

# 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.

7 June 2013

### COL104418.E

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Colombia: Instances of "social cleansing" in Bogotá and Santiago de Cali, including of sexual minorities, drug addicts and the homeless; the groups that engage in "social cleansing," including paramilitaries; actions taken by authorities in instances of "social cleansing," including instances where police took part in "social cleansing" (2011-May 2013)

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### 1. Background

Sources report that "social cleansing" groups operate in several regions of the country (Colombia July 2011, 17; Colombia Diversa 2013, 11). Among the groups that practice "social cleansing" are criminal bands (bandas criminales or BACRIM) (ibid.; AFP 27 Aug. 2011) and unidentified groups (*El Espectador* 12 Jan. 2011; Colombia Diversa 2013, 11). Sources report that police officers have participated in "social cleansing" activities (Colprensa 28 Sept. 2012; *El Tiempo* 28 Mar. 2012).

A report by the National Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo) indicates that these groups exercise control in urban areas with a high population by [translation] "threatening" through pamphlets, telephone calls, and direct threats (Colombia July 2011, 17). The report also indicates that armed groups, including those engaged in "social cleansing," justify their activities by offering "illegal security" against rising criminal activities such as theft, extortion and rape (ibid.). According to a researcher at the Centre for Socioeconomic Research and Documentation at the University of Valle, [translation] "[i]t seems that, given the inefficiency of the justice system, these groups emerge to take charge and create order. A lot of the time in these cases, it is the more organized criminal bands, which have a monopoly on illegal weapons" (*El Espectador* 21 June 2011).

A report produced by Colombia Diversa, an NGO that [translation] "works for the human rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in Colombia" (Colombia Diversa 2013, 4), indicates that there were [translation] "at least" 17 instances of pamphlets with death threats being circulated between 2010 and 2011 in the country (ibid., 11-12). The report indicates that these pamphlets threatened "socially marginalized people, including LGBT, by declaring them as military objectives for either displacement or elimination from the areas of influence" of the criminal bands (Colombia Diversa 2013, 11-12). Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that pamphlets threatened criminals, drug addicts, LGBT people, and prostitutes with death in Bogotá (AFP 27 Aug. 2011). *Crónica del Quindío*, an Armenia city-based newspaper, reports that from January to August 2012, 19 homeless people have been assassinated in the department of Quindío in alleged instances of "social cleansing" (2 Sept. 2012). Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 1.1 "Social Cleansing" in Bogotá

Several sources report on the presence of "social cleansing" groups in Bogotá (Colombia July 2011, 17; AFP 27 Aug. 2011; *El Espectador* 5 Sept. 2008). These groups are also called "'rayas'" (*Semana* 25 Nov. 2008; *El Espectador* 5 Sept. 2008) or "'tiras'" (ibid.). The National Office of the Ombudsperson reports that "social cleansing" groups, including Rastrojos and Águilas Negras, operate in the locality of Bosa (Colombia July 2011, 247). It also reports that in the locality of San Cristobal, Águilas Negras and other "social cleansing" groups distributed "threatening" lists with the names of young people (ibid.). Information on the content of these lists could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Media sources report the following instances of "social cleansing" in Bogotá:

- On 12 January 2011, *El Espectador*, a Bogotá-based newspaper, reports that in the locality of Fontibón two people were killed and two others were injured by a non-identified group that [translation] "seeks to eradicate crime from the sector."

- On 27 August 2011, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that a [translation] "wave of pamphlets" signed by Águilas Negras threatened 12 street theatre groups for "supporting human rights and opposing 'the policies of our government'" (27 Aug. 2011). The mayor of Bogotá asked the Police to provide protection to these groups but, according to the Chief of the Police in Bogotá, the Police have provided "an accompaniment" to these groups and they will receive protection measures should any of them receive personal threats (AFP 27 Aug. 2011).
- On 29 December 2011, *El Tiempo*, a Bogotá-based newspaper, reports that pamphlets were posted in the locality of Antonio Nariño threatening to [translation] "eradicate bad children."

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## 1.2. "Social Cleansing" in Santiago de Cali

Media sources report on the presence of "social cleansing" groups in Santiago de Cali (*El Pueblo* 16 Apr. 2013; *Vanguardia* 2 Feb. 2013).

Sources report on the following instances of "social cleansing" in Santiago de Cali:

- A pamphlet circulated in the neighbourhood El Guabal stating that [translation] "'death has arrived ... we are going to take justice in our own hands since the Police does nothing. Young people, we don't want to see you on street corners taking drugs. We are in cleansing mode, death to drug dealers and to people with bad reputations'" (Santiago de Cali 11 Apr. 2013; *El Pueblo* 16 Apr. 2013). *El Pueblo*, an online newspaper based in Santiago de Cali, indicates that the pamphlet has the names and aliases of several people, including business people accused of facilitating drug trafficking (*ibid.*). According to a Council representative, another pamphlet had circulated 10 months before (*ibid.*).
- *El Espectador* reports that 10 people were killed and 14 others were injured on 20 June 2011 in Santiago de Cali, Jamundí and Yumbo in alleged "social cleansing"-related incidents (21 June 2011).

