



# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Colombia – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

## 20 January 2025

### **More than 60 dead after rebel fighting; peace negotiations with ELN suspended**

On 17.01.25, Colombian President Gustavo Petro suspended peace talks with the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (National Liberation Army). This step was taken after clashes erupted between the ELN and splinter groups of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group in the Catatumbo region. According to the governor of Norte de Santander, William Villamizar, more than 30 people were killed and over 20 were injured in the clashes that took place on 16.01.25. According to the government's Ombudsman's Office that oversees human rights, the number of people killed had risen to more than 60 by 18.01.25, thirty-two individuals had been kidnapped and thousands of people had been displaced. At least five of those killed were former FARC guerrillas who were part of the 2016 peace agreement, the government said. According to the government spokesperson, members of the Estado Mayor Central (Central General Staff (EMC)), a dissident faction of the FARC that is engaged in separate peace talks with the government, were also attacked. In addition, many of the victims were family members of former FARC fighters. Hundreds of families have already sought refuge in the city of Cúcuta on the border with Venezuela and in the municipalities of Ocaña and Tibú. The government has declared its intention to send 300 more soldiers to the region in a bid to end the violence. The Ombudsman's Office has called on the ELN and other armed groups to allow humanitarian aid into the area and to cease all attacks on the civilian population.

The Catatumbo region is considered to be strategically important for drug trafficking due to its proximity to Venezuela, from where illegal armed groups export cocaine. In a statement released on 18.01.25, the ELN accused a faction of the FARC of having provoked the conflict by killing civilians. The FARC faction, however, did not comment publicly on the accusations, but announced that it had begun withdrawing its units the previous day in order to prevent a further escalation of violence.

Peace talks with the ELN have been ongoing since 2022 as part of President Petro's policy of Total Peace (Paz Total). An agreed ceasefire expired in August 2024 after months of stalled negotiations (cf. BN of 05.08.24).<sup>1</sup>

## 27 January 2025

### **State of emergency declared and military deployed to Norte de Santander**

On 24.01.25, Colombian President Gustavo Petro declared a state of emergency "estado de conmoción interior" following attacks carried out by the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (National Liberation Army) in the Catatumbo region in northeastern Colombia. This measure, which has not been applied since 2008, will be valid for 90 days and will only apply to the rural region of Catatumbo. The decree grants the president emergency powers to restore order. Accordingly, Petro can, inter alia, impose curfews, restrict traffic and take other steps that

would normally violate the civil rights of Colombians or require the approval of Congress. The government has reportedly also launched a military offensive against the ELN and has deployed more than 9,000 soldiers in the affected region.

These steps were taken following clashes between the ELN and splinter groups of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group in the region, in which at least 80 people were killed. Moreover, around 36,000 people have been displaced from their villages near the border with Venezuela (cf. BN of 20.01.25). In addition, at least 20 further deaths were reported on 20.01.25 in fighting that took place in the Amazon region in the south of the country.<sup>2</sup>

## **24 February 2025**

### **ELN stages armed strike in Chocó**

The guerrilla group National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)) called a 72-hour armed strike in the Chocó region from 18.02.25 to 21.02.25 and imposed curfews. As a result, shops were closed and public transport came to a standstill. Around 12,000 people were trapped in their communities and at least 3,500 were displaced from their homes. The ELN explained in a communiqué that the strike was a reaction to the alliances between the state, the military and mercenaries, working with right-wing paramilitary groups who they claim are attacking the rebels and community leaders. They say the government is also responsible for the poor humanitarian situation in Chocó and for the proliferation of paramilitaries such as the Clan del Golfo. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE)), the poverty rate in Chocó was 66.7 percent in 2023, with extreme poverty at 43.5 percent. In addition to the volatile economic situation, the region is particularly contested due to the presence of the ELN and the Clan del Golfo, which are competing for drug routes and illegal economies.

