

The U.S.'s Secret War: The Impact of U.S. Aid in Colombia

A report from a Witness for Peace/Veterans for Peace Delegation to Colombia
March 9-21, 2002

Executive Summary

Colombia has endured almost four decades of continual brutal armed conflict between the national army, leftist guerrilla movements, and right-wing paramilitary forces. Overwhelmingly, the victims of this conflict have been and continue to be civilians--primarily church and community leaders, human rights workers, and local labor organizers. Into this situation, the U.S. government is now sending more than \$1.3 billion in mostly military aid, ostensibly to fight the "war on drugs." U.S. military aid only escalates Colombia's violent conflict.

In response to calls for solidarity from Colombian church and human rights leaders, Upper Midwest Witness for Peace and Minnesota Veterans for Peace organized a delegation to evaluate U.S. aid to this South American country, and to bring home information about the effects of U.S. policies on the current situation. The delegation interviewed members of Colombian civil society, internally displaced people, government officials, and U.S. Embassy personnel. Delegates heard personal testimonies from people directly affected by the conflict, observed the impact of military assistance on farmers and other civilians in rural areas, and learned about the economic roots of Colombia's conflict.

U.S. military aid to Colombia supports aerial fumigation of coca crops with toxic herbicides, weapons purchases, and military training. Witness for Peace has joined other human rights organizations in expressing concern for this support of the Colombian Army, which has been linked to brutal paramilitary groups. The paramilitaries have committed serious human rights violations and are on the U.S.'s list of foreign terrorist organizations, along with two of the insurgent groups, the FARC and the ELN. Indirectly, U.S. tax dollars are supporting a terrorist organization. This financial support has not and will not solve domestic drug problems. Instead of helping, U.S. military funding escalates a very complicated, internal armed conflict that each year kills thousands of innocent civilians and displaces hundreds of thousands from their homes.

President Bush and various members of Congress have been considering appropriating funds to extend military support for the protection of oil pipelines in Colombia. The delegation collected information about human rights violations in the largely rural department of Arauca, where important Colombian oil reserves are located. When questioned about the proposed additional U.S. military aid to provide security for the oil pipeline, many local citizens, elected officials, and human rights representatives said that strengthening the Colombian military would only increase violence for civilians in their communities. The solution many Colombians see to this problem is to work with civil society and build strong social movements. U.S. military aid only contributes to cycles of violence and undercuts the ability to build a strong and lasting peace in Colombia.

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More information on our delegation, including photographs from the trip, is available at <http://www.yachana.org/reports/colombia/>.

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Introduction

On Saturday, March 9, 2002, twenty residents of the United States gathered in Miami, Florida to prepare for a trip to Colombia to learn more about the country's violent conflict and to study the impact that U.S. military aid has on South America. Participants in the delegation came from ten different states, and included nine members of Veterans for Peace, who served in the military between the Korean and Vietnam war eras. The group collected testimony and observed the effects of the Clinton administration's Plan Colombia and the Bush administration's Andean Regional Initiative.

Witness for Peace, a politically independent, grassroots organization led by faith and conscience and committed to nonviolence, organized and led the delegation. The organization's mission is to support peace, justice, and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing U.S. policies and corporate practices that contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean. Witness for Peace, which led the U.S. movement against the contra war in Nicaragua in the 1980s, has taken a strong position against the military component of Plan Colombia that provides \$1.3 billion in aid to this country. Having observed some benefits of the limited non-military aid provided under this plan, Witness for Peace proposes an immediate end to U.S. military aid. It supports a new U.S. role that promotes peaceful, long-lasting solutions to Colombia's internal problems, along with funding for treatment and prevention of narcotics addiction in the U.S. in order to reduce demand for drug production in Colombia and elsewhere.

After a two-day orientation in which the group studied the history of Witness for Peace, theories of non-violence, and the current Colombian situation, delegates departed for Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, nestled in a beautiful mountain valley. In Bogotá, Witness for Peace met with representatives from non-governmental organizations, social movements, displaced people, and labor unions (a complete schedule of meetings is in Appendix II on page 17). Repeatedly, many local citizens, elected officials, and human rights representatives said that U.S. military support through Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative only contributes to violence in the country. The delegation also met with FEDEGAN (the Cattle Ranchers' Chamber of Commerce) and four generals from the Colombian Armed Forces. These people represent a segment of society that feels threatened by the violence and social unrest in the country, and as such they advocate strengthening the Colombian Armed Forces as a way to restore order to the country. They believe that a military solution is the most expedient manner by which to defeat the guerrillas, whom they identify as the primary enemy.

The delegation also spent three days in the eastern *llanero* (plains) department (similar to a province or state) of Arauca on Colombia's northern border with Venezuela. In the towns of Tame and Saravena, the group met with governmental officials, human rights workers, social movement activists, and military officials. Arauca is a cattle-growing area that has also become one of Colombia's major oil producing regions. Local governments and people in areas of oil extraction receive little of the royalties foreign firms pay to the Colombian government, and the region suffers from high rates of unemployment. The people of Arauca also suffer from the environmental degradation that accompanies oil exploration and extraction. The U'wa Indigenous people have gained international renown for their campaign to force Los Angeles-

based Occidental (Oxy) Petroleum Corporation to stop drilling for oil on their lands. The leftist guerrilla National Liberation Army (ELN, or Ejército de Liberación Nacional) has long operated in the area, and last year blew up Oxy's oil pipeline 200 times. The larger guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) also have a historical presence in the department. The right-wing paramilitary group, United Self Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC, or Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) has only recently begun operating in Arauca. Battles over natural resources have led to exceptionally high rates of violence in this region, even by Colombian standards. In the municipality of Tame, authorities recorded 84 violent deaths in 2001, and 44 from January through the middle of March 2002. Most of this violence is due to the three illegal armed groups (FARC, ELN, and AUC) attacking perceived civilian supporters of opposing groups. The delegation heard testimonies, visited displaced communities, and saw the physical evidence of this ongoing conflict.

The following report is based on interviews, discussions, and observations the delegation made while in Colombia.