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## 2. "Mano Negra" and Other Groups

*Semana*, a Bogotá-based news magazine, reports that "Mano negra" is a label that, since the 1980s, has been used to [translation] "generically name the authors of extermination campaigns of homeless people, homosexuals and drug addicts" (25 June 2011). It also reports that some have attributed this practice to "unsanctioned activity" of some military units, the Police, and the DAS [Administrative Department of Security or Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad] (*ibid.*). In an Op-ed article published in *Crónica del Quindío*, José Nodier Solórzano [a writer and academic coordinator of Fine Arts at the University of Quindío (Colombia 28 Sept. 2011)] indicates that "Mano negra" is a far-right, undefined, and secret organization that attacks union activists, homosexuals, prostitutes, homeless people, students and human rights activists (*Crónica del Quindío* 28 Sept. 2012). Sources indicate that the members of this group are unknown (*ibid.*; *Semana* 25 June 2011).

In contrast, *El Espectador* cites the Director of the National Police as saying that "Mano negra" refers to sectors linked to drug trafficking and paramilitaries for over 30 years (*El Espectador* 12 July 2011). Sources report that Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos indicated on 14 June 2011 in the context of the law for victims and restitution of land that there are "Mano negra" groups from the far right and "Mano negra" groups from the far left (Colprensa 4 Dec. 2011; *Semana* 25 June 2011). *Semana* quotes Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos as associating "Mano negra" from the far left with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the "Mano negra" from the far right with those who do not want to compensate the victims of the armed conflict and return the land to peasants (*ibid.* 25 June 2011).

Sources report on the following instances of "social cleansing" involving "Mano negra":

- On 19 March 2013, Notillano, a Villavicencio news website, reports that a group called "Mano negra" circulated some pamphlets in Villavicencio [department of Meta] threatening [translation] "drug addicts, thieves, robbers, homosexuals, prostitutes and drug dealers" (Notillano 19 Mar. 2013). The pamphlets had the aliases of several people, one of whom was assassinated (*ibid.*).
- *Vanguardia*, a Bucaramanga-based newspaper, reports that a group called "Mano negra" circulated several pamphlets in 11 neighbourhoods of the municipality of Floridablanca, department of Santander, with the aliases of 30 young people accused of stealing, consuming drugs, and drug dealing, and with a notice of 48 hours to leave the area (*Vanguardia* 2 Feb. 2013). The same article indicates that, according to a resident of one of the neighbourhoods, eight years ago pamphlets were also distributed and [translation] "they carried out the threats because they did kill some people" (*ibid.*).
- A report by the National Office of the Ombudsperson indicates that in northern Sincelejo, a group called "Mano negra" imposed exit and entry schedules for the residents of four neighbourhoods, especially for young people (Colombia May 2012, 10-11). It also indicates that in the first three months of 2012, "social cleansing" groups carried out selective assassinations of people who were named in pamphlets, provoking intra-urban displacement, not only of the named person but of his or her family as well (*ibid.*, 11).

Additional and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 3. State Response

Colombia Diversa reports that police officers refrained from acting when LGBT people were attacked by unidentified "social cleansing" groups in Cúcuta (Colombia Diversa 2013, 50). Another section of the report indicates that investigations into the homicides of LGBT are [translation] "prejudiced" (ibid., 28). Most of these homicides are considered as being committed as a "crime of passion," and crime scenes are not properly preserved, nor is the collection of evidence adequate (ibid.). The report also highlights "the lack of information systems that document violent acts against LGBT persons" (ibid., 9). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Colprensa, a news source based in Bogotá, reports that a ruling by the Council of State (Consejo de Estado) ordered the National Police to publicly excuse themselves for the killing of a citizen in a "social cleansing"-related incident and pay compensation to the family (28 Sept. 2012). The sentence established that some police officers were part of a "social cleansing" group called "Los doce apóstoles" which killed 33 people (Colprensa 28 Sept. 2012). Corroborating and 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: Bogotá – Personería Distrital; Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Justicia y Sociedad; Colombia – Defensoría del Pueblo; Colombia Diversa; Planeta Paz; Santiago de Cali – Personería Municipal; Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

The following were unable to provide information: Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación Socioeconómica of the Universidad del Valle, Fundación Pocalana, Igarapé Institute, and Santamaría Fundación.

**Internet sites, including:** Alba TV; British Broadcasting Corporation; Caracol; Child Soldiers International; Colombia – Consejo de Estado, Corte Constitucional, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Ministerio del Interior, Policía Nacional de Colombia, Procuraduría General de la Nación; *El Colombiano*; ecoinet; InSight Crime; International Crisis Group; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Federation for Human Rights; *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*; *El Mundo*; Organization of American States; *El País*; *La Patria*; UN – RefWorld; Reliefweb, UN Development Programme, UNICEF; United States – Department of State, USAID; *El Universal*; Washington Office on Latin America.

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