

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

COLOMBIA

31 OCTOBER 2007

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Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information (COI) Key Documents has been produced by the Country of Origin Information Service (COIS), Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 31 October 2007.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles on Colombia, produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. By way of introduction, brief background information on Colombia is also provided. This background information is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the key documents listed.
- iii For Home Office users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- v Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional documents are welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- vi The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information was established under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the Home Office's country of origin information material. The Advisory Panel welcomes all feedback on the Home Office's country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk.
- vii It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any Home Office material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly reviews the content of selected Home Office COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel

relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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1. Background information on Colombia

1.01 Full Country Name: The Republic of Colombia

Area: 1,141,748 sq km

Population: 42,090,502m

Capital City: Bogotá (population: 6.9 million)

People: Colombia is an ethnic melting pot in which some 60% acknowledge that they have mixed Spanish/indigenous roots, 20% claim direct European descent, 18% are of Afro-Colombian origin, and 2% belong to indigenous communities. There are tiny Christian and Muslim Arab minorities, small and declining Jewish communities in the major cities, and a small group claiming Romany roots.

Language: Spanish with isolated pockets where indigenous languages remain in use.

Religion: Predominantly Roman Catholic, with some evangelical influences in parts of the country.

Currency: Peso.

Major political parties: The two major political parties are the Liberals and the Conservatives. President Uribe stood for the 'Primero Colombia' movement (dissident Liberal). In addition, there are the following parties: Polo Democrático, Movimiento Cristiano, Movimiento Nacional Progresista (MNP) and recently some small independent parties are emerging. The Conservatives opted not to field a candidate in the 2002 Presidential elections.

Government: Democratically elected representative system with a strong executive.

Legislature: Bicameral Congress; 102 member Senate and 165 member Chamber of Deputies are both directly elected for four-year terms.

Head of State: President Alvaro Uribe Vélez

Foreign Minister: Fernando Araujo Perdomo

Membership of international groupings/organisations: Colombia is a member of the Andean Community, UN, G3, Organisation of American States (OAS), Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), Latin American Economic System (SELA), Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Caribbean Development Bank, Andean Development Corporation (CAF), and the Inter-American Development Bank (AIDB) amongst others. (FCO Country Profile, 14 June 2007) [9a]

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GEOGRAPHY

1.02 Europa World noted, "The Republic of Colombia lies in the north-west of South America, with the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Its continental neighbours are Venezuela and Brazil to the east, and Peru and Ecuador to the south, while Panama connects it with Central America". (Europa World, Colombia: Country Profile) [27a]

1.03 The Foreign & Commonwealth Office Country Profile on Colombia, updated on 14 June 2007, noted:

"Colombia lies entirely within the tropics, but climate and land use vary greatly according to altitude, ranging from the arid low-lying Guajira peninsula in the north-east and tropical lowlands of the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, to the

bleak pastures of the Andean páramo (high moorlands). The Andes' western, central and eastern cordilleras (mountain ranges) run parallel south-west to north-east. The physical geography means that large areas are very sparsely populated.” [9a]

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RECENT HISTORY

- 1.04 As recorded by the CIA World Factbook, updated on 4 October 2007:

“A 40-year conflict between government forces and anti-government insurgent groups and illegal paramilitary groups - both heavily funded by the drug trade - escalated during the 1990s. The insurgents lack the military or popular support necessary to overthrow the government, and violence has been decreasing since about 2002, but insurgents continue attacks against civilians and large swaths of the countryside are under guerrilla influence. More than 32,000 former paramilitaries had demobilized by the end of 2006 and the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) as a formal organization had largely ceased to function. Still, some renegades continued to engage in criminal activities. The Colombian Government has stepped up efforts to reassert government control throughout the country, and now has a presence in every one of its municipalities. However, neighboring countries worry about the violence spilling over their borders.” [4a]

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- 1.05 The Foreign & Commonwealth Office Country Profile on Colombia, updated on 14 June 2007, recorded:

“President Alvaro Uribe's stated focus upon first taking office in 2002 was security, drug interdiction and economic reforms in the form of a National Development Plan. The Plan includes reforms to the political system, justice and public administration.