The government suspended peace negotiations with the ELN on 17.01.25 after a wave of violence in the Catatumbo region claimed more than 80 lives and displaced around 50,000 people (cf. BN of 17.01.25, 20.01.25 and 24.01.25).<sup>3</sup>

## **10 March 2025**

### **Guerrilla group releases 29 kidnapped security forces**

On 08.03.25, twenty-eight police officers and one soldier who had been held hostage in El Plateado in the department of Cauca in southwest Colombia were released. According to reports, security forces attempted to re-establish state control in two municipalities on 06.03.25, but were overpowered by guerrillas and citizens. According to the report, rioters attacked the security forces, set fire to vehicles using improvised firebombs and set off smoke grenades. The government accuses a renegade Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) faction, the Carlos Patiño Front, of instrumentalising the civilian population for attacks on the troops. The local communities claim to have acted in self-defence. They say they are upset over the government's efforts to eradicate coca cultivation in the region. The Carlos Patiño Front operates mainly in the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca and is involved in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, illegal mining, extortion and attacks on the security forces.<sup>4</sup>

## **31 March 2025**

### **Impact of armed conflict in the Catatumbo region, Frente 33 counteroffensive**

According to a report published on 26.03.25 by the NGO Human Rights Watch, based on reports issued by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the National Ombudsman's Office and interviews, among others, numerous human rights violations have been reported following an ELN offensive carried out against a dissident faction of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Frente 33 (33rd Front)) in the Catatumbo region since mid-January 2025 (cf. BN of 20.01.25 and 27.01.25) in the course of clashes over zones of influence. In addition to extrajudicial killings, kidnappings and disappearances of mostly civilian, alleged collaborators of the Frente 33 by the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)), around 56,000 people had also been displaced by the time the report was published. This figure already exceeds the total number of internally displaced persons in Colombia in 2024 as a whole. Previously interviewed displaced persons

also reported, among other things, social control and forced labour for violations of the rules, sexualised violence and forced recruitment, including of minors. On 20.02.25, various UN special representatives also warned of the effects the conflict was having and spoke of a further 27,000 people trapped by the conflict in addition to the considerable number of displaced persons. Other sources estimate lower figures. The current violence has particularly affected "farmers, the indigenous population, migrants, [...] refugees and human rights defenders, teachers, social leaders and former FARC-EP fighters [...] who signed the [2016] peace agreement". The National Ombudsman's Office also drew attention to the negative impact the conflict was having on food and healthcare at local level. Most recently, the fighting between the two groups reportedly intensified once again when the Frente 33, supported by fighters from other regions of the country, launched a counteroffensive in the municipality of Tibú. It was also reported that clashes erupted with the military deployed to Catatumbo and that a soldier was killed by the ELN in Teorama in February 2025. In addition, five people were reported to have been killed in Ocaña on 09.03.25, and a peasant leader was reportedly kidnapped on 19.03.25. Reports say that the number of displaced people has continued to rise and humanitarian needs remain high.<sup>5</sup>

## 7 April 2025

### **ELN Comuneros del Sur dissident group: surrender of arms and peace agreement**

On 05.04.25, President Gustavo Petro signed two agreements in the Nariño department with the armed group Comuneros del Sur, which formed part of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army (ELN)) guerrilla group. Prior to that, the group had handed over war arsenals including land mines, grenades and rockets to an army unit, thus complying with an agreement that had been reached with the government. The members furthermore undertook to surrender the remaining war materiel within the next three months. President Petro reported on his X account of the destruction of a tonne of war materiel, and called the results a first major success in the policy of "total peace". At the meeting which took place in Nariño, furthermore, agreements were reached on support for victims, on commemoration of history, on control of illegal mining, and on replacing 5,000 hectares of illegal farming land. An agreement was also reached on initiating a mine-clearing process.

