VEN101127.FE

Venezuela: Whether Colombian guerrillas are present in Venezuela and whether they are involved in kidnappings, particularly in Caracas and in other cities, or in the eastern part of the country; measures taken by the Venezuelan authorities against the guerrillas (2004 - February 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Presence of Colombian guerrillas in Venezuela

The Colombian armed groups operating along the Venezuelan border (El Universal 30 Mar. 2005) are also active on the Venezuelan side of the Colombia-Venezuela border (El Pais 26 Sept. 2004; Colombia Week 27 Sept. 2004).

The Economist Intelligence Unit indicates that cattle farmers in the border region have seen an increase in the number of raids by Colombian rebel groups (1 Feb. 2006). According to the same source, “incursions [are] usually brief and limited to Venezuela’s remote western region” (EIU 1 Feb. 2006).

However, in May 2004, “130 Colombian rebels dressed in Venezuelan military uniforms were captured on a farm near Caracas” (Colombia Week 27 Sept. 2004).


According to a report by the Colombian army, there are 1,000 FARC members on the Venezuelan side of the border in the state of Zulia (La Verdad 26 Oct. 2005).


In addition, weapons from Venezuela are brought into Colombia in exchange for drugs (El Pais 26 Sept. 2004; The Miami Herald 17 July 2005).

According to the 20 September 2005 issue of The Washington Times, Colombian paramilitaries are forcing Colombian refugees to pay protection money to safeguard themselves from other armed groups. Sometimes, cattle farmers themselves reportedly hire the paramilitaries (The Washington Times 20 Sept. 2005).

In March 2005, the Venezuelan daily El Universal reported that the FARC and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) began fighting in Venezuela to control the drug traffic in the border zone with Colombia (30 Mar. 2005).

In February 2005, a kidnapping and anti-extortion unit in the state of Bolivar arrested Gentil Galvis Patiño, a key member of FARC’s Front 16 (El Tiempo 24 Feb. 2005; El Nacional 25 Feb. 2005; AFP 11 Sept. 2005). Patiño, a guerrilla who has taken part in kidnappings and was apprehended for that of the mother of baseball player Ugeth Urbina, was in possession of over 600 kilograms of cocaine when he was arrested (ibid.; El Nacional 25 Feb. 2005; El Tiempo 24 Feb. 2005; see also The Miami Herald 16 Mar. 2005). His three accomplices, two of whom were Colombian, carried fake Venezuelan identity cards (El Nacional 25 Feb. 2005).
In December 2004, Rodrigo Granda, identified as the foreign affairs minister of the FARC, was kidnapped in Caracas and taken to Colombia, triggering a crisis between the two countries (Latinamerica Press 9 Feb. 2005; Latinnews Daily 29 Mar. 2005; Weekly News Update on the Americas 16 Jan. 2005).

**Participation in kidnappings**

Kidnappings are a particular problem along the border between Colombia and Venezuela, and “the situation has deteriorated in recent years” (EIU 1 Feb. 2006; see also El País 26 Sept. 2004). According to local authorities from Cucuta who spoke to Agence France-Presse (AFP), insecurity has risen in the region because of the presence of rebel groups (18 Sept. 2004), while the Colombian daily El País directly relates the rise in the number of kidnappings to the presence of Colombian armed groups in Venezuela (26 Sept. 2004). The Venezuelan vice-president, José Vicente Rangel, said that the measures taken by Colombia against the illegal armed groups had resulted in a rise in the number of kidnappings and cases of extortion in Venezuela (Latinnews Daily 29 Mar. 2005).

At the beginning of July 2005, the Venezuelan authorities arrested 16 alleged ELN members who were organizing kidnappings in the border region (EFE 6 July 2005).

An 18 September 2004 AFP article, citing a Colombian official, related that there were more than 50 kidnappings in Tachira in 2004, whereas there was only one on the Colombian side of the border.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 2004, the head of the kidnapping unit in the Zulia region was held prisoner for two hours during a confrontation between his unit and roughly 100 guerrillas from the FARC’s Front 41 (Notitarde 2 Feb. 2004). His unit was looking for two local farmers who had been kidnapped in August 2003 (ibid.).

**Measures taken against the Colombian guerrillas**

The Colombian government has often accused the Chavez government of doing too little to crack down on Colombian armed groups, such as the FARC, spilling into Venezuela (AP 1 July 2005; Colombia Week 27 Sept. 2004), of tolerating the rebel group, and even of sympathizing with its activities (Latinamerica Press 9 Feb. 2005; The Miami Herald 17 July 2005). According to a leading spokesperson of the FARC, cited in an International Crisis Group report, the FARC supports Hugo Chavez’s “Bolivarian revolution;” however, the report points out that Chavez has begun to distance himself from the FARC through his statements and with the May 2005 extradition to Colombia of a FARC member (16 June 2005, 15).

In February 2004, the Venezuelan minister of defence pointed out that the entire border region was being patrolled constantly, particularly by two expert brigades, and denied that the Venezuelan armed forces had a permissive attitude toward the Colombian armed groups (Notitarde 2 Feb. 2004).

While stating that Venezuela would not let Colombian troops hunt down armed groups in its territory, the Venezuelan foreign minister said that his country wanted to improve military cooperation with Colombia “to curb the flow of guerrillas, arms and drugs across the two nations’ [. . . ] border” (AP 1 July 2005; see also Reuters 15 Feb. 2005). The Venezuelan minister of the interior, Jesse Chacón, told Latinamerica Press that Venezuela has “20,000 soldiers stationed along [the] border,” while “Colombia has 10,000” (9 Feb. 2005).

More recently, on 27 March 2005, Venezuela announced that “it would establish a special unit to crack down on kidnappings, extortion and drug trafficking in areas bordering Colombia” (Latinnews Daily 29 Mar. 2005).

Furthermore, in January 2005, Colombian authorities presented Venezuela with a list of 10 names of either FARC or ELN guerrillas thought to be in hiding in Venezuela (DPA 20 Jan. 2005). Venezuelan minister of the interior Chacón said that immigration officials would conduct the necessary inquiries (ibid.). No additional information on those inquiries was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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). 11 September 2005. "Un membre des FARC condamné pour le meurtre de deux missionnaires." (Factiva)


______. 16 March 2005. Phil Gunson and Steven Dudley. "Kidnapping Suspect Identified as Colombian Rebel; In a New Bid for Cooperation, Colombia and Venezuela Moved Closer to the Extradition of a Rebel Suspected of Helping to Kidnap the Mother of a Former Marlins Pitcher." (Factiva)


Reuters. 15 February 2005. Patrick Markey. "Venezuela, Colombia Leaders End Rebel Kidnap Row." (Factiva)


Additional Sources Consulted
**Oral sources:** A security specialist in Venezuela did not respond to the information request within the time constraints of this Response.

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.