Democracy and violence

Colombia is the most violent country in Latin America, and one of the most violent in the world. Rates of violent crimes such as homicides and kidnappings far outstrip that of any other country in South America. Last year there were 35,000 violent deaths in Colombia, 530 massacres, 745 people disappeared, 172 labor leaders killed, 342,000 *campesinos* (rural dwellers or peasants) displaced, and about 3,500 people kidnapped.

The sources of this violence are a matter of contentious debate. United States Embassy officials maintain that this violence is a result of the illegal drug trade and that it needs to be attacked on that level. According to this argument, weak state structures in Colombia are unable to address these problems, and hence it is the responsibility of the United States to take on an increasingly larger and militaristic role to strengthen Colombian state forces. Furthermore, this philosophy argues that since Colombia has one of the oldest continuous democracies in Latin America, its system of government represents an institution that is worth defending and preserving. In this vein, General Rafael Ruíz, Inspector General of the Colombian Armed Forces, maintains that his is the most democratic army in Latin America and that it has supported democratic institutions for 40 years.

While most people would not question that drugs contribute to high rates of violence in Colombia, many analysts and activists find that placing drugs at the root of the problem is a-historical, simplistic, and ultimately leads to detrimental policies. Instead, the violence must be situated within, and seen as a product of, an exclusionary democracy that benefits a small wealthy elite to the detriment of the country's numerous impoverished masses. The heart of the problem is defining the nature of the "democracy" that exists in Colombia.

Violence in Colombia is not a recent apparition that accompanied the advent of illegal marijuana and cocaine production in the 1970s and 1980s. Ricardo Esquivia, the Executive Director of Justapaz, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to reduce violence, describes Colombia's history as one of constant war, with only five years of peace since its independence from Spain in the 1820s until the present. The violence, according to Esquivia, is a result of the social injustice of a wealthy elite that excludes poor Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and rural peoples from power.

Colombia has lived amidst internal armed conflict for the last 50 years. The assassination of the populist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 triggered a ten-

year period of violence known as *La Violencia* that killed 200,000 people and destroyed the country's infrastructure. Félix Posada, the Executive Director of the Latin American Peoples' Center for Communication (CEPALC), observed how a National Front alliance between Liberals and Conservatives that finally ended this period of violence ensured a governing structure that excluded peasants, leftists, and others from this elite power sharing agreement. Social injustice and political systems that did not allow for popular participation led to the emergence of guerrilla groups and the continuation of cycles of violence. Long before there was any drug production in the area, violence was an ever-present aspect of society.

Today, there are several different armed actors in Colombia, including the FARC and ELN guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the Armed Forces of Colombia. Leftist guerrilla groups emerged in response to the exclusionary system that marginalized ethnic minorities and the poor from the political process. The FARC was formed in 1964 as a peasant organization that the pro-Soviet Colombian Communist Party supported, and it now has approximately 17,000 members. University students, oil workers, and Catholic priests influenced by the Cuban Revolution founded the ELN in 1964, and it now has about 5,000 members. The paramilitaries were originally formed in the 1960s as a legal armed force to assist Army battalions in the fight against insurgents and to protect the economic interests of wealthy landowners. The government declared these paramilitary groups illegal in 1989 but have yet to disband and there continues to be documented links between them and the Colombian military. The Colombian Army has about 120,000 members and the National Police, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense, has around 105,000 members. The police are the lead anti-drug force and therefore receive a large amount of U.S. assistance. The Air Force and Navy both work in counternarcotics and counterinsurgency, and U.S. assistance is increasing to both of them.

Héctor Mondragón, Economic Advisor to the National Peasant Council, calls democracy in Colombia a hypocritical system that has broken down into a genocidal regime that allows no opposition. For example, leftist political candidates face almost certain death threats. After the leftist Patriotic Union (UP, or Unión Patriótica party formed in 1986 from a demobilized sector of the FARC, thousands of their members and elected candidates were killed, including two presidential candidates. In this exclusionary system, any opposition is violently eliminated. According to Mondragón, if Colombia were indeed a functioning democracy, it would not be experiencing these levels of violence. In fact, Colombia could be thought of as a civilian dictatorship.

People often assume that violence is a product of poverty. Teófilo Vásquez of the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP), however, has demonstrated this to be a false assumption. Vasquez indicated that while there is no convincing link between poverty and violence, there *is* a significant correlation between violence and under-development. Or, more specifically, violence occurs where there is a large capacity for wealth but there is little to no economic development that benefits local populations. For example, Samuel Morales of the Unified Workers' Central (CUT, or Central Unitaria Trabajadora) observes that in Arauca the violence increased with the arrival of Occidental Petroleum. Drilling for oil is an economic activity that translates into few benefits for local communities with most of the profits leaving the region and the country.

The United States has strong underlying economic interests, including an insatiable demand for oil and a strong motivation to increase arms sales, which fuels the war in Colombia. The U.S. justified its intervention in Colombia by a war on drugs, the presence of guerrilla groups, and even by Hugo Chávez's antagonistic government in neighboring Venezuela. A total

war against the guerrillas, Mondragón maintains, will not finish them off, but would only lead to more counter-attacks and drive more people into their ranks. More U.S. military aid will only bring more violence to Colombia, and will do nothing to enhance democracy in the country.

Military aid

The president of Colombia, Andrés Pastrana, with support from then-president Bill Clinton, launched Plan Colombia in September of 1999 as an investment in the region of \$7.5 billion over a span of five years. Under this plan, Colombia itself should contribute \$4 billion, which it has not yet allocated. The rest was to be funded by the European Union, which has balked at providing aid to what it perceives as an overly militaristic plan. The first part of U.S. aid, consisting of \$1.3 billion, was called “emergency aid” and was disbursed throughout 2000. Of this \$1.3 billion, only \$321 million, about 25 percent, comprised the social component of Plan Colombia. This includes alternative development and other social and economic programs along with the support of the peace process (which was allotted only \$3 million).

