

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Are there any reports of leftist groups asking civilians to attend meetings or attempting to extort money in Bogota in 2003?**
- 2. To what extent are FARC or other leftist groups still active in Medellin?**
- 3. Are there any reports indicating that FARC or other leftist groups still make demands for money in urban areas such as Bogota?**
- 4. Are there any reports of a group known by the name “urban militias FARC-EP” or some similar name?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Are there any reports of leftist groups asking civilians to attend meetings or attempting to extort money in Bogotá in 2003?**

Leftist groups

The two main leftist groups in Colombia are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), also known as FARC, and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

A UNHCR report from September 2002 describes the FARC-EP as “Colombia’s largest and most active guerrilla organization”, which has expanded by attracting students, intellectuals and workers in urban areas and carrying out acts of kidnapping and extortion to raise funds:

The FARC-EP, (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-Army of the People, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejercito del Pueblo), founded in 1965, has transformed itself to become Colombia’s largest and most active guerrilla organization. Rooted in the self-defence forces that were formed in the “Era of Violence”, the FARC began as a rural peasant army, adhering to a communist ideology and dominated by the Communist Party. By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, FARC had distanced itself

from the Communist Party and had developed support in urban centers by attracting students, intellectuals and workers. Through money obtained by kidnapping, extortion and selling protection to drug traffickers and coca growers, FARC expanded its membership, financial reserves and territorial control. Military and economic motives now overshadowed their political and social agenda that include land ownership issues and political reform. Involvement in illicit cultivation, narco-trafficking and kidnapping brings FARC an estimated US \$500 million per year. Thus FARC is able to project its military capability almost countrywide, with notably increasing activity in urban centers. Their present strength is estimated at 17,000, fighters organized in 7 regional bloques and consisting of over 60 frentes. The current Commander-Chief of the FARC is Manuel Marulanda Velez, alias “Tirofijo” (sureshot). Due to their perceived lack of a commitment to ideological issues and the indiscriminate violence they visit upon civilians, the FARC now have minimal popular support in Colombia (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2002, ‘International Protection Considerations regarding Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees’, September – Attachment 1).

The entry for Colombia in the Political Handbook of the World for 2009 describes the FARC as “a formidable and well-funded force” of about 12,000 members:

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*—FARC). Founded in 1964 by radicalized peasants, FARC was long a Moscow-line guerrilla group affiliated with the now moribund Communist Party of Colombia (Partido Comunista de Colombia—PCC).

...Fueled by proceeds from its drug trade, the FARC grew rapidly during the 1990s, reaching approximately 18,000 members by the early 2000s. The guerrilla group, which is unpopular in Colombia because of its human rights record, has suffered reversals during the years of the Uribe presidency. Its membership is now about 12,000, and it has lost at least eight senior leaders since 2007. It nonetheless remains a formidable and well-funded force with a presence in the vast majority of Colombia’s departments.

The same source provides the following information about the ELN, particularly indicating that the group engages in kidnapping for ransom and extortion of businesses in the oil and energy sector:

National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*—ELN). Once the largest and most militant of the insurgent organizations, the Cuban-line ELN was founded by radical students and priests in 1964. Less involved in the drug trade, it has supported itself by pioneering the practice of kidnapping for ransom, as well as extortion, particularly of businesses in the energy sector. It has mounted more than 400 attacks on the country’s oil pipelines, causing losses estimated at more than \$1 billion (‘Colombia’ in *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition* 2009, CQ Press Electronic Library http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2009_Colombia&type=toc&num=5 – Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

Extortion

An article in the *Boston Herald* dated 17 January 2005 states that there were 2,271 reports of extortion in Bogotá alone in 2003. According to victim support group Pais Libre, this figure represents an increase of 22 percent from 2002. The main extortionists are paramilitary groups, leftist rebel groups and street gangs, who primarily target farmers and middle class workers, including shopkeepers:

Believing that Colombia's violence had ebbed, Giovanni Colmenares and his family moved from the United States back to Colombia last year, opened a bar in Bogota and were looking to buy an apartment. But then one day assailants hustled him into a car and put a gun to his head.

They were angry at him for ignoring their phone calls and letters demanding \$17,000 – letters like the one in his mailbox that said: “We know your address and your movements. Meet our demands or face the consequences. ...Your children are getting prettier every day. Don't put them in danger.”

Extortion is on the rise across Colombia, spreading fear and discouraging investment.

A 2-year-old government security crackdown has sharply reduced Colombia's world-record kidnapping rate, so insurgent groups and common criminals have turned increasingly to extortion.

“It's much simpler than kidnapping. You pick up the phone, issue threats, sow fear, place your demands and hang up,” Col. Humberto Guatibonza, deputy director of the National Police's elite anti-kidnapping and extortion unit known as the GAULA, said in an interview.

On average, four of every 10 calls yield a payoff, said David Buitrago, an expert with Pais Libre, a victim support group. Targets are often farmers and middle-class workers such as shopkeepers or drivers who have nowhere to flee, Buitrago said.

In Bogota alone, 2,271 extortion cases were reported in 2003, a 22 percent increase from 2002, according to Pais Libre.

The main extortionists are common street gangs, followed by right-wing paramilitary groups and two leftist rebel outfits which have been fighting for 40 years to topple the government. The insurgents, however, are believed to often outsource the job to common criminals.

Extortion payments bring in at least \$228 million a year to the rebels and their paramilitary foes, the biggest source of income after drug trafficking, according to a United Nations report.

Faced with the extortion epidemic, the GAULA has launched a campaign urging people not to pay and to report the crime to authorities. They say those who refuse to give in are unlikely to be killed – at least in cities. But that has not calmed Colmenares, who says he couldn't afford the extortionists' demand.

“We live in permanent fear,” he said, eyes darting around, at a tiny Bogota apartment he has rented to hide out. “One night they picked me up outside my bar ... forced me into the back of a car and put a gun to my head. I thought I'd never see my two boys again.”

He said he doesn't know who is behind the extortion, but that he was probably targeted on the assumption he had left the United States a wealthy man – even though he was living with his in-laws in a middle-class Bogota neighborhood.

Colmenares has pulled his two kids from school, never set foot in the bar and rarely ventures beyond the local supermarket, while facing mounting debts.

Colmenares would love to go back to Miami, but has been denied a visa because he spent 10 years doing odd jobs there without proper work papers.

“Coming back to Colombia was the worst decision I ever made,” he said.

Some extortion victims say going to the authorities is of little help.

“They only take up a case once somebody has been killed or abducted,” said Carmen, who did not want to give her surname, fearing retribution. Her family owns mobile phone shops in Bogota and has paid tens of thousands of dollars to extortionists, forcing the family to sell its vacation cottage and car.

Guatibonza conceded that GAULA officers lack the funds to handle every case. He said a lack of tough laws against extortion makes prosecution difficult, and that most victims are unwilling to entrap the extortionists for fear of reprisals.

Carmen says she has moved seven times in five years to evade the extortionists, who keep demanding more money. They haven’t located her for the past six months, but still she bars her grandchildren from playing in the park. She said the extortionists identified themselves as leftist rebels, but without specifying their affiliation.

“They will probably find us again,” she said. “I have lost hope that one day it will end” (‘Colombian criminals turn to extortion as kidnapping gets too risky’ 2005, *Boston Herald*, 17 January – Attachment 3).

A 2009 International Crisis Group (ICG) report on conflict in Colombia similarly reports an increase in cases of extortion by organised crime groups and leftist groups FARC and ELN from 2,083 in 2002, to 2,347 in 2004. However, the report also indicates that extortion declined to 1,082 cases in 2007 and even further to 830 cases in 2008 (International Crisis Group 2009, *Ending Colombia’s FARC Conflict: Dealing The Right Card*, Latin America Report N°30, 26 March, p. 12 – Attachment 4).

The entry on Colombia in the US Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey for 2003 explains that many Colombian asylum-seekers “are urban, middle-class people who have been subjected to kidnapping or extortion, fear being subjected to these, or fear the generalized violence in Colombia, which in 2002 increasingly targeted major urban centers” (US Committee for Refugees 2003, ‘Country Report: Colombia’, *World Refugee Survey* 2003, June – Attachment 5).

The UNHCR report published in September 2002 cited above indicates that “[e]xtortion practices, including ransoms, “war taxes” and other forced payments are commonplace”, and that 60 percent of extortion cases are committed by guerrilla groups:

Kidnappings and extortion take place both as a form of persecution to target (perceived) political opponents and to finance political / military activities. Only 10% of kidnappings are attributed to purely common criminal motives and of these FARC often “purchases” kidnap victims from criminal gangs. Minors are also targeted, with victims as young as 2 years old. An estimated 205 minors were reported to be in captivity as of October 2001. Moreover, in the case of the guerrillas, in particular the FARC, victims of kidnapping are often considered human capital, to exchange against captured and imprisoned guerrilla members. The government has long rejected calls for such “humanitarian exchanges” (except on a one-time basis in 2000). As a result, the FARC have conducted a number of high profile kidnappings in order to “raise the stakes”. The best known case internationally is that of member of Congress, Ingrid Bettancourt, kidnapped by the FARC while she campaigned for the Presidency in February 2002. She remains in captivity at the date of writing. Kidnap victims are reportedly often tortured by the FARC in captivity while most of those “disappeared” (no ransom demand) by the paramilitaries are either never heard from again or found dead (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2002, ‘International Protection

Considerations regarding Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees', September – Attachment 1).

In addition, a news article dated 5 April 2004 describes the activities of FARC and its militia groups in Bogotá, which include extortion:

The dispute between the guerrillas and the paramilitary groups, already old in certain regions in the north and south of the country, is also taking place in south Bogotá's populous Ciudad Bolívar sector. First came the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia], who in May 1982 via Conference 7 ordered their fronts to deploy forces in the main cities in order to undertake intelligence work which would facilitate the commission of terrorist attacks, abductions and extortion. They established themselves in places such as Bosa, Ciudad Bolívar, Soacha, Patio Bonito and Suba, and formed militias which began to intimidate a city which considered itself impervious ('Power struggle between rebels, paramilitaries spreads to Colombian capital' 2004, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: Cambio, 5 April – Attachment 6).

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada provided the following information in 2003 regarding FARC's activities in Bogotá and other major cities, similarly identifying the existence of the group's urban militias:

In June 2001, Jorge Briceño Suarez, a senior leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), announced that the group was intending to bring its struggle to Colombia's cities (Real Instituto Ebanio 4 Mar. 2003). According to Román Ortiz, an expert on Latin American security and defence issues, the decision to urbanize the conflict reflects a realization by FARC leaders that the costs of large-scale assaults against military targets were unacceptably high, and that an urban campaign would bring pressure to bear on the middle and upper classes upon which the government draws much of its support (ibid.).