Security policy under President Uribe is based on a number of strands, including an increase in manpower and funding for the police and armed forces; the expansion of state presence to every municipality in the country; the establishment of units of 'peasant soldiers'; and a strategy – known as 'Plan Patriota' – to challenge the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] FARC in its strongholds in the south of the country.

The government began discussions with the [United Self Defense Forces of Colombia] AUC paramilitary group in July 2003 and on 18 April 2006, after three years of negotiation, announced that the demobilisation process of the AUC had been completed. 30,150 paramilitaries formally demobilised as part of the Law for Justice and Peace (LJP) process, handing over some 17,000 weapons, 117 vehicles, 3 helicopters, 59 urban properties and 24,000 hectares of land. The LJP gives generous concessions to illegal armed fighters who voluntarily decide to demobilise, which has led its detractors to dub it the 'Law of Impunity', whilst others believe it strikes the right equilibrium required to obtain both justice and peace. In mid May 2006 the Constitutional

Court tightened up some of the provisions of the LJP, particularly those areas relating to the rights of the victims.

President Alvaro Uribe secured a second four-year term in elections held on 28 May 2006. It was the first time for over a hundred years that a sitting President had been able to be run for office for a second successive term. The debate on Presidential re-election took up a substantial part of Congress' time in late 2004, and on 19 October 2005 the Court finally ruled in favour of allowing re-election. The President was formally inaugurated into his second term in office on 7 August 2006.

Colombian Congressional elections took place on 12 March 2006, and President Uribe emerged with a substantial working majority in both Houses of Congress. One of the more surprising results of these elections was that a new (pro-Uribe) party came out ahead of the traditional Liberals and Conservatives in the polls, thereby breaking a mould that goes back almost a century." [9a]

- 1.06 In December 2006 detained paramilitary leaders said they were pulling out of the peace process but the government stated that the demobilisation of right-wing groups would continue. During June 2007 the government released dozens of jailed FARC guerrillas hoping that rebels would respond by releasing hostages. However FARC rejected the move, and said it would only free hostages if the government pulled back troops and set up a demilitarised zone. The following month hundreds of thousands of people protested in Bogota against kidnappings and conflict in the country. (BBC News, Timeline: Colombia, updated 4 September 2007) [2b]

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ECONOMY

- 1.07 **GDP:** US\$ 129.4 billion. (est 2006)
GDP per head (purchasing power parity): US\$ 8,600 (est 2006)
Annual Growth: 6.8% (est 2006)
Inflation: 4.3% (est 2006)
Unemployment: 11.1% (est 2006)
Major Industries: Oil, Mining, Construction, Financial Sector, Agriculture, Manufacturing and Transport
Major trading partners: US, Venezuela, other Andean Countries, Mexico, Brazil and China. (CIA World Factbook, updated on 4 October 2007; FCO Country Profile, 14 June 2007) [4a; 9a]

- 1.08 As recorded by the CIA World Factbook, updated on 4 October 2007:

"Colombia's economy has experienced positive growth over the past three years despite a serious armed conflict. The economy continues to improve in part because of austere government budgets, focused efforts to reduce public debt levels, an export-oriented growth strategy, an improved security situation in the country, and high commodity prices. Ongoing economic problems facing President Uribe range from reforming the pension system to reducing high unemployment, and to achieving congressional passage of a fiscal transfers reform; furthermore, new exploration is needed to offset declining oil production. However, the government's economic policy, democratic security

strategy, and the signing of a free trade agreement with the US have engendered a growing sense of confidence in the economy, particularly within the business sector.” [4a]

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HUMAN RIGHTS

- 1.09 The US State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices in 2006, dated 6 March 2007, noted:

“Although serious problems remained, the government's respect for human rights continued to improve, which was particularly evident in actions undertaken by the government's security forces and in demobilization negotiations with the [United Self Defence Forces of Colombia] AUC. The following societal problems and governmental human rights abuses were reported during the year: unlawful and extrajudicial killings; forced disappearances; insubordinate military collaboration with criminal groups; torture and mistreatment of detainees; overcrowded and insecure prisons; arbitrary arrest; high number of pretrial detainees some of whom were held with convicted prisoners; impunity; an inefficient judiciary subject to intimidation; harassment and intimidation of journalists; unhygienic conditions at settlements for displaced persons, with limited access to health care, education, or employment; corruption; harassment of human rights groups; violence against women, including rape; child abuse and child prostitution; trafficking in women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation; societal discrimination against women, indigenous persons, and minorities; and illegal child labor.