Michael Reid in his April 19, 2001 article “Drugs, war and democracy” in *The Economist*, foresaw the differences between the Clinton and Bush administrations even before the September 11th terrorist attacks on the U.S. He writes, “The Clinton administration insisted that the military aid was to fight drugs, not guerrillas—but by cutting the flow of drug money to the insurgents, it would force them to take the peace talks seriously. This is a distinction the Bush administration may blur.” On February 4, 2002, President Bush proposed to Congress a \$98 million military aid package for the 2003 budget to go towards protecting an oil pipeline from guerrillas. If approved, this will represent a clear policy shift, moving from counter-narcotics into counterinsurgency, though cleverly phrased as an anti-terrorism initiative.

There are several reasons the United States government provides to justify its military aid to Colombia. First, Colombia is the world leader in the production of cocaine that enters the United States. Secondly and more recently, after the September 11 attacks oil sources in the Middle East are not as secure and Colombia is third only to Mexico and Venezuela in oil production in the Americas.

Félix Posada and Héctor Mondragón both noted Colombia’s strategic location, in particular its shared border with Venezuela, which has a government perceived as hostile to the United States. They said that there is a fear that Colombia’s guerilla war could cross the border into Venezuela, affecting U.S. oil interests there. Colombia also shares borders with both Ecuador and Perú, two countries that are experiencing fragile political transitions that the violence in Colombia could potentially adversely affected. Furthermore, Colombia is the only South American country with both a Pacific and Caribbean coast that gives it additional geo-political significance. Several U.S.-based businesses located in Colombia stand to benefit from U.S. military aid that could be used to protect their investments in the country. In particular, Posada mentioned Occidental Petroleum and Bush’s own financial interest in Harken Energy Corporation, an oil company based in Houston, Texas.

Mondragón noted that arms sales are a main factor in U.S. Congressional support of Plan Colombia because weapons manufacturers contribute heavily to the campaigns of Congressional representatives from the corporations’ home states and districts. This phenomenon is not limited to Colombia. Some analysts believe that the primary purpose of the recent increase in U.S. military presence in Latin America is to quell popular movements against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), thereby ensuring that the U.S. can put this trade agreement in place by 2005 as scheduled. Mondragón noted that the U.S. has more troops stationed in Paraguay than

in Colombia. Paraguay has strategic borders with Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina, all which have strong social movements. A U.S. military presence in Paraguay allows the United States to control social protest in these countries as well.

The war on drugs

The United States has given \$1.3 billion to Colombia in emergency aid, of which the majority goes towards the fumigation of coca crops. A 1994 Rand Corporation study indicates that drug treatment of addicts is 23 times more effective than source country eradication. Meanwhile, in the United States, those without money face difficulties in receiving drug treatment. The drug problem is especially apparent in U.S. prisons. The impacts of forcing a military solution on a public health problem like drug addiction are especially evident in U.S. prisons. Of the world's eight million prisoners, the United States claims two million. One fourth of those two million have been convicted on non-violent drug charges.

Félix Posada argues that the success of the drug trade in Colombia is a symptom of deeper social problems, primarily poverty. Felix observes that, according to Colombian Government statistics, of Colombia's population of 40 million, 69 percent live in absolute poverty, which is defined as living on less than \$2 dollars a day. Colombia also suffers from 20 percent unemployment. As Colombia integrates into the free trade model advocated by the United States, its agricultural industry has suffered a decline, as its agricultural products are not able to compete in the global market. Its previous primary cash crop of coffee has dropped in price tremendously, as well as its food crops, which are also unable to compete in price with those coming in from other countries. Many Colombian small farmers who are hardly able to survive growing these legal crops turn to growing coca. Sanho Tree from the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., explained the economic rationale for this decision. Coca grows in many climates, particularly in acidic soil where other crops will not grow. It is also easier to manage; campesinos grow the coca, but buyers often assume the responsibility for transportation. Even when farmers have to transport the harvest to markets themselves, coca leaves are much lighter and more compact than bulky food crops, and therefore can be taken out on bicycles or pack animals on rural trails. This is an important factor, considering that many times farmers do not have access to transportation or roads with which to take the produce to market, and that the very act of transportation raises the costs of production. Commodity prices are also higher for coca than most legal food crops.

The department of Putumayo has been particularly targeted by Plan Colombia, which seeks to eliminate half of Colombia's coca production in five years. Eradication efforts have largely been carried out through aerial fumigation that has resulted in extreme social and environmental disruptions, deaths, and forced displacements. The U.S. favors fumigation, but this approach largely ignores the problems of poverty and unemployment. If these underlying problems are not addressed, campesinos will continue to grow coca. Because of the "balloon effect," coca fields are squeezed from one part of the country to another or even across country borders—but with no corresponding decline in total acres cultivated. The herbicide employed in the aerial fumigations consists of Glyphosate (commercially sold in the U.S. as Round-up Ultra), and a surfactant chemical called CosmoFlux, made by a Colombian company. The environmental and health impacts of aerial spraying of the mixture of Glyphosate and CosmoFlux have not been studied. The indiscriminate spraying kills both coca crops and other types of legal food crops. One source from Putumayo reported that of 80,000 hectares fumigated, only half were planted with coca. Ironically, after these sprayings the plant that is most able to recover

quickly and grow back is the coca plant, which reportedly returns in approximately 45 days. Campesinos will trim off the poisoned leaves and the coca plant will grow back stronger than before. Legal food crops, on the other hand, are less resistant to the herbicide. The destruction of farmers' legal food crops is especially devastating, because they are left with few options to support their families after fumigation. There are also confirmed reports of water sources being sprayed illegally, though a U.S. Embassy official dismissed these errors as "accidents." After fumigation there have been reports made to the local ombudsmen of dead farm animals, rashes, and bronchitis and lung problems that mostly affect children and elderly.