An important element in the FARC's urban strategy has been the exploitation of new technologies and tactics borrowed from European guerrilla movements such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) (ibid.; Jane's Intelligence Review Sept. 2002, 24-25; ibid. Mar. 2003, 23). These technologies include the use of remote-controlled mortars, as seen in the attacks on the presidential palace and the José María Córdova military school in August 2002, and the establishment of a new system of urban guerrilla cells which may be modelled on the PIRA's "active service units" (ibid. Sept. 2002, 24-25). These cells, each of which is composed of no more than 12 individuals, make use of their own network of safe houses and escape routes in order to minimize the risk of detection (Real Instituto Ebanio 4 Mar. 2003). According to police officials, the FARC's Antonio Nariño Urban Network (Red Urbana Antonio Nariño, RUAN) sent approximately 60 guerrillas trained in the use of the new tactics to Bogotá in January 2002 (Jane's Intelligence Review Sept. 2002, 25).

In addition to the urban cells described above, the FARC has engaged in a strategy of creating urban militias connected to [its] regular armed fighters [and] may have as many as 12,000 urban militias, highly concentrated in Bogotá and Medellín but also in many of the medium sized urban centers such as Bucaramanga and Villavicencio (Adjunct Professor 30 June 2003).

A Stetson University College of Law associate professor who served as a district judge in Medellín between 1983 and 1986 and currently specializes in the legal dimensions of narcotics trafficking and guerrilla insurgency also indicated that the FARC is active in nearly all of Colombia's major cities, where its members are "responsible for gathering intelligence to feed to the rural fronts, for carrying out recruitment, and for conducting acts of kidnapping,

extortion, and robbery against the urban population” (7 July 2003). The associate professor went on to claim that

recent events have indicated that the guerrillas ... are concentrated [in urban centres] and capable of delivering attacks against the formal infrastructure. ... Brazen attacks by cells of combatant groups have increased. There has also been a noticeable rise in the level of violence between guerrillas and paras [paramilitary groups] in the poor areas as fronts from either side compete and battle for the control of “turf” in the slums. ... While military actions such as tactical strikes and bombings against police installations and government properties have continued, the tactics of the urban guerrilla ... fronts have expanded to assume more of an intelligence-gathering role than a tactical strike role. Regardless, terrorism for the purposes of intimidation, control, and financial gain is still a primary plank in the guerrilla ... modus operandi (ibid.).

Bogotá, where the FARC’s organizational structure and activities are becoming increasingly complex, is believed to harbour cells from the group’s 10th, 22nd, 42nd, 45th and 53rd Fronts (El Espectador 11 Aug. 2002). Additionally, members of the FARC’s Huila-based Teófilo Forero “mobile column” (columna móvil) have reportedly travelled to the capital on a number of occasions in order to carry out attacks such as the 7 February 2003 bombing of El Nogal nightclub in which 35 people were killed and more than 160 injured (Semana 22 Feb. 2003; Jane’s Intelligence Review Mar. 2003, 22) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003: *COL41716.E – Colombia: Update to COL35124.E of 20 September 2000 on the activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) in urban centres (September 2000-July 2003)*, 28 July – Attachment 7).

No information could be found regarding leftist group demands on civilians to attend meetings, however the following response from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) dated 18 July 2003 indicates that the FARC were involved in university-based recruitment:

According to the Bogotá newspaper El Tiempo, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) have taken steps to infiltrate state agencies as well as lawyers’ offices and private security companies after realizing the limitations of university-based recruitment (25 Mar. 2003) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, *COL41717.E – Colombia: Update to COL39098.E of 21 October 2002 on the infiltration of state agencies and programs by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) or the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) (October 2002-July 2003)*, 18 July – Attachment 8).

In addition, information provided by the United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services on 12 August 2003 quotes a *Jane’s Intelligence Review* article dated 1 June 2003, which states that the FARC’s “extensive urban militia networks...in most Colombian cities” consider the infiltration of universities a priority task:

There have been other reports of FARC infiltration of universities, including the National University in Bogotá. In November 2002, three mortar rounds were launched from that campus and landed near the U.S. Embassy and the office of the Attorney General. A subsequent government raid on the campus uncovered grenades, homemade explosives and bomb-making chemicals. SEMANA reported that one of the ways the FARC has extended its influence into the university system is by giving “scholarships” to students in exchange for political loyalty. According to JANE’S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW, infiltrating universities is

a priority task for the “extensive urban militia networks” the FARC maintains “in most Colombian cities” (BOSTON GLOBE 30 Mar 2003, SEMANA 9 Jun 2003, JANE’S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW 1 Jun 2003) (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2003, ‘Colombia: Information on Illegal Armed Groups’, Refworld website, 12 August <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USCIS,,COL,,3fe0dc3d4,0.html> – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 9).

2. To what extent are FARC or other leftist groups still active in Medellín?

The response to this question is divided into three sections which provide information regarding the activities of leftist groups in [Medellín](#), [Bogotá](#), and in [Colombia](#) as a whole.

Medellín

A previous research response dated 6 February 2009 provides limited information on whether FARC or other guerilla organisations are still active in Medellín (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response COL34318*, 6 February – Attachment 10).

An article dated 6 January 2009 and quoted in the research response above indicates that the recruitment of FARC urban militias still occurs in Medellín:

Granada Ramos, who belongs to the Farc for 12 years, was expert in the management of explosives and had under his orders up to 600 guerrillas among which was his daughter. Since three years ago was recruiting and reorganizing the urban militias in different sector in Medellín (Díaz, F.E. 2009, ‘Captured alias “Cantina” in Girardot’, Fuerza Aérea Colombiana website, 6 January <http://www.fac.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=34265> – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 11).

However, the ICG report cited above indicates that urban FARC groups in Medellín “have been severely disrupted”, and their support networks “progressively weakened”. The report attributes the weakening of these urban militia groups in cities such as Bogotá and Medellín to paramilitary offensives in the 1990s-2000s:

With Cano’s appointment and the difficulties faced by FARC rural units, security forces fear an increase of urban terrorism. Urbanisation of the conflict would aim to discredit the government’s security policy, which is highly popular in large and medium-sized cities. According to multiple sources, the FARC wants to gain attention and regain the initiative by assassinating senior officials and conducting sabotage with explosives, while concurrently seeking to recruit university students. Several attacks with explosives, presumably carried out by FARC militiamen or commandos, have been launched in cities like Bogotá, Cali, Buenaventura, Neiva and even small villages like Ituango (Antioquia department). The police have seized several caches of explosives on the outskirts of Bogotá, and rural FARC militiamen or commandos have been detected and arrested when attempting to penetrate cities.

Threat perception differs from one city to another. In Cúcuta, Medellín and Villavicencio, authorities believe FARC urban structures have been severely disrupted, while in Cali and Buenaventura the insurgents remain highly active despite significant hits against their urban militias. They now work as independent cells or with criminal organisations to help in intelligence gathering and the logistics necessary for terrorist attacks.

It is impossible to determine how many militiamen are active, but it appears that the support networks involved in acquisition of food, medicine, electronic and communication devices and uniforms have been progressively weakened. The paramilitary offensives of the late 1990s and early 2000s drove urban fronts out of major cities like Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Cúcuta. The remnants were then ordered to support the rural fronts, which have endured the bulk of the Uribe administration's offensive. Militiamen have increasingly become a pool from which to replace fighters lost through combat or defection. This has made logistics more vulnerable to interception by security forces, which exert tight controls via checkpoints on roads and rivers that lead to and from combat areas (International Crisis Group 2009, *Ending Colombia's FARC Conflict: Dealing The Right Card*, Latin America Report N°30, 26 March, pp. 11-12 – Attachment 4).

In addition, a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia dated 5 March 2007 states that “security policies pursued by the mayor's offices in Bogotá and Medellín” have contributed to a downward trend in incidences of violence, including abductions:

In 2006, the Government's military offensive against the illegal armed groups continued, aimed primarily against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), and to a lesser extent against the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the new illegal armed groups formed by demobilized or rearmed paramilitaries. The FARC-EP focused their actions on attacks against local authorities, armed strikes during the pre-electoral period, massacres and attacks against mobile units of the security forces and eradicators of coca crops. Although guerrilla attacks against fixed bases of the security forces decreased, a few did occur, such as the attack on a police station in the centre of Tierradentro (Córdoba) in November.

According to information provided by the Presidential Programme for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, the implementation of the Democratic Security and Defence Policy allowed the Government to maintain the downward trend in the general indicators of violence, particularly the rates for murders and abductions. The security policies pursued by the mayor's offices in Bogotá and Medellín stand out in this context. The increase in security forces personnel was maintained, and greater control of certain rural areas traditionally under the domination of illegal armed groups was achieved. In other regions, such as Urabá in the Department of Antioquia, the security forces were unable to prevent infiltration by the FARC-EP or to fully control territory previously held by paramilitary groups. Likewise, important challenges remain regarding the full restoration of the rule of law throughout the country. There are still difficulties in ensuring that military gains are accompanied by a simultaneous strengthening of civilian authority, the presence of other State institutions, the implementation of social investment and rural development projects, and total respect for human rights and IHL (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2007, ‘Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia’, *United Nations General Assembly A/HRC/4/48*, 5 March, pp. 4-5 – Attachment 12).

Bogotá

Information provided by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) dated 16 April 2009 outlines the prevalence of crime and the activities of the FARC in Bogotá, and describes government actions taken to combat the activities of the FARC and the ELN. The response particularly cites a 2009 International Crisis Group report which indicates that the FARC “continues to commit murders and carry out bombings in Bogotá and is trying to extend its control in Colombian cities”. However, a 2008 study by Colombia's Foundation for Security and Democracy (FSD) noted an 83 percent decrease in the number of violent acts committed

by illegal armed groups between 2002 and 2008, which the FSD attributes “to the demobilization of nearly all paramilitary groups and the weakening of FARC and the ELN”:

An article published on leParisien.fr on 21 January 2009 reports that according to information from the Colombian police, in Colombia, [translation] “16,140 people were killed in 2008, compared with 17,198 in 2007 and nearly 29,000 in 2002, which amounts to 33 violent deaths for every 100,000 residents.” Although the number of murders has decreased over the years, the murder rate is still high (leParisien.fr 21 Jan. 2009). Colombia has a population of more than 45 million (US 19 Mar. 2009).

Bogotá

According to data from the national police sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of the Observatory for the Presidential Program on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario), the number of murders in Bogotá decreased from 1,669 in 2005 to 1,341 in 2008 (Colombia 11 Feb. 2009). Statistics from the governmental organization National Fund for the Defence of Individual Freedom (Fondo Nacional para la Defensa de la Libertad Personal, FONDELIBERTAD) indicate that there were 36 kidnappings in Bogotá in 2005, 75 in 2006, and 30 in 2008 (ibid.).

In October 2008, the Foundation for Security and Democracy (Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, FSD) studied crime and victimization in Colombia’s six largest cities; 50 percent of study participants were men and 50 percent were women, all aged 20 to 44 years (FSD 27 Nov. 2008, 12). More than 67 percent of participants were the head of their household or the spouse of the head of the household, and most had a job: 34 percent were salaried employees and 29 percent were self-employed (ibid., 12).

