

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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22 August 2008

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Colombia: Forcible recruitment of Afro-Colombians by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and paramilitary groups; whether Afro-Colombians are targeted for recruitment (2006 - June 2008)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In a 21 July 2008 interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians USA (AFRODES USA), which was created in 2003 and is based in Washington, DC, indicated that both male and female Afro-Colombians are being recruited by both the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and paramilitary groups. Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia, former governor of the department of Chocó and Senior Fellow on International Policy at the Phelps Stokes Fund, corroborated this information in testimony before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 24 April 2007, indicating that in the municipalities of Tumaco, Quibdó and Buenaventura, young Afro-Colombians are recruited by illegal armed actors (Murillo Urrutia 24 Apr. 2008, Sec. 4).

According to the Representative of AFRODES USA, illegal groups use "violent means" to recruit, and often, the family is threatened in order to force a minor to join (21 July 2008). The Representative added that groups may also offer financial incentives to recruits (AFRODES USA 21 July 2008). The Representative stated that in the past three to five years, the level of violence linked to recruitment activities by FARC and paramilitary groups had increased (ibid.). Prior to this period, recruitment methods generally emphasized remuneration, making membership in a guerrilla or paramilitary group a way of earning a living (ibid.).

According to the Colombia Human Rights Committee, an organisation based in Washington, DC, the rise in the number of young Afro-Colombians who voluntarily join or who are forced to join legal or illegal armed groups is linked to their limited access to education and employment (5 May 2008).

The Representative of AFRODES USA noted that recruitment of young people by FARC, paramilitaries, the police and the military in the city of Buenaventura is "quite violent" (21 July 2008). Recruitment of Afro-Colombians by guerrilla and paramilitary groups also occurs along the Atlantic coast, particularly in the departments of Chocó, Bolívar, Sucre and Nariño (AFRODES USA 21 July 2008). These are areas where the number of Afro-Colombians is relatively high (ibid.).

According to Amanda Romero-Medina, a Human Rights expert on Colombia speaking at a March 2007 conference sponsored by Rights and Democracy, the Latin American Human Rights and Education Research Network (Red Latinoamericana para la Educación e Investigación sobre Derechos Humanos, RedLEIDH) and the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), forced recruitment into the ranks of

armed groups has been on the increase in some regions of Colombia, including in the departments of Chocó, Arauca, Nariño and César (CERLAC Dec. 2007, 45). She adds that

[a]s armed groups pressure the members of a community, especially its youth, to join their ranks, more young people, in order to avoid either being considered collaborators or being forcibly recruited, feel obliged to migrate out of their home communities, usually to seek a means of surviving in urban centres (ibid.).

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.

References

Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians USA (AFRODES USA). 21 July 2008. Telephone interview with a representative.

Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC). December 2007. *Ethnicity, Violence and Exclusion in Colombia: The Struggles of Colombia's Indigenous and Afro-Colombian People*. <http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/documents/Colombia_conf.pdf> [Accessed 21 May 2008]

Colombia Human Rights Committee. 5 May 2008. Correspondence from a representative.

Murillo Urrutia, Luis Gilberto. 24 April 2007. *Testimony of Luis Gilberto Murillo-Urrutia Former Governor, State of Choco, Colombia, Senior Fellow on International Policy, Phelps Stokes Fund Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere - Hearing on "U.S.-Colombia Relations."* (Global Security.org) <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2007_hr/070424-urrutia.htm> [Accessed 21 May 2008]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including : Alto Comisionado para la Paz; Amnesty International (AI); Associated Press (AP); Coalición contra la Vinculación de Niños, Niñas y Jóvenes al Conflicto Armado de Colombia; Coalico; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers; *El Colombiano*; Comisión Colombiana de Juristas; Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES); Council on Hemispheric Affairs <<http://www.coha.org>>; Dialog; Equipo Nizkor; Global IDP Project; Human Rights First; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR); Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC); International Crisis Group; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Refugee International; Reliefweb; Save the Children; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United States Department of State; United Nations Development Programme <<http://www.undp.org/>> (UNPD); Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA); Y Care International.

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