Illegal armed groups committed the majority of human rights violations. Despite a unilateral cease-fire declared by the AUC in 2002 and a nationwide demobilization, renegade paramilitary members committed the following criminal acts and human rights abuses: political killings and kidnappings; forced disappearances; torture; interference with personal privacy and with the political system; forced displacement; suborning and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens' privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; recruitment and employment of child soldiers; and harassment, intimidation, and killings of human rights workers, journalists, teachers, and trade unionists.

The [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] FARC and [National Liberation Army] ELN committed the following human rights violations: political killings; killings of off-duty members of the public security forces and local officials; kidnappings and forced disappearances; massive forced displacements; suborning and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens' privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; widespread recruitment of child soldiers; attacks against human rights activists; harassment, intimidation, and killings of teachers and trade unionists.” [16a]

- 1.10 Amnesty International's 2007 Annual Report, covering events from January – December 2006, stated:

“Serious human rights abuses remained at high levels, especially in rural areas, despite continued reductions in certain types of violence associated with Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict, in particular kidnappings and

killings. All parties to the conflict - the security forces and army-backed paramilitaries as well as guerrilla groups, mainly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) - continued to abuse human rights and breach international humanitarian law. They were responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. There was a fall in the number of people newly displaced by the conflict, but the large number of displaced people remained a concern. There were further attacks on trade unionists and human rights defenders, mainly by paramilitary groups. Extrajudicial executions by members of the security forces, and selective killings of civilians and kidnappings by guerrilla forces continued to be reported.” [1a]

1.11 In its World Report 2007, Human Rights Watch recorded:

“Colombia remains mired in a decades-long internal armed conflict, which continues to result in widespread abuses by irregular armed groups, including both guerrillas and paramilitaries, as well as by the Colombian armed forces. Civilians suffer the brunt of the conflict, as every year thousands become displaced by the violence, losing their homes and livelihoods. Forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, threats, and kidnappings remain commonplace. The vast majority of abuses remain unaddressed.” [10a]

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2. Index to key source documents

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[2a]	BBC News, Country Profile: Colombia, 4 September 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1212798.stm
	[3h]	Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Country Fact Sheet: Colombia, April 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=323&cid=55
	[4a]	Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 4 October 2007 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/co.html
	[8a]	Ethnologue, Languages of Colombia http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=CO
	[9a]	Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Country Profiles: Colombia, 14 June 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1023977766424
	[14a]	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Protection Considerations Regarding Colombian Asylum Seekers and Refugees, March 2005 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=col
	[27a]	Europa World online (subscription only), Colombia: Country Profile: Location, Climate, Language, Religion, Flag, Capital http://www.europaworld.com/entry/co.is.2
MAPS	[14b]	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Various Articles and Maps http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=col
	[19a]	Writenet, Colombia: Internal Displacement: Policies and Problems, June 2006 http://www.unhcr.org/publ/RSDCOI/44bf463a4.pdf
HISTORY	[2a]	BBC News, Country Profile: Colombia, 4 September 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1212798.stm
	[2b]	BBC News, Timeline: Colombia, 4 September 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1212827.stm
	[6a]	Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Country Profile: Colombia, October 2004 http://www.csw.org.uk/Countries/Colombia/Resources/ColombiaCountryProfile.pdf
	[9a]	Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Country Profiles: Colombia, 14 June 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1023977766424