The study shows that in Colombia’s six largest cities, the most common crimes are theft without violence (73 percent) and armed robbery in the street (20 percent) (ibid., 6). According to the study, in Bogotá

- 11.8 percent of participants stated that they were the victim of a crime in 2008, compared with 20 percent in 2006 (FSD 27 Nov. 2008, 6);
- knives are the most commonly used weapons in the commission of theft (ibid., 7);
- in 2008, 45 percent of people who stated that they were the victim of a crime reported the crime, compared with only 17.6 percent in 2007 and 40 percent in 2006 (ibid., 8); – the police registered most of the complaints (87 percent), followed by the Office of the Attorney General (Fiscalía General de la Nación) (13 percent) (ibid., 8);
- 39 percent of participants felt that the police are doing a good job (ibid., 9).

According to an FSD report entitled Balance de la confrontación armada en Colombia 2002-2008 (summary of the armed conflict in Colombia 2002-2008), the number of violent acts committed by illegal groups in Bogotá dropped from 69 in 2002 to 30 in 2008 (FSD 18 Dec. 2008). A report published by the International Crisis Group indicates that, according to several sources, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) continues to commit murders and carry out bombings in Bogotá and is trying to extend its control in Colombian cities (International Crisis Group 26 Mar. 2009, 11). In addition, according to official sources, in November 2008, the police seized a large amount of explosives on the outskirts of Bogotá (ibid.). According to an article in the Spanish daily El País, a bombing at a mall on 27 January 2009, for which FARC claimed responsibility, killed two people (El País 29 Jan. 2009; see also lepetitjournal.com 9

Feb. 2009). Further information on FARC's activities in Bogotá could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

...Information on the activities of the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) in either Bogotá or Cali could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Government actions to combat the activities of FARC and the ELN

Although various international organizations continue to denounce the human rights violations committed by FARC and the ELN in Colombia (AI May 2008; HRW Jan. 2009; International Crisis Group 26 Mar. 2009), the FSD report on the armed conflict in Colombia found that the government's Defence and Democratic Security Policy (Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática) has given it more control over the actions of illegal military groups (FSD 18 Dec. 2008; see also Colombia 5 Aug. 2008 and AI May 2008). However, according to the International Crisis Group report, the government of Colombia has yet to implement a political strategy that is rigorous enough to end the actions of the illegal groups (26 Mar. 2009, i).

The overall objective of the Defence and Democratic Security Policy is [translation] "to strengthen and guarantee the rule of law in Colombia by bolstering democratic authority: the free exercise of the authority of institutions, the power of the law and the active participation of citizens in public affairs" (Colombia 2003). However, the International Crisis Group report, citing the ineffectiveness of Colombia's anti-drug program, states that these efforts lack long-term vision and are insufficient to improve the rule of law (26 Mar. 2009, i).

In an annual report covering the period from July 2007 to July 2008, the Ministry of Defence (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional) lists some of the successes of the Colombian army with respect to the Democratic Security and Defence Policy and its offensive against the illegal armed groups:

- from July 2007 to July 2008, 2,568 FARC members were demobilized (Colombia 5 Aug. 2008, 5);
- the neutralization of several key FARC members weakened the group, which experienced serious communications and supply problems (ibid., 9);
- from January to June 2008, 163 ELN members were demobilized (ibid., 6).

The same report also indicates that information provided by the demobilized paramilitary soldiers and the cooperation of intelligence officials contributed to the Colombian government's efforts to

- free 31 hostages (Colombia 5 Aug. 2008, 7);
- seize and destroy 8.9 tons of cocaine (ibid.);
- deactivate 7,449 antipersonnel mines (ibid.);
- seize 98.8 tons of explosives, 3,207 firearms and 7,820 grenades (ibid.);
- decrease the number of murders by 9 percent, from 17,966 (between July 2006 and June 2007) to 16,325 (between July 2007 and June 2008) (ibid., 31);

- reduce the number of kidnappings from 614 (between July 2006 and June 2007) to 447 (between July 2007 and June 2008) (ibid., 33).

The December 2008 FSD report on the armed conflict in Colombia indicates that in recent years, Colombia has succeeded not only in reducing the number of crimes attributed to illegal groups, but also in neutralizing their communications systems and reducing their operational capacity (FSD 18 Dec. 2008). The report compares the various types of crimes committed by illegal groups in Colombia and their frequency during the periods of January to October 2002 and January to October 2008 (ibid.). The data show that illegal armed groups committed 3,226 violent acts between January and October 2002, compared with 533 crimes reported between January and October 2008 (ibid.). This represents a decrease of approximately 83 percent, and according to the report, is due to the demobilization of nearly all paramilitary groups and the weakening of FARC and the ELN (ibid.).

The FSD report also notes that the number of attacks committed by FARC fell 70 percent, from 330 between January and October 2002 to 100 between January and October 2008 (ibid.). In 2008, after FARC moved its main area of operations from central to western Colombia, more than half of all crimes were committed in the departments of Cauca (21), Antioquia (11), Nariño (8), Valle del Cauca (8) and Chocó (7) (ibid.). No attacks were committed in the departments of Boyacá, Casanare, Magdalena, Risaralda, Santander and Vichada (ibid.). The number of kidnappings committed by FARC also dropped 89 percent, from 830 between January and October 2002 to 94 between January and October 2008 (ibid.). The departments with the most kidnappings in 2008 were Chocó, Tolima, Antioquia, Caquetá and Meta (ibid.). Ten departments did not report any kidnappings in 2008: Magdalena, Sucre, Caldas, Bolívar, Nariño, Boyocá, la Guajira, Vichada, Atlántico and Córdoba (ibid.).

An AFP article published by the Ecuadorian daily El Tiempo reports that according to government data, FARC has approximately 7,000 rebels (AFP 5 Feb. 2009). The International Crisis Group report, however, indicates that government figures are inconsistent: according to the Ministry of Defence, there are 7,000 to 8,000 guerrillas, but a Colombian security agency states that FARC has approximately 10,000 combatants (International Crisis Group 26 Mar. 2009, 7).

On 5 February 2009, FARC released a former Colombian politician, the sixth hostage released since 1 February 2009 (France 5 Feb. 2009; AFP 5 Feb. 2009). FARC is still holding 22 hostages, soldiers and police officers, whom it is trying to exchange for imprisoned guerrillas (ibid.).

As for the ELN, the number of attacks committed by this group decreased by 77 percent during the period of the FSD report (January to October 2002 and January to October 2008) (FSD 18 Dec. 2008). The number of kidnappings committed by the ELN decreased by 96 percent from 646 in 2002 to 29 in 2008 (ibid.). Of the 29 kidnappings, 14 took place in the department of Norte de Santander (ibid.).

Information on the protection offered to victims of crime in Bogotá and Cali could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2009, *COL103020.FE – Colombia: Crime in Bogotá and Cali, activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) in those cities, government actions to combat the activities of these groups, and protection offered to victims*, 16 April – Attachment 13).

Further information relating to FARC's extortion activities in Bogotá and other urban areas is outlined in the response to Question 3 below.

Colombia in general

The following articles address the extent of FARC's activities and influence throughout Colombia more generally.

A *BBC* article dated 27 May 2009 indicates that the FARC's membership numbers have been reduced by 50 percent since 2002, when they boasted 16,000 fighters, with 3,000 members deserting in 2008 alone. In addition, their forces are being restricted to smaller territories. However, it is argued that the group is "far from being defeated", committing "more attacks so far this year than any year since 2003":

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) are celebrating their 45th anniversary, making them one of the oldest insurgent forces in the world – and, despite recent setbacks, still one of the strongest.

"The Farc are at their worst point in 45 years of fighting," said Alfredo Rangel, head of the Bogota think-tank Security and Democracy.

"Up until recently they had always been growing, in numbers and territory. Now they are being driven back, and their numbers are falling. They are in terminal decline."

Yet while the Tamil Tigers, one of the most brutal and innovative insurgencies, are crushed and the Nepalese Maoists opt for the political route (at least for the moment), the Farc remain committed to their increasingly improbable aim of overthrowing the state and imposing a socialist regime.

Its members are motivated neither by religion or ethnicity. The Farc are a throwback to the 1960s, when Cuban-inspired insurgent groups sprang up in South and then Central America.

Battered

And they are pretty much all that remain of those insurgencies that swept through Latin America.

They have recently taken a battering, reduced from almost 16,000 fighters in 2002 to half that today, with a record 3,000 deserting ranks in 2008.

Last year their founder and legendary leader, Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda, died of a heart attack aged 78.

Two other members of the Farc's ruling body, the Secretariat, were killed, one in an aerial bombardment of a rebel camp in neighbouring Ecuador, another murdered by his own bodyguard, who cut off a hand to show the authorities and claim a reward.

Yet the Farc are far from defeated. They have new leaders, including a bespectacled and bearded anthropologist known by the alias Alfonso Cano, long the movement's ideologue, a committed Marxist Leninist and hardliner.

He has now established his control over the movement, since the death last March of Marulanda, and delivered his new strategy for the rebels, called Plan Rebirth.

The Farc have stepped up their campaign, with more attacks so far this year than any year since 2003.

And the rebels are trying to move away from their peasant roots and project themselves into Colombia's cities, aided by training from international groups like the Provisional IRA and the Basque separatist group Eta.

Cocaine

The Farc's communique celebrating their 45th anniversary was defiant and optimistic.

"The decisive stage of the fight for peace has begun," read the message posted on the internet. "We have sworn to win and win we will."

Much of the Farc's longevity, certainly since the mid-1980s, can be attributed to one thing: cocaine.

Whilst the Farc are ultra conservative in their doctrine and tactics, they have proven themselves to be adept businessmen, latching onto the drugs trade and taking their cut from all the links in the narcotics chain, from the coca fields up to the vacuum-packed bricks of cocaine that leave Colombia's shores at a rate of over 600 tonnes a year.

According to Roman Ortiz, security expert at the Ideas for Peace Foundation, the drugs trade has provided more than just overflowing coffers.

"The Farc have also inherited a support base from their involvement in the drugs trade," said Mr Ortiz. "They get support and recruits from the peasants who cultivate and harvest the drug crops."

Out of reach

The Farc have two other crucial advantages which they maximise: topography perfectly suited to guerrilla warfare, and long borders with nations not interested in, or unable to crack down on, rebel activity.

Colombia could not have been designed any better for an insurgent force. It has three mountains ranges that trisect the country and the lower levels are coated in dense jungle.

Like the Taliban in Pakistan and the Vietcong in Cambodia, the Farc use the border regions, mostly impenetrable jungle, to rest and recuperate, plan attacks and get supplies and weapons, all out of reach of the Colombian security forces.

Intelligence sources indicate that four members of the Secretariat now reside outside Colombia.

There have long been accusations, vehemently denied, that President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela sympathises with the Farc.

What is clear is that the Farc have camps on Venezuelan soil and many of their supplies come from here and from Ecuador.

The latter uses the US dollar as its currency, meaning that the dollars that come into rebel coffers from the US drugs market can be readily translated into food, medical supplies, uniforms and black-market arms and munitions.

