants who are either paid or intimidated (5 Mar. 2013).

The Director indicated that both guerrillas and paramilitaries are usually more present in places to which large groups of displaced persons have relocated, including Bogotá (ibid.). Some victims have identified their aggressors at meetings organized by displaced persons (Director 5 Mar. 2013). The FIP representative indicated that [translation] "without doubt, the paramilitaries infiltrate groups of displaced persons, victims, and demobilized persons, and even the institutions responsible for developing policies for the assistance of victims" (5 Mar. 2013). He also indicated that victims of forced displacement by guerrillas [translation] "have less protection, are less organized and their situation is less known than [victims of] paramilitaries" (FIP 5 Mar. 2013).

According to the Director, paramilitary and guerrilla groups have infiltrated government agencies such as the National Police, the army, and the immigration department to obtain information about their victims or for their operations (5 Mar. 2013). Regarding guerrillas, the FIP representative indicated that they have intelligence networks in municipal governments and in cities (5 Mar. 2013). The US *Country Reports 2011* indicates that both guerrillas and organized criminal groups "forcibly entered private homes, monitored private communications, and engaged in forced displacement" (24 May 2012, 20). It also indicates that these groups "continued to establish illegal checkpoints on rural highways and rivers" (US 24 May 2012, 23).

Sources report that the illegal armed group Los Urabeños infiltrated the Office of the Attorney General (Fiscalía General de la Nación) through one of the Attorney General's bodyguards, who provided information to a public prosecutor who had been arrested for having ties with that criminal group (Colprensa 10 Dec. 2012; *El Espectador* 10 Dec. 2012). *El Espectador*, a Bogotá-based newspaper, reports that the public prosecutor provided the information to Los Urabeños and FARC (ibid.). Sources also report the detention of two FARC guerrillas who had infiltrated the Ninth Army Brigade in Neiva with the purpose of obtaining [translation] "valuable information for future terrorist actions" (*La Nación* 23 Mar. 2012; Opa Noticias 23 Mar. 2012).

The Director also indicated that another way these groupstrack their victims down is with the *cédula*, or national identity card, through which they can obtain information that can assist them in locating their victims (5 Mar. 2013). Paramilitaries are also known to use victim's relatives as a mechanism of pressure (Director 5 Mar. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Director indicated that guerrilla groups have also been identified at universities, protests, and meetings of displaced peoples (5 Mar. 2013). Several press reports note that FARC has infiltrated universities (*El Nuevo Siglo* 28 Sept. 2012; Colprensa 21 June 2011; RCN 27 Mar. 2012), with *El Nuevo Siglo* saying as many as 10 (28 Sept. 2012), and RCN, a Bogotá-based news station, saying that 11 have been infiltrated (27 Mar. 2012). RCN reports that among the universities are the Universidad Nacional, Universidad Pedagógica, and Universidad Distrital, all in Bogotá, the Universidad del Atlántico, the Universidad de Antioquia, the Universidad Industrial de Santander, the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, and the Universidad de Nariño (27 Mar. 2012). RCN also reports that the infiltration was coordinated by the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (Partido Clandestino Comunista Colombiano, PC3) (27 Mar. 2012). *El Tiempo*, a Bogotá-based newspaper, reports that the PC3 is a [translation] "very closed and hard to detect structure," the objective of which is to infiltrate universities, schools, teacher associations, taxi drivers and displaced peoples (16 Feb. 2012).

3.2 Abroad

The Director said that victims who have lived in or are living in the US and in Europe have said that they thought that they were being watched (5 Mar. 2013). The representative of FIP indicated that guerrilla groups can trace people in other countries through their international fronts, even though it would depend more on the behaviour of the person abroad, for example, if the person participates in meetings, political events, or seminars, rather than on a [translation] "deliberate" strategy to locate them (FIP 5 Mar. 2013). The representative also indicated that it would be [translation] "very difficult" for the guerrillas to act against a person abroad given the risk of such an operation (ibid.). As for the paramilitaries, the FIP representative said that [translation] "it would be difficult to imagine them using their contacts abroad, which are based on drug trafficking, to identify and look for victims of the armed conflict" (ibid.). These groups act with violence abroad for reasons related to drug trafficking (ibid.). Sources report the detention of seven Colombian citizens in Spain in February 2013 while they were transporting an arsenal (*El Tiempo* 25 Feb. 2013; *El País* and Agencia EFE 25 Feb. 2013). The same sources report that their purpose was to create a satellite branch for drug cartels in Spain to [translation] "settle scores" in Europe (ibid.; *El Tiempo* 25 Feb. 2013). A news article published by *El País*, a Madrid-based newspaper, and Agencia EFE reports that the leader of the group had ties with Los Rastrojos and is accused of surveying and monitoring people tied to rival groups in Spain (25 Feb. 2013). Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Central Unitaria de Trabajadores; Colombia – Unidad Nacional de Protección of the Ministry of the Interior; Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris; Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz; Northwestern University.

The following were unable to provide information: Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos; Colombia – Unidad Nacional de Fiscalías para la Justicia y Paz, Fiscalía General de la Nación; Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y Desplazamiento; researcher, Universidad de Los Andes; University of Miami.

Internet sites, including: British Broadcasting Corporation; Child Soldiers International; City University of New York; Colombia – Corte Constitucional, Defensoría del Pueblo, Ejército Nacional, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Ministerio del Interior, Policía Nacional de Colombia, Procuraduría General de la Nación; *El Colombiano*; *El Comercio*; ecoi.net; European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights; Factiva; InSight Crime; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Federation for Human Rights; International Institute for Counter-Terrorism; *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*; *El Mundo*; Organization of American States; Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia; *El País*; *La Patria*; *Semana*; UN – Reliefweb, UN Development Programme, UNICEF; *El Universal*; Washington Office on Latin America.

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