The Comuneros del Sur were established in 1992, and was the first ELN structure in Nariño. In March 2024, the group split off from the ELN, and started promoting a territorial peace process. The roughly 300 rebels are now to be reintegrated into civilian life.<sup>6</sup>

## 28 April 2025

### **FARC dissidents kill soldiers in Guaviare departamento**

On 27.04.25, at least nine soldiers were killed in Charras, in the southeastern Guaviare departamento according to preliminary estimates. Military sources have so far confirmed six killings attributed to the Jorge Suárez Briceño association of armed groups. The group forms part of the Estado Mayor de Bloques (EMB) of FARC dissidents, which is led by a pseudonym by the name of "Calarcá". Five other soldiers had previously been abducted but released a few hours later in Guanapalo, three of whom were however injured. One soldier is still missing according to information from the military. The soldiers were responsible for securing the former territorial training and reintegration areas (Antiguo Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación, AETCR) in Charras, which were being used by former FARC guerrillas who had accepted the 2016 peace agreement. The Colombian military sent a special commission to investigate the incident, as well as support troops, in order to enhance deployment capacities and security in the region. The attack was carried out against the background of a countrywide wave of violence, which according to defence minister Pedro Sánchez Suárez had so far claimed the lives of at least 18 members of the security forces between 15. and 25.04.25. Sánchez stated that contract killers working for illegally-armed groups were responsible for the violence, and that they were deliberately attacking members of the police and military (*plan pistola*). The attacks in Antioquia and Córdoba, and on the Atlantic coast, were reportedly carried out by the "Golf Clan", those in Norte de Santander by the ELN, and those in Cauca by the FARC dissidents, under the leadership of Iván Mordisco.<sup>7</sup>

**26 May 2025**

**OHCHR warns of extinction of Indigenous peoples in Sierra Nevada**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia (OHCHR) warned on 20.05.25 that five Indigenous peoples in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta faced physical and cultural extinction. Scott Campbell, representative for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, urged the government to protect the Kogui, Wiwa, Kankuamo, Arhuaco and Ette Naka Indigenous groups. These communities, whose combined population is approximately 54,700 people, are reportedly subjected to increasing violence from armed groups competing for control of their territory. Campbell reports that armed non-state actors – including dissident rebel factions and organised crime groups – had infiltrated the region, imposing curfews, disrupting religious and political assemblies, and forcibly displacing hundreds. Furthermore, an Arhuaco community leader had been murdered and a member of the Kogui tribe had disappeared in the past two years. Campbell stressed that the communities “are under various forms of cruel attack” by “armed non-state actors”, and “their lives, territory, self-governance and spirituality” were “being devastated” as a result. He called for action beyond military deployments, and for comprehensive steps to be taken, including better access to healthcare and education as well as economic prospects, in order to ensure the survival of these cultures, the knowledge of which is recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

**16 June 2025**

**Presidential candidate Uribe shot in Bogotá**

According to recent media reports, senator and presidential candidate Miguel Uribe Turbay was shot on 07.06.25 during a campaign event in Bogotá. Uribe, whose condition is still reportedly critical, is said to have been shot twice in the head. The 14- or 15-year-old perpetrator is said to have admitted on his apprehension that he had been promised 20 million Colombian pesos (the equivalent of 4,200 EUR) for carrying out the attack. It was said to be unknown as yet who had ordered the attempted assassination. Uribe is said to be one of the most prominent critics of leftist president Gustavo Petro, who is said to have referred to the assassination attempt on Uribe as an attack on “democracy, freedom of thought and the legitimate exercise of a political office in Colombia”. Petro stated on social media that the protection scheme for Uribe had been reduced “strangely” on the day of the attack, from seven people to three. Petro had then announced an “investigation”. On 15.06.25, more than 70,000 people are said to have protested against political violence in several Colombian cities. The attack on Uribe was said to be reminiscent of the events in the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which five presidential candidates had been murdered. Several presidential candidates are said to have recently halted their campaigns.<sup>9</sup>

**Several killed and wounded in bomb attacks in Colombia’s south-west**

According to media reports, some 20 bomb attacks were carried out on 10.06.25 in the Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments in the south-west of the country, for which military and police blame the dissident faction “Estado Mayor Central” (abbreviated to: EMC), who broke away from the former guerrilla organisation “Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia” (abbreviated to: FARC). At least seven people were reportedly killed – including two police officers and five civilians – and 50 more wounded. The EMC claimed responsibility for the attacks in a video on 13.06.25.<sup>10</sup>

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