Héctor Mondragón notes that after the land is fumigated the farmers often have no other option than to abandon the land, which is then occupied by illegal armed groups or drug traffickers. Fumigation also contributes to deforestation because it forces the farmers to work their way deeper into the rainforest, cutting down trees in order to grow more coca because they do not have any other economic means on which to survive. As Mondragón explained, moving deeper into the forest makes the growing of coca more expensive. In order to compensate these costs farmers have to increase coca production, which results in further deforestation. This fumigation creates an ugly cycle of continual displacement, deforestation, poverty, and dependence on the coca crop for survival.

The disintegration of a dream: The effects of oil extraction on the people of Arauca

The department of Arauca in the eastern area of Colombia has the natural richness of a tropical paradise. Rare species of flora and fauna are common and Indigenous groups such as the U'wa call this area their spiritual home. The economic situation of this department appeared to be on the verge improving when rich supplies of oil were discovered there in the early 1980s. The fossil-fuel dependent West, wary of the power the OPEC countries wield, turned its attention and resources to this traditionally neglected border department, as did the Colombian national government. The government implemented long overdue developments in infrastructure as roads and electricity pylons began to appear on the landscape. Infrastructure, however, was not the only new addition to the composition of Arauca, and the lure of this "liquid gold" resulted in the volatile mix of foreign multi-nationals, leftist guerilla groups and, in the last six months, armed right-wing self-defense groups, all of which converge in this region.

The ELN was the first armed group to come to Arauca. They formed initially in protest of the lack of state presence in the department. With the discovery of oil, the ELN's message shifted to one of extreme nationalism, centered on keeping the wealth of the oil production inside the region. These words were alluring to many of the poor people in the region, and for a while the ELN had a strong support base, or at least a small opposition base, in this area. When the vast sums of money they extorted from the oil companies for "protection" is added to this, it becomes clear why Arauca became one of the ELN's strongest departments in the whole of Colombia. Twenty years and countless murders, displacements and disappearances later, the ELN's historical dominance is being contested by the recent arrival of paramilitaries in September 2001. Now both groups and the FARC fight for control of this key border department and its priceless resources.

The U.S. oil giant Occidental Petroleum, in partnership with ECOPETROL, the Colombian State Oil Company, is the main extractor of oil in Arauca. They have constructed a pipeline stretching 770 kilometers from the Caño Limón oil well, which is only a few kilometers from the Venezuelan border, across Colombia exiting on its northern Caribbean coast. The vast oil reserves have generated a huge amount of wealth, little of which has trickled back to the

civilian population. The Caño Limón well pumps about 240 barrels of oil per hour through the Occidental pipeline, and is a large factor in Colombia's current status of being the fourth largest supplier of oil to the United States in the world. Extracting and transporting this oil has not been easy for this multinational corporation, however, and guerilla groups have blown up the Occidental pipeline 940 times in the last 10 years, spilling a total of 2.5 million barrels of oil, causing the loss of almost \$500 million last year. The environmental cost of this has been horrific, and the beautiful, fragile landscape of Arauca is now scarred with black sludge, polluted rivers, and leafless, petrified tree skeletons. The attacks have also taken a huge chunk out of Occidental's profits and, according to unconfirmed reports, have manipulated the company into making huge payments to the armed guerilla groups. Attacks on the pipeline escalated in 2001, and some people in the area suspect that the arrival of the paramilitaries is the direct result of a change in the oil company's security tactics.

The arrival of yet another armed group into the region has had a devastating effect on the civilian population, placing them in the center of a three-way struggle for control. This has resulted in a civilian murder rate in the small municipality of Tame, which has a population of only 55,000, of 84 in 2001 and a chilling 44 in the first 2 months of 2002. In the first week of March alone, 12 civilians were murdered by paramilitaries and guerillas. In addition, the area has a 40 percent unemployment rate, which has led to major problems with alcoholism and prostitution. This situation of extreme poverty has forced many into joining one of the armed groups simply as a means of gaining economic security. This has been especially true of young males in the region. In a raid upon a warehouse of the ELN urban militia in early March 2002, the police of Tame captured 13 men, mostly between 14 and 17 years old who claimed to have participated in an average of three or more violent deaths each.

Many people of Arauca no longer speak of the discovery of oil as a blessing to their region, but speak instead of it as a curse. Despite claims by United States Embassy officials to the contrary, many people in Arauca claim to have seen nothing of the benefits of its extraction. Biting poverty plagues much of the population, social problems are increasing in the urban areas, displacement of families by all of the armed groups is high and rising, murder and bombings are common and the environment is being irrevocably damaged. In early March 2002, the FARC launched a cylinder bomb attack in the center of the municipality of Saravena, destroying the mayor's offices. Supposedly, local police stations are the intended targets for such attacks, but in the center of Saravena many storefronts, homes, and office buildings have been abandoned because owners fear more bombings.

Despite very real threats of guerrilla violence in the area, many people in Arauca insist that increased militarism is not the answer. Some suggested that the price for the wealth of a few is being paid for by the subjugation of the many. With the United States "war on terrorism" giving the West a new reason to be militarily involved in Colombia, and with the volatile situation in the Middle East raising the importance of the oil reserves in Arauca, local people hope that one day soon the oil will dry up and the vested interest groups it has attracted will leave allowing them to rebuild their region in peace.

The war on terrorism

The Bush administration's desire to protect its oil investments in Colombia has led to a dangerous blending of support for counter-drug interdictions into the new realm of counter-insurgency, with the accompanying danger of dragging the U.S. into a financial and military quagmire. The United States government is apparently keen to increase the amount of military

aid it gives to the Colombian military stationed in this region, and is attempting to push through a proposal to give \$98 million worth of military aid to the 18th Brigade in Arauca to protect the Occidental pipeline. In a February 10, 2002, interview in the Bogotá daily newspaper *El Tiempo*, Anne Patterson, the U.S. ambassador to Colombia declares that the United States will protect its interests in Colombia. Approximately \$60 million of this money will go towards the purchase of helicopters, communications equipment and intelligence, and the rest will be used for training the 18th Brigade.