	<p>[14a] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Protection Considerations Regarding Colombian Asylum Seekers and Refugees, March 2005 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=col</p> <p>[19a] Writenet, Colombia: Internal Displacement: Policies and Problems, June 2006 http://www.unhcr.org/publ/RSDCOL/44bf463a4.pdf</p> <p>[21a] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2007: Colombia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7156</p>
POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	<p>[1a] Amnesty International (AI), Report 2007: Colombia http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Americas/Colombia</p> <p>[2a] BBC News, Country Profile: Colombia, 4 September 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1212798.stm</p> <p>[2b] BBC News, Timeline: Colombia, 4 September 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1212827.stm</p> <p>[3h] Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Country Fact Sheet: Colombia, April 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=323&cid=55</p> <p>[4a] CIA World Factbook, 4 October 2007 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/co.html</p> <p>[9a] Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Country Profiles: Colombia, 14 June 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1023977766424</p> <p>[9b] Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), Human Rights Annual Report 2006 http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/hr_report2006.pdf</p> <p>[10a] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2007: Colombia http://hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/colomb14884.htm</p> <p>[14a] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Protection Considerations Regarding Colombian Asylum Seekers and Refugees, March 2005 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=col</p> <p>[16a] US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Colombia, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm</p> <p>[19a] Writenet, Colombia: Internal Displacement: Policies and Problems, June 2006 http://www.unhcr.org/publ/RSDCOL/44bf463a4.pdf</p>

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HUMAN RIGHTS - GENERAL:	<p>[1a] Amnesty International (AI), Report 2007: Colombia http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Americas/Colombia</p> <p>[9a] Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Country Profiles: Colombia, 14 June 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1023977766424</p> <p>[9b] Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Human Rights Annual Report 2006 http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/hr_report2006.pdf</p> <p>[10a] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2007: Colombia http://hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/colomb14884.htm</p> <p>[14a] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Protection Considerations Regarding Colombian Asylum Seekers and Refugees, March 2005 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/country?iso=col</p> <p>[16a] US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Colombia, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm</p> <p>[21a] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2007: Colombia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7156</p>
HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES: (IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW.)	
ABUSES BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ARMED FORCES	<p>[1a] Amnesty International (AI), Report 2007: Colombia http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Americas/Colombia</p> <p>[3a] Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Colombia: Whether individuals threatened by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) or United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) can</p>

		<p>avoid such threats by relocating to Bogotá or another region of the country (May 2002-July 2003), 22 July 2003 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=417950 This is beginning to look a little dated.</p>
	[3b]	<p>Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Colombia: State Protection (March 2004-February 2005), July 2005 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=285&cid=55&version=printable&disclaimer=show</p>
	[3f]	<p>Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Colombia: Kidnappings and extortion in rural and urban regions, especially Bogota, and protection available to victims (February 2006 - February 2007), 12 April 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451133</p>
	[3g]	<p>Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Colombia: Training, organization and effectiveness of GAULA (Grupos de Accion Unificada por la Libertad Personal), the National Police (both Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS and the Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación, CTI) and the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalía General de la Nación) in regard to providing protection to the public from, and to people who have been threatened or targeted by, the illegal armed groups operating in Colombia, including protection from kidnapping (2004 - February 2006), 13 February 2006 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=450219</p>
	[3h]	<p>Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board (IRB), Country Fact Sheet: Colombia, April 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/publications/index_e.htm?docid=323&cid=55</p>
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	<p>[16a] US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006: Colombia, 6 March 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78885.htm</p> <p>[19a] Writenet, Colombia: Internal Displacement: Policies and Problems, June 2006 http://www.unhcr.org/publ/RSDCOI/44bf463a4.pdf</p> <p>[21a] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2007: Colombia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7156</p> <p>[21b] Freedom House, Countries at the Crossroads 2007: Colombia http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=8&ccrpage=37&ccrcountry=153</p> <p>[23a] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Violence and discrimination against women in the armed conflict in Colombia, 18 October 2006 http://www.crin.org/docs/inter_am_com_colombia_06.pdf</p> <p>[24a] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Annual Report 2006: Colombia http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/738DL4/\$FILE/icrc_ar_06_colombia.pdf?OpenElement</p> <p>[28a] Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), August Colombia Delegation Report, 26 September 2007 http://www.wola.org/media/August%20Colombia%20Trip%20Memo%20WOLA%20USOC%20LAWGEF.pdf</p>
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