"We have incontrovertible evidence that elements of the Venezuelan military not only turn a blind eye to Farc presence on their soil, but actively help them with weapons and logistics," said a senior intelligence figure in the Colombian defence ministry. "As long as this continues, our chances of a military victory are slim."

Leaner and meaner

Other borders are with Panama, which has no army; Peru, still unable to defeat the remnants of its own rebel force, the Shining Path; and Brazil, whose border sweeps into the Amazon basin, where visibility is reduced to a few metres amid the triple-canopy jungle.

And under orders to recruit quality not quantity, the Farc are becoming leaner and meaner.

The money from drugs continues, whereas the tax revenues the state needs to keep the US-backed military machine on the offensive are shrinking thanks to the world financial crisis.

President Alvaro Uribe, who may well stand for a third term in office, assuming he can change the constitution once again, has shown no desire to negotiate with the rebels, who killed his father in a botched kidnap attempt.

The Farc celebrate their 45th anniversary secure in the knowledge that it will not be their last (McDermott, J. 2009, 'Oldest insurgent force marches on', *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 27 May – Attachment 14).

Another *BBC* article dated 28 February 2009 indicates that the FARC are planning to return to the cities, in particular Bogotá, from which they have been pushed out by the military. However, a recent operation carried out by security forces which resulted in the deaths of ten FARC rebels and the capture of a further eight, including a well-known FARC leader, has hindered the group's plans to reopen a kidnapping route into Bogotá:

Colombian security forces have clashed with a Marxist rebel group and captured one of its most notorious kidnappers.

Soldiers fought Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) rebels in the central province of Cundinamarca, killing 10 and capturing another eight.

Among those taken was a leader known by the alias "El Negro Antonio", whom authorities have been seeking for well over a decade.

One soldier was killed in the combat and a kidnap victim rescued.

"El Negro Antonio" is a Farc guerrilla with 33 arrest warrants outstanding against him.

The operation took place in the mountain range of Sumapaz in Cundinamarca province.

It is a severe setback for the Farc, not just because of the number of rebels killed and captured, but because it hinders its plans to reopen a movement corridor into the capital, Bogota.

It was along this corridor that El Negro Antonio used to move kidnap victims out of Bogota and into the rebel-controlled lowland jungles.

Under their new leader Alfonso Cano, the Farc rebels have been seeking to retake the initiative snatched from them over the last five years by the US-backed military.

The rebels are seeking to bring their four-decade-old war back into the cities, particularly Bogota, where their attacks have far greater impact than in the countryside (McDermott, J. 2009, 'Colombia captures Farc kidnapper', *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 28 February – Attachment 15).

The US Department of State report on terrorism for 2008 similarly claims that “Colombian security forces captured or killed a number of mid-level FARC leaders... and reduced the amount of territory where terrorists could freely operate”. In addition, the military succeeded in damaging the FARC’s communication network, destroying a large number of their weapons and supplies, and reducing their financial resources. Despite these operations, however, the FARC “continued tactical-level terrorism, kidnapping for profit and maintained 28 “political” hostages”. In regards to the ELN, the report claims that the group is operating with diminished resources including a membership of only 2,000 fighters. However, they continue to use kidnapping, extortion and drug trafficking to fund their activities, and have attacked the Colombian military with land mines:

The Government of Colombia continued vigorous law enforcement, intelligence, military, and economic measures against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), along with operations against remaining elements of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Colombia increased its counterterrorism cooperation and training efforts in the region. The threat of extradition to the United States remained a strong weapon against drug traffickers and terrorists. In 2008, Colombia extradited a record 208 defendants to the United States for prosecution; most were Colombian nationals.

The administration of President Álvaro Uribe maintained its focus on defeating and demobilizing Colombia’s terrorist groups through its “Democratic Security” policy, which combines military, intelligence, police operations, efforts to demobilize combatants, and the provision of public services in rural areas previously dominated by illegal armed groups.

...After years of seeming invincibility, the FARC’s Secretariat suffered several key losses in 2008. On March 1, a Colombian military strike killed Secretariat member Raúl Reyes at his camp just across the Ecuadorian border, followed less than a week later by the killing of Secretariat member Iván Ríos at the hands of one of his own security guards. Secretariat member and FARC founder Manuel Marulanda (“Tirofijo”) died in late March, reportedly of natural causes.

In addition to the high-profile hostage rescue and the severe blows to the FARC Secretariat, Colombian security forces captured or killed a number of mid-level FARC leaders, debriefed terrorist group deserters for detailed information on their respective units, and reduced the amount of territory where terrorists could freely operate. The Colombian military crippled the FARC’s communications network, destroyed major caches of weapon and supplies, and reduced the group’s financial resources through counternarcotics and other security operations.

Additionally, a record number of FARC members deserted in 2008, yet another sign of the organization’s deteriorating power. Desertions increased among mid-level and in some cases senior FARC leaders, such as FARC commander Nelly Ávila Moreno (“Karina”), who deserted in May. FARC desertions in 2008 numbered at least 3,027, surpassing the previous year’s record number of 2,480.

Despite the ongoing campaign against the FARC, the group continued tactical-level terrorism, kidnapping for profit and maintained 28 “political” hostages including former Meta Governor Alan Jara and Valle del Cauca Assemblyman Sigifredo López. The FARC also continued narco trafficking activities, launched several bombings against military and civilian targets in urban areas, and targeted numerous rural outposts, infrastructure targets, and political adversaries in dozens of attacks. Examples of 2008 terrorist activity attributed to the FARC included the following:

- In March, the FARC attacked electrical towers in Nariño and Cauca, cutting off power to numerous municipalities;
- In August, a bomb in Ituango, Antioquia killed seven and wounded 50;
- In August, a car bomb in front of the Justice Palace in Cali killed four and wounded 26;
- In August, two Bogota supermarkets were targeted with small incendiary devices;
- In November, guerrillas from the FARC's 49th Front in Neiva killed Caquetá council member Edinson Javier Pérez;
- In November, FARC members killed teacher Dora Liliana Saavedra and her husband Ferney Ledesma, in front of schoolchildren, for entertaining Colombian Army members at their home;
- In December, the FARC attacked a humanitarian caravan led by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute in Caquetá department with a roadside bomb, killing two health workers.

Peace talks between the government of Colombia and the ELN remained stalled throughout the year due to ELN intransigence. International and local efforts to coax the ELN back to the negotiating table—including efforts by former ELN leader Antonio Bermúdez (“Francisco Galán”), who announced his resignation from the group to focus on peace talks in 2008—made little progress. The ELN remained in the field, but with diminished resources, a dwindling membership of approximately 2,000 fighters, and reduced offensive capability. Still, the ELN inflicted casualties on the Colombian military through increased use of land mines. It continued to fund its operations through narcotics trafficking. The ELN and FARC clashed over territory in northeastern and southern Colombia, and the ELN continued kidnapping and extortion. Numerous ELN fronts increased their drug trafficking activities in an effort to stem losses suffered by the government of Colombia and the FARC (US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Terrorism for 2008*, April, pp. 164-165 – Attachment 16).

In addition, an IRB response dated 9 April 2008 outlines FARC's areas of influence, with many sources indicating a steady decline in membership and a weakening of the group, however there is significant disagreement as to current FARC membership numbers. It is argued by one source that the FARC are now “reportedly financed largely by drug trafficking, since kidnappings and extortion are in decline”, however another source claims that “kidnappings have decreased, but not as much as the government maintains”, and that “FARC is responsible for a third of all kidnappings”:

According to the February 2008 statement by Amnesty International (AI) to the 7th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) continue to violate human rights and international humanitarian law (AI 21 Feb. 2008). AI noted as examples the killing of civilians and the taking of hostages (ibid.). According to the 29 February 2008 report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the situation in Colombia, FARC members were reportedly responsible for two “massacres” in May and August 2007, killing 10 people in Turbo in the department of Antioquia and 11 assemblymen in the department of Valle del Cauca (UN 29 Feb. 2008, Para. 44). Municipal officials from Caqueta and Choco were also reportedly killed (ibid.).

The Free Country Foundation (Fundacion Pais Libre), a Colombian organization that provides support for kidnapping victims and their families, noted 456 kidnappings in 2007 (Le Monde 25 Feb. 2008). It did not identify any of the perpetrators, but stated that the victim profiles

have changed: the middle class is now being targeted, whereas the elite were targeted in the past (ibid.).

The Foundation for Security and Democracy (Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia, FSD) in Bogota noted 687 kidnappings in 2006 (2007b, 25). The FSD does not provide numbers for 2007 but notes in a 2007 report a steady decline in the number of kidnappings between 2002 and 2006 (FSD 2007b, 25; see also Liberation 30 May 2006). The FSD also reports that FARC was responsible for 122 kidnappings (18 percent of all kidnappings) in 2006 (2007b, 31). According to the FSD, that is an 88 percent decrease from the 998 kidnappings for which FARC claimed responsibility in 2002 (ibid.). However, FARC is still holding more than 700 hostages (AFP/AP 12 Jan. 2008). The Free Country Foundation reports that FARC is responsible for a third of all kidnappings (Le Monde 25 Feb. 2008), and according to Colombia's Ministry of Defence, FARC is the main perpetrator and is responsible for 29 percent of all reported kidnappings (L'Express 22 Feb. 2007).

According to the Free Country Foundation, [translation] “the kidnappings have decreased, but not as much as the government maintains.. Guala, a specialized unit made up of police officers, soldiers and public prosecutors, has had some success, but the group benefits from almost full impunity because of the ineffective justice system” (Le Monde 25 Feb. 2008). Although the number of kidnappings has decreased, the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in her 29 February 2008 report on the situation in Colombia that the systematic kidnapping [by FARC] and the prolonged captivity of hostages are a matter of grave concern” (UN 29 Feb. 2008, Para. 45).

Most of the sources consulted by the Research Directorate do not distinguish the various types of kidnapping in their statistics. However, Colombia's Congress adopted a law, Ley 40 de 1993, that sets out categories of kidnappings, including kidnappings for extortion (secuestro extorsivo) committed for economic or political purposes (Colombia 20 Jan. 1993, Art. 1-2; see also FSD 2007b, 25).

The only source consulted that identifies the purpose of the kidnappings claimed by FARC is the Colombian online weekly Cambio, which states in a 28 November 2007 article that no ransom was demanded in four out of eleven kidnappings attributed to FARC in 2006. Instead, the kidnappers wanted to use the victim's business or bank accounts to launder money (Cambio 28 Nov. 2007).

FARC's areas of influence

FARC's presence is felt primarily in the coca plantation regions in southeast Colombia (France2.fr 13 Dec. 2007). According to Cambio, the rebel group has withdrawn to the areas along the borders with Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama and its best fighters defend the territories where FARC is traditionally present – Guaviare and Caqueta departments, the southern part of Meta department, and Putumayo and Narino departments (28 Nov. 2007).