The problems which could occur from sending even more arms to this already overly armed region are starkly apparent, but these are further exacerbated by the links which the 18th Brigade is believed to have with the paramilitaries and its exposed role in the 1998 Santo Domingo massacre. On December 13, 1998, a military aircraft belonging to the 18th Brigade of the Colombian Army bombed the village of Santo Domingo, killing 19 civilians, including seven children. An international opinion tribunal, which the Center for International Human Rights at Northwestern University and the Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America held in Chicago, indicted the commander of the brigade. It was further revealed that an Occidental Petroleum plane provided the coordinates for the attack and that a fragment at the attack site indicated that a bomb used in the attack had come from the U.S.

These accusations are very serious because they demonstrate the extent to which private U.S. oil interests are already intimately involved in the Colombian civil war. Furthermore, the cover-up campaign undertaken by the Colombian Air Force about this attack on a civilian population demonstrates the extreme lack of accountability in the Colombian Armed Forces. There are concerns in both countries that the \$98 million aid package will escalate the violence in the area.

Additionally, the United States is considering developing an Anti-kidnapping Plan that would cost between \$25 to \$30 million. It would include training for joint operations between the Colombian Armed Forces and the Police, called the Unified Action Groups for Personal Security (or GAULA, its Spanish acronym), and military experts in anti-kidnapping operations. U.S. ambassador Patterson states that “we want to continue with the training at all levels, improve intelligence and help establish analysis centers for the anti-kidnapping program.” These two aid packages/plans are the beginning of open U.S. counterinsurgency in Colombia. Furthermore, these plans support the Colombian military even though the U.S. State Department’s Human Rights report admits it still continues to have ties with paramilitary forces that the State Department has denounced as a terrorist organization.

Human rights and impunity

Colombia faces a desperate human rights situation, and the short-term prospects for improvement do not look good. Last year there was an average of more than one massacre and 1,000 people displaced per day. In March 10, 2002, congressional elections the right-wing paramilitaries claimed that “their” candidates won 35 percent of the vote. Polls now show the paramilitary-supported presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe with a wide lead for the May 26 elections. If Uribe wins the election, civil rights will likely be reduced further. Uribe has proposed significantly increasing the number of soldiers in the Colombian military in order to win the war militarily, which may drain resources from social programs that are already seriously under funded. Uribe’s recommendation includes having a million armed civilians involved in the war. The true victims of the war are the civilian population, with the paramilitaries committing approximately 70 percent of the human rights abuses.

Under the current situation of fighting terrorism, the government has taken away the rights of the people. One fear is that the government will start openly calling union activities terrorist activities. The ones who will be persecuted under this law will be those in civil society. One vivid example of these abuses is Coca-Cola's actions towards SINALTRAINAL, the National Food and Beverage Worker's Union. SINALTRAINAL workers have suffered persecution since the formation of their union in 1982. Currently 48 workers are displaced due to death threats. The workers have been persecuted by their employers and by the state, with most of the persecution being linked to paramilitaries. Union leaders have testimonies regarding the involvement of factory management in the planning of paramilitary threats and attacks. This union has seen a 50 percent loss in membership over the last seven years because of the well-justified fears of its affiliates. During this period a number of assassinations occurred, with SINALTRAINAL suffering its most recent assassination in June 2001 during a period of labor negotiations. In 2002, attacks on union headquarters along with threatening phone calls continue.

Impunity is what allows these policies and killings to continue, and derails a search for truth, justice, and reparations. SINALTRAINAL's current campaign against impunity includes plans to organize a protest against Coca-Cola on April 17, 2002 in New York during the Coca-Cola Shareholders' Meeting, and public hearings on July 22 in Atlanta, October 12 in Brussels, and December 5 in Bogotá. Public hearings would provide a forum for testimonies and an opportunity to show the link between Coca-Cola and the paramilitaries. The public hearings would also seek to sensitize popular organizations and international opinion to the destruction of the social fabric caused by these grave human rights violations. The union is using a U.S. law called the Alien Tort Claims Act that allows them to sue Coca-Cola for kidnapping, torture, and death threats. Their hope is that by having a trial in the U.S., Coca-Cola will not be able to manipulate the justice system as easily as it might in Colombia.

In the department of Arauca there has been a systematic violation of human rights that has continually worsened since the 1980s. The government has made little social investment here, with the development of infrastructure occurring only because of the will of the people. The U'wa Indigenous peoples were the first attacked. Then starting in 1984, campesinos who lived close to oil exploration zones were displaced. With the discovery of oil came an increase in the military's presence. Social organizations, including campesinos, workers and unions, Indigenous peoples, and youth and students, came together to struggle to protect their lives. During this period there was an increase in the violation of human rights and the assassinations of leaders. Much of this took place under hidden militarism. These four sectors of the population brought attention to the respect for human rights. They also presented cases to the Colombian government against high-ranking military personnel. An example of this was a massacre in 1993 in Saravena where 50 people were killed.

In Arauca, representatives of local human rights and social organizations allege that there are links between the paramilitaries and the Armed Forces. These organizations and some local communities have told the government where the paramilitaries are located, but claim the government has not investigated their accusations. Furthermore, military and police forces have on occasion acted violently against the civilian population. During a brief visit to Saravena, the Witness for Peace delegation also heard unverified rumors about the presence of 40 U.S. Marines stationed within the Caño-Limón oil complex.

In Saravena, leaders talked about the challenge of bringing international solidarity to the community. In this city, many leaders have been killed as a result of the armed conflict. Human

rights violations are getting worse in this area. Violence has increased with the increased presence of multi-national corporations, especially in oil exploration. Many local human rights groups allege that the Colombian Armed Forces have been complicit with the arrival of the paramilitaries. This is a great concern for many of the 400,000 people of Arauca who want to stay and live there. Multi-national corporations often prioritize profit maximization over the well being of local populations.

A massive campesino mobilization in Arauca in February 2002 called for the “Respect for Life.” Many people in this region have organized to reject the presence of paramilitary forces and violence from all sides directed against the non-combatant civilian population. This struggle has caused many deaths and has led to increased militarism in the area. This is why many have united their efforts in favor of nonviolence and open their doors to international observers. Civilians in the region love life and reject violence against them and their loved ones. People seem to understand that the current conditions cannot continue so many are trying to raise international awareness in the hopes that it may help alleviate the violence they experience daily.

