

Arhuaco

Profile

Arhuaco, related to the Kogi and Arsario peoples, live in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada in Santa Marta near the San Sebastián de Rábago and on the river banks of the Sevilla, Aracataca and Fundación. The Sierra Nevada is the highest coastal region in the world at almost 12,600 square kilometers, and has an extremely diverse climate with great biodiversity. The Arhuaco are also known as the Ika and their language is part of the Chibcha family. The Arhuaco grow coffee and sugar for their own consumption and participate in small animal husbandry (cattle, goats, pigs, and chicken). In order to marry, the man must live and work for his future father-in-law for one or two years. If the marriage does not take place after this period of time the man is given compensation for his labour. The Arhuaco consider neighbouring communities "little brothers." The spiritual leader or Mamu, lives separate from family and is responsible for solving community legal problems and providing religious counselling. There are 42 separate Arhuaco communities that are consolidated under the Tayrona Indigenous Federation.

Historical context

In 1982 Arhuaco took action to evict a Roman Catholic mission which was attempting to prohibit use of national dress and language. In 1990 the Colombian military tortured and killed Arhuaco leaders. This unprovoked violence seems to have been generated in response to the activities of the leftist guerrilla group FARC.

Current issues

The Arhuaco have been on the forefront of the indigenous movement. Since 1980 the lands of the Arhuaco have become the battleground between growers of illicit crops and the Colombian government. In 2004, the community was the site of a vicious bomb attack by the army. Spiritual leader Mariano Suárez Chaparro was also assassinated the same year. But the greatest continuous threat to the Arhuaco is the growing military conflict in the region.