According to the FSD report, even in cases in which FARC played a key role in the violence surrounding the local and regional elections on 28 October 2007 in the municipalities where the group is active, it was unable to sabotage the electoral process, which ended up being the least violent electoral process of the last 10 years (FSD 2007a, 5).

As of February 2008, “[f]ighting continues between [FARC] and ELN in the departments of Arauca, Cauca and Narino, and this has led to an increase in the number of murders” (UN 29 Feb. 2008, Para. 48). According to the International Crisis Group, “the ELN and the FARC cohabit in the higher regions of Serrania de San Lucas in southern Bolivar, the Serrania de Perija in Cesar and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Magdalena” (11 Oct. 2007, 5). The same is true in the departments of Choco, Valle del Cauca and Cauca, where the ELN works

with FARC and other armed groups to facilitate drug trafficking (International Crisis Group 11 Oct. 2007, 5). According to the daily Liberation, fighting resumed between FARC and ELN in January 2008 in the department of Arauca (13 Feb. 2008). Reuters reports that there was also violence in Cali and in the port of Buenaventura, a strategic location for the transportation of drugs, and that in those two cities, 103 FARC members surrendered to authorities in February 2007 (7 Feb. 2007). According to Cambio, FARC no longer operates in the departments of Cundinamarca and Boyaca (Cambio 28 Nov. 2007).

According to the director of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, CODHES), a Colombian non-governmental organization (CODHES n.d.), FARC has moved into the departments of Amazonas, Guainia, Vichada and Vaupes in order to expand their territory in the Orinoquia region (Cambio 28 Nov. 2007).

According to Cambio, the active FARC fronts have been [translation] “hard hit” (ibid.). Twenty of those fronts have reportedly disappeared completely, and the Teofilo Forero mobile column, described as the best elite force in the history of FARC, has been almost entirely dismantled (ibid.). Cambio also reports that [translation] “the 19th and 35th Fronts, which operate in the regions of Montes de Maria and Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria, have completely disappeared, because their members have either deserted or died” and that [translation] “the dismantling of troops has forced FARC to withdraw to the south of the country” (ibid.).

According to the International Crisis Group, “FARC has been forced to retreat to a more traditional guerrilla war” (20 Oct. 2006, 1). In addition, an article in the Panamanian newspaper La Prensa, translated into French and republished in Courrier international, indicates that FARC’s 57th Front has again become a very mobile and more clandestine guerrilla group, according to the Front’s leaders (17 Jan. 2008).

Decline of FARC members

According to the Colombian government, FARC “has gone into irreversible decline” (BBC 1 Feb. 2008). Cambio also notes a steady weakening of the organization (29 Nov. 2007). On 1 March 2008, the Colombian army killed FARC’s number two leader, Raul Reyes [whose real name was Luis Edgar Devia (BBC 1 Mar. 2008)], in Ecuador (Reuters 4 Mar. 2008; ibid. 7 Mar. 2008; AFP 7 Mar. 2008). On 7 March 2008 in Colombia, Colombian forces killed Ivan Rios [whose real name was Manuel Munoz Ortiz (AFP 7 Mar. 2008)], who was another FARC leader and a member of the organization’s secretariat (Reuters 7 Mar. 2008; AFP 7 Mar. 2008).

However, an independent expert and former Colombian presidential adviser, interviewed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) following the death of two FARC leaders, stated that, in his opinion, FARC is still capable of enduring and has already demonstrated its ability to adapt (9 Mar. 2008). In addition, according to the BBC, the death of three key FARC members in 2007 affected only specific units, not the entire organization (BBC 1 Feb. 2008).

The number of FARC fighters has decreased from 16,900 to 8,900, according to figures published by Cambio (28 Nov. 2007), but the government estimates that there are currently between 6,000 and 8,000 rebels (BBC 1 Feb. 2008; see also L’Express 22 Jan. 2008).

Nevertheless, the BBC reports that few independent analysts accept the government’s estimate of 6,000 fighters (BBC 1 Feb. 2008). According to Le Monde, there are fewer than 9,000 fighters (21 Feb. 2008), and AFP mentions 17,000 fighters (21 Jan. 2008). According to FARC, the organization had more than 20,000 members in 2007 (Le Figaro 15 Dec. 2007).

An article in the daily newspaper, The Washington Post indicates that “a report by a coalition of 187 human rights groups said there are allegations that between mid-2002 and mid-2007, 955 civilians were killed and classified as guerrillas fallen in combat – a 65 percent increase over the previous five years, when 577 civilians were reported killed by troops” (The Washington Post 30 Mar. 2008).

...The activities of FARC, currently the richest active guerrilla group according to Le Monde (21 Feb. 2008), are reportedly financed largely by drug trafficking, since kidnappings and extortion are in decline (Cambio 28 Nov. 2007) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008, COL102779.FE – *Colombia: The situation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), including their areas of influence and operation; their targets and the electronic sharing of information (2006 – February 2008)*, 9 April – Attachment 17).

3. Are there any reports indicating that FARC or other leftist groups still make demands for money in urban areas such as Bogotá?

The ICG report cited earlier explains that extortion remains a significant source of income for the FARC, particularly in border regions, and that cases of extortion are believed to have increased despite underreporting on this issue:

While not as pervasive as five or six years ago, kidnapping and extortion remain important sources of income for the FARC, especially in border regions. Responding to sustained pressure, guerrilla units involved in such activity have modified their methods: victims are no longer held in sanctuaries for long periods but are moved constantly to avoid detection, and ransom demands are less substantial. Extortion is believed to have increased, although this is difficult to corroborate due to underreporting. Civil society sources also believe criminal gangs or individual FARC members are acting at times on their own, using the movement's name for personal gain (International Crisis Group 2009, *Ending Colombia's FARC Conflict: Dealing The Right Card*, Latin America Report N°30, 26 March, p. 12 – Attachment 4).

An article dated 2 March 2009 claims that the FARC have been reduced to about 7,000 – 10,000 members and pushed back to Colombia's jungle and mountain areas. However, a FARC extortion network has been blamed for the bombing of a Blockbuster store in Bogotá which resulted in the deaths of two people. The article also briefly mentions FARC's urban militias:

Colombian troops killed a FARC rebel commander accused of ordering extortion and bombings around Bogota, including small blasts at Carrefour supermarkets and Blockbuster stores, authorities said on Monday.

The death of Jose de Jesus Guzman, alias “Gaitan”, during weekend combat was the latest strike against the weakened Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as the FARC, Latin America's oldest left-wing insurgency.

Guzman, a 26-year FARC veteran, was recently entrusted with reorganizing the rebels' urban militias and had been an ally of top FARC commander “Mono Jojoy”, the presidential office said.

Once a peasant army of 17,000 controlling large portions of Colombia, the FARC have been reduced to between 7,000 and 10,000 combatants and forced back into remote jungles and mountains to evade military assaults and bombardments.

The FARC lost three top commanders last year, suffered from desertions and military setbacks. A surprise army operation in July rescued 15 of its key political hostages, including French-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt and three Americans.

Ten members of Guzman's "Antonio Narino" guerrilla unit were killed during combat last week in Cundinamarca province near Bogota and one of the group's key kidnapping operators was captured by the army, the military says.

Officials blamed a FARC extortion network for a recent bombing on a Bogota Blockbuster store that killed two people. Blockbuster stores and the Carrefour chain have been hit with small explosions or firebombs police link to extortion.

A recent security report said the FARC could try to increase urban attacks to pressure the government while trying to regain political space with hostage releases. Analysts say rebels are turning increasingly to extortion as kidnapping becomes more difficult under military pressure ('Govt troops kill FARC rebels commander' 2009, *France 24*, 2 March <http://www.france24.com/en/20090302-government-troops-kill-rebel-commander-farc-jesus-guzman-gaitan-colombia> – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 18).

An article dated 28 January 2009 also describes the bombing of the Bogotá Blockbuster store by the FARC, claiming that the attack was "part of a scheme to extort money for protection from businesses in the capitol city". The article highlights a rise in extortion by the FARC, however indicates that this may be a sign of the group's weakening:

FARC has turned to an old form of income now that the Colombian governments crackdown has hurt their kidnapping business. Colombian officials say that the bombing that killed two people on Wednesday was a part of an extortion scheme aimed at funding the leftist rebel group. The bombing outside of a Bogota Blockbuster is part of a scheme to extort money for protection from businesses in the capitol city. The Colombian governments campaign against the rebels has pushed them out of the cities and into the mountains and country side.

The Colombian government in response announced a plan to form an elite group aimed at eliminating the extortion business. The government of President Alvaro Uribe has severely limited the groups kidnapping plots used to raise funds. International pressure, especially from the Venezuelan government of President Hugo Chavez, has caused the FARC to scale back its kidnapping operations. Even supporters of the FARC within Colombia have worked to negotiate with the FARC and Colombian government to end the practice of kidnapping for ransom. Leftist Senator Piedad Cordoba has negotiated recent hostage releases between the two.

Her most recent negotiation will lead to release this Sunday. The FARC has only asked that their be an international presence at the release. The request is perhaps in part a response to the actions taken during last years highly publicized release of Ingrid Betancourt. In that release the government operatives were wearing Red Cross bibs during the rescue. A Red Cross missionary group from Brazil will be used to transport the group.

The Colombian government says the releases are a further sign of the weakening of the group. The rise of extortion as means of fund raising is also seen as a sign of weakness. The hope is the elite unit will eliminate that weak funding source (Garza, V. R. 2009, 'As Colombian Government Cracksdown on FARC, They Turn to Extortion as New Income Source', *Impunity Watch*, 28 January http://www.impunitywatch.com/m/impunity_watch_south_amer/2009/01/brazilian-human-rights-activist-is-murdered.html?locale=en_US – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 19).

An article dated 17 March 2009 similarly indicates that the Bogotá Blockbuster store bombing appeared to be related to guerrilla extortion operations, citing officials who claimed that “Blockbuster had reported that the Colombian franchise of the company had been the victim of extortion demands that it refused to pay”. In addition, the article claims that although the FARC’s strategy is to concentrate on urban areas, a high number of desertions and deaths of FARC members in recent years has forced the group to move their urban militias to the jungle areas, thus weakening their presence in the major cities:

The taps have run dry in the Colombian city of Villavicencio.

For more than a week, residents have been making do with buckets of water from trucks that circle the neighborhoods after the latest in a spate of urban bomb attacks that signal a shift in leftist guerrillas’ strategy.

The flow of water to Villavicencio, a city of 300,000 on Colombia’s eastern plains, was cut March 7 when three bombs tore through the main water line. Two days later, two policemen patrolling the water plant were severely injured by land mines.

The government offered a reward of \$40,000 for information leading to the capture of those responsible. But Gen. Freddy Padilla, commander of Colombia’s armed forces, says he has little doubt it was the guerrilla commander operating in that area who ordered the attack.

The bombing of the pipeline, he says, is part of a new campaign by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia’s largest rebel group, to make its power felt in the cities from which they had been pushed out through a sustained military and security campaign over the past five years.