Leaders of civil society in Arauca talk of the need for international solidarity to support their struggle for nonviolent social change. In the stage, they are in now they need groups to help in accompaniment in order to carry on the struggle. Because of the need for international solidarity, the communities have gathered together from various sectors of society. As a result, they have demanded that multi-nationals order their security people not to attack civilians. The NGOs allege that there exists complicity between the military and paramilitary groups. For this reason, they manifest concern about the proposed U.S. aid of \$98 million to the 18th Brigade for pipeline protection. Because of impunity and a lack of justice in the country, many local community leaders fear this aid will lead to an increase in human rights abuses and that U.S. military aid only “sows the seeds of death.” Their message is that the U.S. should provide aid for life and not death. This is fundamental for them to remain in this area. In an extensive report, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Washington Office on Latin America concluded that the Colombian government and Armed Forces have failed to comply with all three human rights conditions that the U.S. Congress stipulated must be met before disbursement of U.S. military aid in 2002.

The office of the *Personero*, or municipal human rights ombudsman, was created in Colombia’s progressive 1991 constitution. Among their 163 mandated functions are the responsibility to monitor local officials, oversee municipal finances, and verify municipal compliance with laws. One of the most dangerous and difficult obligations of this office, however, is the defense of the interests of society, including denouncing the human rights abuses that various armed actors commit against the civilian population. This responsibility puts the human rights ombudsmen in a significant amount of danger, and people in this position have been known to receive death threats.

Economic austerity measures resulting from IMF-imposed neoliberal reforms have resulted in municipal government budgets being slashed in half in 2001, with the municipal human rights offices taking a particularly strong hit. Human rights ombudsmen face a difficult situation, both because the Colombian government does not provide them with the necessary resources to carry out their functions and because of the dangers to their lives. Although they are often deeply committed to their jobs and to the advancement of human rights in Colombia, it is questionable how long many of these officials will be able to continue in their current positions.

Human rights abuses abound throughout the country. The department of Putumayo on Colombia's southern border with Ecuador is an area that recently has witnessed extensive violence due to increases in drug production. Over the last decade, dramatic increases in the levels of coca production have devastated Putumayo's rainforests. The wealth from both coca and oil production brought in first the leftist FARC guerrillas and then right-wing paramilitary forces, and also drug lords. The violence is very intense in this area now. There is corruption among both military and government officials. The competition between the armed actors has always had the most impact on civilians.

Local activists recount how the paramilitaries carried out massacres when they arrived in Putumayo in 1997. The Catholic Church tried to persuade local authorities to get the paramilitaries to leave. The paramilitaries were then run out of town, but they returned again in 1999. At that time, there were selective killings and massacres. The way they did the killings was brutal, including torturing and mutilating people. At the end of 1999 in a terrible "massacre of fires" paramilitaries pulled people out of their homes and killed them. Community members claim that there was military complicity in this massacre, including a military roadblock that shut off traffic so people could not leave. This led to intervention from human rights officials in Bogotá and some military officials were relieved of duty. Considering the high rates of impunity in the country, it is remarkable that they were removed from their positions.

The paramilitaries during this period would drive around openly in trucks, showing their weapons in order to strike fear into people. In the department of Putumayo, it is rumored that there are now about 1500 paramilitaries and some local residents have heard that another 1500 are coming. Heavy fighting between the guerrillas and paramilitaries in the rural areas has displaced about 7,000 people from their homes. It is difficult for the people in this area to believe in the peace process when the military is building itself up so much, and the guerrillas and the paramilitaries increasingly attack the civilian population.

Women

The negative impacts of war on women are particularly evident in Colombia. A newspaper article in the March 13, 2002, edition of Bogotá's daily newspaper *El Tiempo* mentioned an International Labor Organization (ILO) study that concluded "women and children comprise 75 percent of the world's refugees, and are the ones who most suffer the consequences of armed conflicts during the last decade." The study also noted that "wars provoke a special terror among women who not only must deal with death, injuries, and destruction of their houses, but also rape, torture, and sexual slavery."

Luz Marina Becerra is the secretary of the Association of Afro-Colombian Displaced Persons (AFRODES) in the Barrio La Isla on the southern outskirts of Bogotá. Originally, she came from the Darien rainforest on the Panamanian border, but paramilitary violence resulting from intense competition over resources caused her to flee to the capital city of Bogotá. As an Afro-Colombian woman, Luz Marina faces discrimination in terms of access to jobs, education, and other resources both because of her race and gender. On March 8, the International Women's Day, she was denied access to commemorative events in an elite Bogotá hotel because of her skin color. Afro-Colombian women typically have large families, and often property owners will not rent houses to them for this reason. This forces Afro-Colombian women to the outskirts of town where they survive in subhuman conditions, often without running water, electricity, or school for their children. Women are forced to accept whatever work they can find, often working as maids, street vendors, or even prostitutes, to support their children.

Without money for daycare, they are often forced to leave children behind at home alone. Naturally, this leads to a lot of concern on the part of Afro-Colombian women.

Armed conflicts leave women in a particularly difficult situation, as they are often targets of violence. Both paramilitaries and guerrillas have recruited women into their armed forces. Women can hide more easily within the civilian population, and thus are perceived as being useful for gathering information. Once in an armed group, women face rape and a variety of tortures. If they try to leave, they face threats of being killed. Oil and coca booms have resulted in many women and girls being drawn into prostitution, including child prostitution. Incidences of sexually transmitted disease have risen significantly in areas surrounding military bases. Political violence results in many women being left behind as widows and single mothers with increased responsibilities for their families. Alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence rates have all increased. The war is also causing severe mental health problems—especially for children who have seen their parents killed.

Despite repeated threats and displacements, women in Colombia continue to struggle for the rights of their communities and families. Often they overcome many of these difficulties and barriers to become leaders in their communities. Their lives are a testimony to the strength of the human spirit and give hope for Colombia's future.

