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Colombia: The reality of trade unionism Facts and Figures

Human rights violations against trade unionists in Colombia

- o 2,245 trade unionists were killed, 3,400 threatened and 138 forcibly disappeared across Colombia between January 1991 and December 2006 (Colombia's National Trade Union School).
- o Impunity in cases of human rights violations remains at over 90%.
- o Since 1991, killings of trade unionists in Colombia have increased in some years and decreased in others (Colombian National Trade Union School).

Year	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	Total
No	83	135	196	104	237	275	182	101	80	137	197	186	94	96	70	72	2245

Trade unions in Colombia

- o Around 831,000 workers in Colombia are affiliated to a trade union (Colombia's National Trade Union School).
- o Affiliation to trade unions has been on the decrease since 1996 (Colombian National Trade Union School).
- o There are three main trade unions' confederations in Colombia: Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC) and the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT). Each confederation is made up of hundreds of trade unions.

Companies operating in Colombia

- o Colombia has attracted investment from multinational companies from a variety of sectors, including mining, oil, food, agro industry, electricity and others.

Armed Conflict

- o Colombia's 40-year internal armed conflict has pitted the security forces and army-backed paramilitaries against guerrilla groups. The conflict has been used as a means by powerful economic sectors to advance their interests and secure control of economic resources.
- o At least 70,000 civilians have been killed during the past 20 years in Colombia while thousands of others have been victims of forced disappearances, kidnappings, torture, arbitrary detention and sexual abuse.
- o More than 3 million people have been internally displaced since 1985 -- over 60% of them have been forced off areas of mineral, agricultural or other economic importance.
- o More than 30,000 paramilitaries have reportedly been "demobilized" since 2002 in a controversial government-sponsored demobilization process but there's strong evidence that paramilitary groups are still active and that their members continue to commit human rights violations with impunity.
- o Serious human rights abuses remain at high levels, especially in rural areas, despite continued reductions in certain types of violence associated with the conflict -- in particular kidnappings and killings. All parties to the conflict -- the security forces, paramilitaries, and guerrilla groups, continue to abuse human rights and breach international humanitarian law.

Parties to the conflict
Military and Paramilitaries

The paramilitaries have their origin in legal, civilian "self-defence" groups created by the army in the 1970s and 1980s to act as auxiliaries during counter-insurgency operations. Their legal basis was removed in 1989 but they continued to expand.

The main role of paramilitaries has been to carry out the dirty war tactics of the armed forces' counter-insurgency strategy, which is characterized by the systematic and widespread violation of human rights. The use of paramilitaries has helped the armed forces avoid increasing international pressure to respect human rights.

In recent years, there has been an increase in reports of extrajudicial executions carried out by the security forces. Amnesty International (AI) has received information of numerous extrajudicial executions of trade unionists carried out by the security forces.

AI continues to document human rights violations by paramilitaries carried out with the support or acquiescence of the armed forces.

Guerrillas

There are two main guerrilla groups in Colombia: the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the smaller ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional).

Over the last 40 years, the guerrillas have created extensive strongholds in many rural areas of the country where they effectively determine local government policies and exercise significant control over the local population. Since the 1990s, the FARC has sought to significantly increase attacks in urban areas, and civilians have increasingly borne the brunt of guerrilla attacks in these areas.

Guerrilla groups are responsible for repeated and serious breaches of international humanitarian law, including hostage-taking and the abduction and killing of civilians. They have also carried out attacks using disproportionate and indiscriminate weapons which has resulted in the death of numerous civilians.

Government

President Álvaro Uribe Vélez took office for a second term in August 2006. On assuming his second term, President Uribe continued to pursue his hard-line security policies, encapsulated in the so-called "Democratic Security" programme. This sought to consolidate and recover territory from guerrilla control. But rather than boost the security of the civilian population, the Democratic Security strategy has made some sectors of society more vulnerable than ever to abuses from illegal armed groups and the security forces.

The government is pursuing policies which are contrary to its obligations under international human rights law and repeated UN human rights recommendations. These policies are dragging civilians further into the conflict and strengthening impunity.

Public Document

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