“The FARC are opting to organize terrorist acts to show their presence as a force to the people of Colombia,” General Padilla said in an interview. Based on military interceptions of FARC communications, the new strategy has been dubbed “Plan Renacer” or “Plan Rebirth.”

Guerrillas regrouping

The FARC are regrouping after a series of severe setbacks last year, including the rescue of some of their more prized hostages and the deaths of three leaders, including the top commander and founder Manuel “Suceshot” Marulanda. Alfonso Cano, a more city-savvy guerrilla, took over the command of the rebel force, which the military estimates has some 8,000 fighters.

Officials said they are preparing for a possible major attack on March 26, the anniversary of Mr. Marulanda’s death, apparently from natural causes.

The bomb that disrupted the aqueduct followed several other such attacks:

- On Jan. 16, a car packed with 88 pounds of explosives blew up at a shopping mall in the south-central city of Neiva.
- On Feb. 1, a car bomb blasted through the regional headquarters of the police intelligence service in the southwestern city of Cali, killing two. In September, a similar bomb went off in front of Cali’s palace of justice.
- On March 6, a blast ripped through a hardware store and several other businesses in Neiva.

Some smaller attacks, Padilla says, appear to be related to extortion operations by the guerrillas. In February, a small bomb killed two people at a Blockbuster video store in a well-

heeled neighborhood of Bogotá. Officials said Blockbuster had reported that the Colombian franchise of the company had been the victim of extortion demands that it refused to pay.

The FARC's strategy is to avoid combat situations with the military and concentrate on quick, clean attacks on infrastructure and urban areas.

Román Ortiz, a security analyst with the Ideas para la Paz (Ideas for Peace), a think tank in Bogotá, says the FARC are discovering what groups like Hamas in Israel and Shiite militias in Iraq have already concluded: that the cities are better than the jungles to wage war.

"The new jungles for the FARC are concrete jungles," he says. "When you cause damage in a city, the political impact is much larger than in the countryside."

Mr. Ortiz adds that, with the urban attacks, the FARC face a strategic dilemma. "They are probably looking for a balance between small attacks that are irrelevant and large-scale action that could in turn deepen the rejection of the population," he says.

Most of the recent blasts appear to have been calculated to cause the fewest civilian deaths, since most were detonated in the middle of the night. But the attack in Villavicencio was felt by 90 percent of the population there.

But Padilla says the desertions, captures, and the deaths of many FARC fighters over the past several years had forced the guerrillas to call on their urban militias to take up arms in the jungle, weakening their position in the cities.

"They tapped out their militias," he says. But the urban operatives that remain are "vital for their survival, because the militias are where they get their intelligence from and where they get their logistical support from – the ones who maintain connection with the population," Padilla adds.

Police successes

Weakened urban structures may be why police have been so successful in making arrests in the urban bombing cases. Less than two weeks after the Cali bomb in February, police captured six men believed to be members of the FARC's Manuel Cepeda Front. Less than a week after the February bomb in Neiva, two men were captured.

The FARC, Colombia's oldest and largest leftist guerrilla group, was founded in 1964 and reached a peak of nearly 20,000 fighters. After controlling large swaths of the country, a sustained military campaign under President Alvaro Uribe has pushed them into a retreat from major cities and diminished their military might (Brodzinsky, S. 2009, 'Colombia – Security: In strategic shift, Colombia's FARC targets cities', International News Safety Institute website, source: Christian Science Monitor, 17 March http://www.newssafety.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12181%3Ain-strategic-shift-colombias-farc-targets-cities&catid=54%3Acolombia-security&Itemid=100274 – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 20).

A *Reuters* article dated 15 February 2008 describes the deaths of FARC members as the result of the army's offensive against an extortion scheme which targeted the cousin of former President Cesar Gaviria, near the city of Ibagué:

Colombian soldiers killed 5 rebels in a gun battle as the army broke up an extortion scheme in which the guerrillas demanded protection money from a cousin of former President Cesar Gaviria, authorities said on Friday.

The members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, were killed on Thursday after receiving thousands of dollars from the victim of the extortion plot near the central city of Ibagué, the army said.

An army spokesman declined to provide the name of the victim, but said she is a cousin of the former president.

Gaviria, chief of Colombia's opposition Liberal Party, was president from 1990 to 1994 and headed the Organization of American States from 1994 to 2004. His sister, Liliana Gaviria, was killed in a botched FARC kidnapping in 2006.

The FARC started as a leftist peasant movement in the 1960s and is now chiefly funded by Colombia's multibillion-dollar cocaine trade as well as kidnapping for ransom.

The rebels are being pushed onto the defensive under President Alvaro Uribe's U.S.-backed security policies, which have cut urban crime and attracted investment to this Andean country (Bronstein, H. 2008, 'Colombia scuttles rebel extortion bid, 5 FARC dead', *Reuters*, 15 February <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN15600927> – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 21).

A June 2008 report on the peace process in Colombia by the Organization of American States identifies cases of extortion committed at various levels in urban cities such as Bogotá and Medellín:

The presence of illegal armed groups in the areas of influence of demobilized self-defense forces has direct repercussions for the civilian population, restricting its ability to travel, exercising social control, and implementing an illegal, extortion-based economy. Generally, in such contexts, inhabitants who resist the armed faction's domination are threatened and, in some cases, murdered.

...The Mission is concerned about information regarding the presence of armed factions on the outskirts of some urban areas, such as Ibagué (Tolima), Cúcuta (Norte de Santander), Valledupar (Cesar), Medellín (Antioquia), Bucaramanga (Santander), and Bogotá. In these cities, statements have been given regarding extortions at different levels.

... In view of the pressure exerted by law enforcement agencies, illegal armed factions are responding with actions that seek to reduce the intensity of operations and prevent the recovery of territory and the reestablishment of institutions. Law enforcement personnel and judicial authorities have recently been murdered in some urban areas where the security situation has been impacted by a possible realignment of armed outlaws. This dynamic has occurred in Santa Marta (Magdalena), / Valledupar (Cesar), / and Cúcuta (Norte de Santander) ('Eleventh quarterly report of the Secretary General to the Permanent Council on the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OEA)' 2008, Organization of American States website, 21 June, pp. 5-6

http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/ENGLISH/HIST_08/CP20723E04.DOC – Accessed 27 January 2009 – Attachment 22).

A report on displacement in Colombia dated 3 July 2009 indicates that both the ELN and the FARC-EP employ methods including "massacres of civilians, assassinations, kidnapping for ransom or political gain, torture, extortion, forced confinement and forced recruitment" in their claimed "fight for political and social equity", although it is not clear as to whether this occurs predominantly in urban or rural areas (The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2009, *Colombia: New displacement continues, response still ineffective*, 3 July, p. 13 – Attachment 23).

An IRB response dated 12 April 2007 provides information on kidnappings for extortion in rural and urban regions, particularly in Bogotá, between February 2006 and February 2007, claiming that the FARC and the ELN were the main perpetrators of such activities. It is reported that in 2006, the number of kidnappings for extortion decreased from 766 to 621, with 22 of these occurring in Bogotá:

Kidnappings and extortion

The Free Country Foundation (Fundacion Pais Libre), a non-profit organization that provides assistance to kidnap victims (AP 17 Feb. 2007), presented statistics from the National Fund for the Defence of Individual Freedom (Fondo Nacional para la Defensa de la Libertad Personal, FONDELIBERTAD) in a report on kidnappings in Colombia (Fundacion Pais Libre 2006). According to that report, in 2006, four departments (Tolima, Antioquia, Bogota and Meta) stood apart from the others, with over 61 kidnappings; between 42 and 48 took place in three other departments (Cundinamarca, Cauca and Valle) (Fundacion Pais Libre 2006, 6). That same report indicates that, of 687 kidnappings in 2006, 407 individuals were released, 147 were rescued, 30 died in captivity and 11 escaped (ibid., 2).

Statistics provided by the Presidential Program Against Extortion and Kidnappings (Programa Presidencial contra la Extorsion y el Secuestro) indicate that, during the first 11 months of 2006, the total number of kidnappings dropped from 766 to 621, a decrease of 19 percent compared with the same period in 2005 (Colombia 22 Dec. 2006). For the first 11 months of 2006, the number of kidnappings for extortion dropped from 360 to 243 (ibid.). In 2006, the departments most affected by that type of kidnapping were Antioquia (32) and Valle (27), as well as the city of Bogota (22) (ibid.).

Olga Lucia Gomez, Director of the Free Country Foundation, pointed out that statistics provided by the government are not as reliable as they were five years ago (AP 17 Feb. 2007). She indicated that her organization provided support in approximately 2,000 cases in 2006 and that at least 40 percent of them were not registered with the government (ibid.).

The key perpetrators of the kidnappings for extortion were, on the one hand, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) (62 cases) and the National Liberation Army (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional, ELN) (39 cases), and, on the other hand, small-scale criminals (91 cases) (ibid.).

With respect to the situation in the cities, the Foundation for Security and Democracy (Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia) indicates that 27 kidnappings took place during the fourth quarter of 2006 in Barranquilla, Cartagena, Medellin, Bogota (16 cases), Cucuta and Cali (Feb. 2007). In the fourth quarter of 2004, the capital city had three kidnappings, compared with seven during the same period in 2005 (Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia Feb. 2007). As for extortion cases, 34 of 75 cases reported in the six cities above took place in Bogota (ibid.).

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) indicates that the kidnappings, with or without extortion, took place primarily in rural areas and that “businessmen and public figures are targets . . . [for] guerrillas and common criminals” (20 Nov. 2006).

In May 2006, EFE indicated that over the course of a few days a number of relatives of politicians had been kidnapped, including a cousin of former president Andres Pastrana, and that the sister of former president Cesar Garcia was assassinated during a kidnapping attempt in April 2006 (9 May 2006).

Another EFE article reports that, according to the Central Directorate of the Judicial Police (Direccion Central de Policia Judicial, DIJIN), demobilized members of paramilitary groups

in the state of Putumayo had regrouped under a new militia and was practising extortion (22 Nov. 2006). Reuters indicates that, according to a Colombian government report, at least 10 new gangs made up of former paramilitaries were formed between February and August of 2006 (31 July 2006). These gangs practise extortion and drug trafficking (Reuters 31 July 2006).

Kidnapping and extortion protection measures

The Web site of the Presidential Program Against Extortion and Kidnappings indicates that about 400 people were to receive training on kidnapping and extortion investigation methods at the start of March 2007 (Colombia 6 March 2007).

In May 2006, the Administrative Security Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS) indicated that 16 of its officers were fired because of their involvement in various crimes, including kidnapping and extortion (AP 21 May 2006). Associated Press reported that director Andres Penate had fired 70 agents since his appointment to DAS in October 2006 (ibid.).

Articles from the DAS Web site provide details about the arrest, by DAS members, of guerrillas known for their involvement in kidnappings and extortion (Colombia 19 Jan. 2007; ibid. 12 Jan. 2007) and announce the dismantling of a criminal gang that was practising extortion in the municipality of Ibagué (department of Tolima) (ibid. 29 Sept. 2006).