Peace process

The most recent peace processes began in 1999 between the government of President Pastrana and the FARC, and in 2000 between Pastrana's government and the ELN. These groups have been largely driven to negotiations by popular support and more significantly because no side has either the guns or political support to win this conflict militarily. As a part of the peace process, President Pastrana and the FARC created a "de-militarized zone" (or *Zona de Despeje*) about the size of Switzerland in the mid south of Colombia. As part of this condition for peace talks, the Colombian government pulled its military out of the zone and gave complete control of the area over to the FARC. However, there was no cease-fire, and the armed confrontation continued in the rest of the country. Furthermore, according to a Human Rights Watch report published in late 2001, the FARC committed numerous human rights abuses and violations of International Humanitarian Law within the de-militarized zone. Héctor Mondragón called this a "pretend peace process" because nothing really changed. The level of corruption was the same and poverty worsened. Furthermore, the number of massacres throughout the country increased to 403 in 1999 and then to 530 in 2001.

Meanwhile, during the peace negotiations, the United States through Plan Colombia gave the Colombian military 75 percent of its \$1.3 billion aid package to the country. Logically this can only lead to increasing violence, whether directly or indirectly. For example, the guerillas interpret this increase in funding for the Colombian military as a threat and then try to strengthen their own forces, especially as U.S. military aid may soon shift toward overt support for counterinsurgency efforts that may undermine the peace process.

On February 20, 2002, the FARC hijacked a domestic commercial flight and kidnapped a Colombian Senator on board. The government decided to call off the peace process in the wake of this incident and has since bombed and invaded the previously de-militarized zone. The peace process with the ELN continues and, despite many very real challenges, still looks optimistic.

Conclusion

Repeatedly, social movement activists denounce U.S. military aid to the Colombian government, and observe that Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative only bring more violence to the country. The Association of Afro-Colombian Displaced Persons (AFRODES) maintains that “Colombia’s most serious problem is that of Plan Colombia which causes even more poverty and displacement in the country.” In Arauca, non-governmental organizations representing teachers, students, workers’ unions, social organizations, health workers, human rights workers, shelters for orphans, and members of the national oil workers’ union asked, demanded, and pleaded that the U.S. stop military aid to Colombia. In Putumayo, as people are driven off of their land, paramilitary and guerrilla forces move in, take over their homes and resources, and continue massacring more people. The only solution many Colombians see to this problem is to work with civil society and build strong social movements. U.S. military aid only contributes to cycles of violence and undercuts the ability to build a strong and lasting peace in Colombia.

Appendix I Delegate List

John C. Pegg, Delegation Coordinator

Duluth, MN

A former U.C.C. parish minister, now a WFP Regional Coordinator for the Upper Midwest. Has traveled to Colombia 3 times. John is an ex-Marine who is a member of Veterans for Peace.

Marc Becker

Kirkville, MO

An assistant professor of Latin American history at Truman State University. Marc has lived in Nicaragua as a former WFP International Team member, and in Ecuador doing research.

Jessica Carrick-Hagenbarth

Olympia, WA

A junior at Evergreen College who spent a year in Quito, Ecuador engaged in studies and working for human rights organizations.

Dr. David L. Harris

Red Wing, MN

A retired surgeon and avid worker for social justice in Latin America. David is a former national WFP Board member and has led several WFP delegations.

Vela N. Giri

Minneapolis, MN

With an M.S. in Forestry, Vela operates his own tree surgeon business. A former Army paratrooper in Viet Nam, he has made several trips to that country as a peacemaker.

Patricia Abbott

Philadelphia, PA

Trish hails from Great Britain and is an honors student at the University of Pennsylvania. She has participated in School of the Americas Watch activities at Ft. Benning, GA.

Will Sjoblom

Duluth, MN

A business manager with a strong commitment to social justice in Latin America. Active in a sister-parish project in El Salvador. Will is a Marine Corps Viet Nam veteran.

Wayne Wittman

St. Paul, MN

A retired rehabilitation counselor who now serves as a Catholic deacon and an active leader with Veterans for Peace. Wayne served in the Navy during the Korean War.

Aaron Blyth

Shoreview, MN

A graduate of Northland College, majoring in Environmental Studies. Aaron now works as a carpenter who restores log homes. He went to Guatemala last year to study Spanish.

Dr. Sigrid Bachmann

Minneapolis, MN

A retired pediatrician, who has been active with WFP and Amnesty International for many years. Born in Germany, Sigrid has both traveled and lived in Latin America.

Maria P. Lemos

Philadelphia, PA

A native of Bogotá, Maria came to the U.S. to study at Haverford College. She now is a PhD. candidate in Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania. She has traveled to Cuba and Guatemala on human rights delegations.

Margot Worfolk

Naperville, IL

A retired Catholic lay parish worker and full-time peace activist, with an M.A. in parish ministry. Margot traveled to El Salvador for the 20th anniversary of Bishop Romero's assassination.

Daniel Brito

Tucson, AZ

A junior at the University of Arizona, Daniel also works as an intern with the AFSC in Tucson. He has been active with the School of the Americas Watch.

Ted Sexauer

Sonoma, CA

A retired nurse and gardener, Ted was a medic with the 173rd Airborne in Viet Nam. He now is a Buddhist and an active member of School of the Americas Watch – West.

William A. Collins

Norwalk, CT

A former state legislator and mayor of Norwalk CT, Bill now writes a syndicated newspaper column. He has traveled extensively in Central America.

Marie Salupo

Euclid, OH

Marie now works for the United Church of Christ in Refugee Ministries. She has studied Spanish in Guatemala and done service work in Costa Rica.

Lenore M. Palladino

Chicago, IL

Finishing her degree at the University of Chicago, Lenore works as an organizer with United Students Against Sweatshops and Jobs with Justice.

Ward Brennan

Minneapolis, MN

A retired insurance company administrator who now volunteers for peace and justice. Active in Veterans for Peace and School of the Americas Watch. Ward was a pilot in the Air Force.