EFE indicates that a police operation in Antioquia led to the arrest for extortion of a group of 21 people with ties to paramilitary groups (14 Mar. 2007). In August 2006, during a military operation, six men who had just kidnapped a merchant in the city of Baranquilla were killed (EFE 15 Aug. 2006).

In April 2006, the Colombian national police announced that Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom (Grupos de Accion Unificada por la Libertad Personal, GAULA), the army and the police were working together on an awareness campaign to stop kidnappings and extortion in the department of Huila (Colombia 19 Apr. 2006) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *COL102407.FE – Colombia: Kidnappings and extortion in rural and urban regions, especially Bogota, and protection available to victims (February 2006 - February 2007)*, 12 April – Attachment 24).

In addition, a UK Home Office Operational Guidance Note on Colombia dated 23 December 2008 provides the following information on claims for asylum based on extortion and blackmail committed by leftist guerrilla groups such as FARC:

3.7 Criminality, extortion and blackmail

3.7.1 Some applicants may make an asylum and/or human rights claim based on ill-treatment amounting to persecution (usually blackmail and extortion) at the hands of the FARC or other guerrilla groups.

3.7.2 The most common type of claim is being the victim of extortion and/or kidnapping. These types of claim are most often from landowners, particularly farmers. The applicant will usually state that the FARC has made the threats. Most often they claim that there has been one or more attempts made on their life. Also, they tend to claim that reports have been made to the police to no avail. Documentation is sometimes presented, and can take the form of threatening letters, which could be hand written, words/letters cut from newspapers to form sentences or letters written on computers. There is generally no common form. Police reports from Fiscalía are also often

presented, and these will generally state that the incident has been reported. Newspaper articles are sometimes submitted.

3.7.3 Although kidnapping, both for ransom and for political reasons, continued to diminish in 2007, it remained a serious problem. Kidnapping for ransom reportedly remained a major source of revenue for both the FARC and ELN in 2007 and the FARC continued to hold political hostages taken in previous years.

3.7.4 Government statistics from 2007 indicated that there was a 29 per cent decrease in the number of kidnappings. The National Foundation for the Defense of Personal Liberty (Fondelibertad) reported that during 2007 guerrilla groups kidnapped 149 persons (38 per cent of those in which a perpetrator was identified), the FARC 121 persons, and ELN 28 persons. Fondelibertad also reported that new illegal groups were responsible for kidnappings during the year, though numbers were not differentiated from kidnappings due to common crime, since the government statistics considered new illegal groups as criminals. There were numerous reports in 2007 that guerrilla groups killed kidnapping victims.

3.7.5 Sufficiency of protection. The state authorities are willing to offer protection to such individuals, however their capacity to actually provide it is limited due to the Government's weak authority in some regions and inability to counter the influence in parts of the country of the FARC, ELN, and paramilitaries who refuse to demobilise. Whilst the new illegal groups lack the organisation, reach and military capacity of the former AUC, guerrilla organisations continue to operate nationwide and are well-resourced to dominate areas in which they see a particular interest. The state therefore cannot currently offer sufficient protection from these groups.

3.7.6 Internal relocation. Ongoing military operations and the occupation of certain rural areas restrict freedom of movement in conflict areas. New illegal groups, paramilitaries that refuse to demobilise, and FARC and ELN guerrillas continue to establish illegal checkpoints on rural highways, but enhanced government security presence along major highways has reduced the number of kidnappings (UK Home Office 2008, *Operational Guidance Note – Colombia*, 23 December, pp. 6-7 – Attachment 25).

4. Are there any reports of a group known by the name “urban militias FARC-EP” or some similar name?

‘FARC-EP’ refers to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo); and is also more commonly known as FARC.

A Wikipedia article¹ on the FARC-EP explains that the group added ‘EP’ (Ejército del Pueblo, or People’s Army) to its name in 1982 during its Seventh Guerrilla Conference, in order to reflect the group’s intended progression from guerrilla warfare to more conventional military activities. The article also states that “FARC-EP is organized along military lines and includes several urban fronts or militia cells” (‘Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia’

¹ Users should be aware that [Wikipedia](#) is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is written collaboratively by volunteers. The Research Service recommends that users of Wikipedia familiarise themselves with the regulatory practices which Wikipedia employs as a preventative measure against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. For more information, see the recommended background reading available in the [Wikipedia Topical Information Package](#).

2009, *Wikipedia*, 5 November

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Armed_Forces_of_Colombia – Accessed 6 November 2009 – Attachment 26).

The Political Handbook of the World cited above indicates that “FARC’s urban wing is known as the Bolivarian Militias (Milicias Bolivarianas), which have been significantly weakened by the Uribe government’s urban-focused security policies” (‘Colombia’ in *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition* 2009, CQ Press Electronic Library http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2009_Colombia&type=toc&num=5 – Accessed 30 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

An article dated 14 November 2008 from the Global Research website cites Latin American expert James Petras, who explains that FARC-EP is a “highly organized 20,000 member guerrilla army with several hundred thousand local militia and supporters” which includes “hundreds of village and urban militia units”:

Noted Latin American expert James Petras calls the FARC-EP the “longest standing, largest peasant-based guerrilla movement in the world (that was) founded in 1964 by two dozen peasant activists (to defend) autonomous rural communities from” Colombian military and paramilitary violence. It’s a “highly organized 20,000 member guerrilla army with several hundred thousand local militia and supporters....” It now numbers about 10,000 – 15,000 “distributed throughout the country” and still a force to be reckoned with.

When its leader, Manuel Marulanda, died in March, Petras paid homage to him in a powerfully moving article. He explained that for over “60 years he organized peasant movements, rural communities and, when all legal democratic channels were effectively (and brutally) closed, he built the most powerful sustained guerrilla army and supporting underground militias in Latin America.” Besides its fighters, it included (and still largely does) “several hundred thousand peasant-activists, (and) hundreds of village and urban militia units” united against the most brutally repressive Latin American government (regardless of who leads it) and his vast supportive entourage (Lendman, S. 2008, ‘Targeting Hugo Chavez’, Global Research website, 14 November <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10945> – Accessed 6 November 2009 – Attachment 27).

A Human Rights Watch report published in 2003 outlines the structure of the FARC-EP, and describes its urban militias, which are also referred to as “Bolivarian militias (milicias bolivarianos) and popular militias (milicias populares)”. These urban militias engage in extortion, recruitment and sabotage, among other activities, and were thought to number approximately 10,000 in 2003:

The FARC-EP is Latin America’s oldest guerrilla group. According to the U.S. State Department, FARC-EP guerrillas now count over 16,500 trained and armed fighters among their fighting force. That number is more than double the 1998 estimates of the group’s size.

Not included in this figure are the FARC-EP urban militias: known as Bolivarian militias (milicias bolivarianos) and popular militias (milicias populares). The Bolivarians alternate between civilian and military attire and receive military training. Members of popular militias dress in civilian clothes, often live at home, and engage in civilian activities even as they gather intelligence, sabotage, assassinate, kidnap, collect “taxes,” obtain supplies, and recruit. They do not normally receive military training, and are usually provided with handguns rather than combat weapons. Together, the FARC-EP’s militias are believed to number about 10,000, bringing its total force to around 26,500.

In an interview with an unidentified journalist, FARC-EP Commander Manuel Marulanda Vélez stated that the two types of militia differed in their combat readiness. “The popular militias are made up of those whose age or physical condition prevents them from participating in direct combat with the enemy. For example, the elderly and children. The Bolivarian militias, on the other hand, have a military structure and are composed of people suited for direct physical combat” (Human Rights Watch 2003, “*You’ll Learn Not to Cry*”: *Child Combatants in Colombia*, September, p. 23 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf> – Accessed 10 November 2009 – Attachment 28).

A response provided by the IRB on 25 January 2000 provides detailed information on the FARC’s urban militias, who are defined as “groups of ununiformed guerrillas operating from or within a city”. The response explains that the FARC’s urban militia network is called ‘Milicias Bolivarianas’, while the ‘Milicias Populares’ are linked to the ELN:

Various sources consulted refer to Colombian “urban militias” and “commandos” of urban militias, although these terms are used generically or colloquially, not as proper names of groups. The various sources coincide in describing urban militias (milicias urbanas) as groups of ununiformed guerrillas operating from or within a city.

A 1999 report on urban militias in Colombia explains that these groups ceased some years ago to be purely logistic support branches of guerrilla organizations; they are now self-financing and militarily semi-autonomous groups, present in many of the main cities of the country (El Espectador 14 May 1999). The groups, also referred to as “urban cells” (células urbanas), reportedly grew considerably over the last few years, exercising a level of control over entire neighbourhoods or communities, throughout Colombian capital cities and other urban centres, financing their operations through armed propaganda actions and toll-excising, kidnapping and extortion (ibid.). The report, which cites intelligence sources from the Colombian security forces, states that the militias blend easily among the inhabitants of a neighbourhood, since the latter do not dare to identify them due to threats and intimidation (ibid.).

An earlier report focusing on militia distribution in Bogota cites the head of the Special Operations Unit of the Security Administration Department (DAS), stating that urban militias do not limit their operations to specific neighbourhoods or urban sectors, and some of their leaders live in upscale areas of the city (ibid. 3 Dec. 1998). The urban militias of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Ejército Nacional de Liberación (ELN) “coexist” (conviven) in some areas and have been detected in municipalities attached to Bogota (ibid.). The report states that the “political work” of urban militias includes indoctrination of youths, developing plans and infiltrating members into different state institutions, while the “operational work” (operativo) includes gathering information and following possible kidnap victims (who are handed afterwards to rural detachments), sabotage, propaganda, inciting violence during demonstrations, and terrorist acts as required by their leadership (ibid.).

The authorities do not have precise figures on the size of urban militias, but estimate that there is approximately one urban militia group for every guerrilla front, and that each urban cell has an area commander, who communicates with leaders of the fronts and coordinates the detachments under his command (ibid. 14 May 1999). Specific detachments of committees perform financial, intelligence and combat operations, the latter including armed attacks and kidnappings (ibid.).

Each guerrilla group has its own urban militias in different regions of the country, but the FARC has the largest network, with its Milicias Bolivarianas which have been operating in the main capital cities since 1987 (ibid.). The next largest network is that of the Milicias

Populares of the ELN, followed by the Milicias Obreras of the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), and other smaller dissident groups which began as branches of guerrilla groups but have evolved into organized crime groups (ibid.).

Some urban militia groups appear to be branches of a guerrilla front or consider themselves independently-named fronts. For example, a report on threats and attacks against the mayor of Cali reports that FARC militias threatening to kill him described themselves as the “urban front Manuel Cepeda Vargas,” while an ELN group that attempted to kill the mayor described itself as “urban militias of the Jose Maria Becerra front” (ibid. 4 Oct. 1999).

In recent years, urban militias have been expanding their presence throughout the main cities of Colombia and other smaller urban centres, and authorities regard Medellin as the city with the highest concentration of urban militias (ibid. 14 May 1999). These include the Comandos Armados Populares (Armed Popular Commandos, CAP), which originally formed part of the ELN urban militias and currently operate in various areas of the capital of Antioquia; it is particularly known for its extortion of merchants and businessmen, and at least one public transportation company of the city is required to pay a certain amount for every bus that passes through a specific area (ibid.).

The October 1998 Human Rights Watch Report, *War Without Quarter: Colombia and International Humanitarian Law*, available at Regional Documentation Centres, reports in Chapter V (Guerrilla Violations of International Humanitarian Law) on the use of urban militias by FARC, ELN and other groups.

COL29839.E of 7 August 1998 contains additional references to the urban militias of the FARC and the ELN. Information on protection available to persons threatened with kidnapping by guerrillas can be found in COL33287.E of 24 January 2000 and previous Responses. In addition to the information provided in the latter Response, the special anti-kidnapping task force (known as GAULA, mentioned in previous Responses) in the city of Medellin had dealt several recent blows to the FARC urban militias in the city, with 95 of its kidnappers captured and 50 victims freed over 18 months as of late-July 1999 (El Heraldito 31 July 1999). However, after capturing seven FARC urban militia members in the morning of 30 July 1999, the GAULA facilities in Medellin were bombed by FARC urban militias a few hours later in reprisal, destroying the site and several surrounding buildings, killing at least 10 people and injuring more than 30 (ibid.; Weekly Update on the Americas 1 Aug. 1999) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, *COL33574.E – Colombia: The Comando Milicias Urbanas (Urban Militia Command or Commando); whether it is related to the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC); whether it threatens businessmen, state protection available for people threatened; and whether this group operates outside Colombia*, 25 January – Attachment 29).

An IRB response dated 22 July 2003 cites a university professor who indicates that both the FARC and the ELN have created urban militias to work in addition to their regular fighters. In 2003, it was believed that FARC had approximately 12,000 urban militias who were situated predominantly in Bogotá and Medellín:

The FARC and ELN have a vast network of intelligence that they have been known to share when it is expedient to do so, particularly in areas of the country where they are aligned en masse against government entities, as is the case, for instance, in the oil production regions of northeastern Colombia, such as in Arauca department (7 July 2003).

Furthermore, according to a number of sources, the FARC, ELN and AUC have a significant presence in Colombia's urban centres, including Bogotá (ibid.; Georgetown University 30 June 2003; AI USA 9 July 2003). For example, in the view of the Georgetown University adjunct professor,

Each [of these groups] has instituted a strategy of creating urban militias connected to their regular armed fighters. Indeed the FARC may have as many as 12,000 urban militias, highly concentrated in Bogotá and Medellín but also in many of the medium sized urban centers such as Bucaramanga and Villavicencio. The AUC also has close ties with urban militias and youth gangs. The militias from both the left and the right are not as closely scrutinized or controlled and often degenerate into armed criminals and sicarios [hired killers] (30 June 2003) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, *COL41770.E – 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 avoid such threats by relocating to Bogotá or another region of the country (May 2002-July 2003)*, 22 July – Attachment 30).

A 2001 article from the Workers World website describes the involvement of FARC-EP's urban militia in a raid on a prison in Bogotá, in which 98 prisoners were released:

And in a spectacular raid in the capital city of Bogotá, a FARC-EP unit with support from its urban militia exploded a wall of a prison, releasing 98 prisoners "including guerrilla fighters from the FARC-EP, the ELN [National Liberation Army], and other social prisoners," according to a FARC-EP report (McInerney, A. 2001, 'FARC shows good will by releasing prisoners', Workers World website <http://www.workers.org/ww/2001/colombia0712.php> – Accessed 6 November 2009 – Attachment 31).

The US Department of State human rights report for 2003 explains that "[g]uerrillas used university campuses to plan, prepare, and carry out terrorist attacks", with some students at the National University in Bogotá found to be connected to "illegal student organizations linked to FARC urban militias":

On March 4, for example, police discovered 80 homemade explosive devices and a supply of ANFO--an explosive mix of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil--hidden in the biology lab of Bogota's Pedagogic University. On March 11, two medical students from the National University in Bogota detonated incendiary devices on Bogota's principal public bus system; investigators found guerrilla propaganda and other evidence at the students' residence connecting them to illegal student organizations linked to FARC urban militias. On April 29, the Prosecutor General's Office arrested and charged a FARC recruiter with coordinating the attacks and providing the students with explosives training (US Department of State 2004, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003 – Colombia*, February, Introduction, Section 2a – Attachment 32).

An article dated 24 April 2006 similarly describes the FARC's infiltration into universities, and attacks carried out by FARC's urban militias:

FARC rebels are recruiting Colombian university students and training them up to sabotage the forthcoming presidential elections, according to a Colombian weekly. The authorities had been working on this theory for some months but their suspicions were confirmed when two students were among five killed when a bomb accidentally exploded in an apartment in Bogota earlier this month. The recruitment drive also has longer term aims, the weekly explains: "To find new blood to fill the spaces left by the mass demobilizations and the pressure of the armed forces (...) and to provide candidates for a new generation of leaders". The following is the text of the report: "FARC University", published by Colombian weekly Cambio website on 24 April; subheadings as published:

At 23, Luis Alejandro Concha was already one of the FARC's [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] most prominent urban ringleaders. His leadership capacity and the persuasive

charisma he exerted on his classmates at Bogota's Universidad Libre [Free University] brought him rapidly to the fore as one of the most solid candidates to become the university militia chief in Bogota. Concha was in the sixth semester in the Faculty of Philosophy majoring in Political Science.

According to the authorities, Concha began his terrorist activities in mid-2005 and quickly rose in the FARC hierarchy. In November he disappeared from home with the excuse that he would be doing a placement linked to his programme, but his actual destination was the Caqueta jungle. There, members of the Teofilo Forero Mobile Column trained him in urban warfare tactics, sabotage and explosives.

Security agencies revealed to Cambio that Concha arrived at the guerrilla camp in the company of Ricardo Andres Ruiz Borja, a fellow student, who was part of his terrorist cell. Once his training was complete, Concha was notified by Carlos Antonio Lozada, a member of the Eastern Bloc's General Staff, and put in charge of coordinating the reorganization of the country's urban militias, of which he would be the new Bogota chief.

The identity and whereabouts of Concha, however, were a mystery to the authorities, who had been tracking the new FARC urban militias since 2004. "Concha was keeping a low profile, living with his parents and studying at a private university," one of the investigators told Cambio. "No-one suspected what he was really doing."

The day of the explosion, Luis Alejandro Concha took advantage of his parents' absence to meet Ricardo Ruiz and Jenny Patricia Vega, a student at Innca and one of the members of his urban cell. The objective, according to the investigation, was to build a bomb, intended for a use that is still unknown. Ruiz, who lived a few blocks from Concha's apartment, brought the materials. But something went wrong, with fatal results [all three were killed].

Key piece

The accidental explosion in apartment 201 was the piece that allowed authorities to confirm a hypothesis that they had been working on since the beginning of the year, when they collected evidence and statements that implicated university students at the sites of two attacks on pylons in the southern part of the city and later the attack on the TransMilenio mass transit system.

According to reports consulted by Cambio, this upsurge in terrorism is related to a new project that the FARC are calling Anarkos, which is being implemented in 13 of the country's universities. The aim is to build terrorist cells of three students each, reporting to an urban chief.

ACCORDING TO SECURITY AGENCIES, THE FARC HAVE RECRUITED STUDENTS IN 12 OF THE COUNTRY'S UNIVERSITIES. [upper case as published]

The documents state that Carlos Lozada himself gave the direct orders to chiefs in each city and that the immediate objective is to sabotage the presidential elections scheduled for next May. One of the investigators said: "The students are contacted at academic and cultural events. Once recruited, they are sent on a three-month course in camps in Meta, Huila and Caqueta. The final test is to organize and participate in the takeover of a town or in a terrorist attack in the city."

Cambio is aware of an email written by Lozada to Danilo Narino, whom the FARC placed in charge of selecting candidates for the courses in Bogota, which confirms this: "Here we have the conditions to conduct militia courses on an ongoing basis," the mail reads. "The ideal would be groups of eight. Hopefully those who have the profile for leadership positions or

have already been given responsibilities will be sent.” Up to now, findings indicate that approximately 1,000 students in the country could be involved in project Anarkos.

In addition to sabotaging the elections, investigators believe that the FARC are using this strategy to find new blood to fill the spaces left by the mass demobilizations and the pressure of the armed forces, and, while they are at it, to provide candidates for a new generation of leaders. For a start, the authorities are clear that their mission is to stop this new move.

Infiltrated universities

According to security agencies, the FARC have recruited students from the following 12 universities: National University; Distrital, or Bogota District University; Innca; Free University; Pedagogical University; [Pontifical] Javeriana [University] campuses in Bogota, Antioquia and Valle; the Industrial University of Santander, Surcolombiana in Neiva; Surcolombiana in Cartagena; and Tunja University. Today, the management of these institutions is working with the authorities to detect the cases and deal with the problem (‘FARC rebels recruiting Colombian university students, weekly reports’ 2006, *BBC Monitoring Service*, source: Cambio, 24 April – Attachment 33).

The ICG report cited above also identifies explosive attacks on shops allegedly committed by urban militias in Bogotá in 2008 and early 2009, and outlines a number of operations designed to disband urban militias in Medellín:

In Bogotá, explosive attacks, allegedly carried out by the eastern bloc urban militias, were recorded against several shops and other establishments throughout 2008 and January 2009.

...Operations “Mariscal”, “Meteoro”, “Orión” and “Marcial” were carried out to dismantle urban militias and fronts in the Medellín slums as well as the FARC and ELN fronts in eastern Antioquia department. These units had continuously disrupted traffic on the Bogotá-Medellín highway with roadblocks and attacked the electric grid (International Crisis Group 2009, *Ending Colombia’s FARC Conflict: Dealing The Right Card*, Latin America Report N°30, 26 March, pp. 11, 21 – Attachment 4).

In addition, an article dated 31 March 2009 explains that the FARC is attempting to revive its urban militias in Bogotá by outsourcing terrorist attacks to criminal gangs:

Colombia’s largest rebel group FARC is outsourcing terrorist attacks in Bogotá to common criminal gangs to revive its urban militias in the capital, House Representative for Bogotá Simón Gaviria Muñoz said Tuesday.

According to the Representative, “this guerrilla group is contracting criminal gangs to carry out these attacks to extort businessmen. This way they want to finance the reactivation of the urban militias.”

Gaviria says that according to government information, the FARC pays between 200 thousand (US\$78) and 300 thousand pesos (US\$117) for a bomb attack.

Colombia’s House of Representatives is discussing security in Bogotá Tuesday. Mayor Samuel Moreno was ordered to respond to the increase of crime in the capital (Alsema, A. 2009, ‘FARC outsources terrorist attacks’, *Colombia Reports*, 31 March <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/3431-farc-outsources-terrorist-attacks.html> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 34).

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