Ben Naimark-Rowse

Chicago, IL

Ben is a junior at the University of Chicago who has studied at the University of Havana. He has traveled extensively in Latin America.

Tom Hooley

Forest Lake, MN

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, following his service in the Navy, Tom became a Catholic priest. Now retired, he volunteers his time for peace and justice.

Witness for Peace International Team leaders in Colombia:

Jess Hunter

Julia Graff

Appendix II Delegation Schedule

Sunday, March 10

Sanho Tree, IPS (Institute for Policy Studies)

Monday, March 11

Ricardo Esquivia, Executive Director, Justapaz

Tuesday, March 12

AFRODES (*Asociación de Afro-Colombiano Desplazados*, Association of Afro-Colombian Displaced Persons), Barrio La Isla, Bogotá

- Jatán Mazot, Vice-President
- Eusebio Mosquera
- Roberto Antonio Comacho
- Carlos David Cartona
- Luz Marina Becerra, Secretary

Ministerio de Defensa, Escuela de Ingenieros Militares, Ministry of Defense, Military Engineer School

- General Rafael Ruíz, Inspector General of Army
- General Valencia, Veteran of Korea
- General Clavijo, Association of Retired Generals and Admirals
- General Gómez, Office of Engineers

Wednesday, March 13

Félix Posada, Executive Director, CEPALC (*Centro Popular para América Latina de Comunicación*, Latin American Peoples' Center for Communication)

Héctor Mondragón, Economic Advisor to the *Consejo Nacional Campesino*, National Campesino Council

Peter Stucky, President of Mennonite Church in Colombia

Thursday, March 14

Teófilo Vásquez, CINEP (*Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular*, Center for Research and Popular Education)

Javier Correa, President, SINALTRINAL (Food and Beverage Workers' Union)

José Miguel Narvaez, FEDEGAN (Cattle Ranchers' Chamber of Commerce)

Friday, March 15

Municipal Government building, Tame, Arauca

- Jaime Reuto, Vice-Mayor

- Dr. Carlos Yovanny Caro Martínez, Personero (Human Rights Ombudsman)
- Dr. William Zorro, Cabinet member of municipality and treasurer
- Ismael Pavón, Comité Regional “Joel Sierra” (human rights committee)
- José Roosevelt Lara, Comité Regional “Joel Sierra” (human rights committee)
- Sebastián Vera Alvarado, President of Municipality
- Lieutenant Luis Eduardo Castro, Commander of National Police, Tame

Lieutenant Cornel Jorge Alberto Segura Manonegra, Commander of Batallón de Ingenieros de Combate No. 18, Gral. Rafael Navas Pardo

Saturday, March 16

ANUC (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*, National Association of Peasants) Office, Saravena, Arauca

- Samuel Morales, CUT (*Central Unitaria de los Trabajadores*, Workers Unity Central)
- Ravelo Cetina, Leadership Board of Social Organizations
- Jesús Angarita, USO (*Unión Sindical Obrera*, United Workers Union)
- Alonso Campiño, ANUC and INCORA (Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute)
- José Sierra, Mayor of Saravena
- Liliana del Carmen Santana Beltrán, *Personero*, Human Rights Ombudsman

Tuesday, March 19

Displaced woman from Putumayo

Two U.S. Embassy officials

Appendix III

Questions For Our Meeting With The U.S. Embassy Meeting

Oil

There is a proposed \$98 million to go to the 18th Brigade of the Colombian military to protect the 480-mile long pipeline construction for Occidental Petroleum in the department of Arauca. Does the U.S. feel this is sufficient to protect the pipeline and is it prepared to protect all the oil infrastructure throughout Colombia? If monetary aid proves insufficient, are we willing to bring in U.S. troops?

Drugs

A Rand Corporation study stated that treatment in the U.S. is 23 times more effective than source country eradication. We also know that although eradication did include drug production in Peru and Bolivia from 1992-98, production in Colombia has increased due to the balloon effect. During our time here we have listened to people who have personally seen the effective of the fumigation with Glysofate and Cosmoflux in their area. From their testimony, it would seem that fumigation is inefficient with unknown effects on the environment and human health. Therefore, why does the U.S. persist in such an ineffective drug policy, and a waste of U.S. tax dollars?

Human rights

We have talked to many different groups, trade union members, displaced persons, mayors and human rights workers in Tame and Saravena. We have observed that a huge number of innocent civilians are caught in the squeeze between the FARC and ELN on the left and the paramilitary often with military connections on the right. How can we redirect our foreign aid so as to support peace instead of oppression and violence in Colombia?

Peace process

If a sustainable, self-enforcing peace in Colombia is a U.S. foreign policy goal, what strategies, structures, frameworks, and actors does the U.S. support in the creation of a peace process?

Development

If U.S. policy is to develop a stable legal economy in Colombia, given the costs of fumigation to licit crops in the rural sector and the current open market politics that have lowered coffee and agricultural prices internationally, what are the short and long term strategies that the U.S. supports?

Exit strategy

As part of the current discussion on Capitol Hill about increasing U.S. military aid to Colombia, several congressional representatives have raised the fear of getting involved in at least a financial quagmire. In our own interviews, we have also heard people raise doubt about the likelihood of any player, including the Colombian military itself, achieving a military victory. In your view, what would constitute victory, and what is our exit strategy?

Military aid

As a Marine Corps Veteran of the Vietnam era, I and all members of our delegation are very concerned about the effects of U.S. military aid on Colombia. Under the terms of agreement for military aid to Colombia established by the U.S. Congress, certain conditions were mandated concerning certification of human rights, which must be met for the U.S. to extend aid. Recent reports by Amnesty International, the Washington Office on Latin America, Human Rights Watch, and the State Department Human Rights Report on Colombia all demonstrate direct links between the Colombian military and the AUC forces. Clearly, we are in violation of our own laws. How can we provide aid under these conditions, and how can we even consider removing these basic human rights restrictions, which currently is under consideration by the U.S. Congress?

Appendix IV
Map of Colombia

Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/colombia_rel_2001.jpg