

APPENDIX V

COLOMBIA FORUM
Issue 22
JAN – MAY 2000
CHURCH, M.

COLOMBIA FORUM UPDATE No. 22: EVENTS IN COLOMBIA BETWEEN JANUARY AND MAY 2000

Based on *Actualidad Colombiana* (a bulletin produced by a consortium of Colombian non-governmental organisations) and on other press articles and reports from the UN and NGOs.

This Update will seek to highlight the major and important developments in Colombia over the past five months, and to capture the current trends. It will concentrate on the developments surrounding international aid, on the current political crisis and the peace process.

Introduction

The period of this Update sees the continuing struggle of Pastrana's administration to secure increased military aid from the United States, and development aid from Europe, Canada, and Japan. Pastrana is faced with a deepening political crisis at home, with corruption scandals threatening to close congress, bring down his government, or force a referendum. This coupled with rumours of plans for a coup of some kind, either externally directed or Fujimori-style, from within, generate spiralling confusing from the electorate on the political future. At the same time, the peace process with the FARC is coming under ever-increasing pressure from extremists while considerable efforts from civil society bodies aim to re-launch the putative process with the ELN.

Human Rights Watch produces a highly controversial report on links between Colombia's security forces and the paramilitary groups, using evidence from the Colombian Prosecutors Office. The UN Human Rights Commission makes another statement on the serious situation in

Colombia, and the US State Department report again makes for grim reading.

Figures for displacement continued to rise during 1999, and new geographical areas are being affected by the struggle for strategic control by armed actors. People continue to leave the country in ever-increasing numbers.

The country's prison system is plunged into crisis by the outbreak of almost total war in La Modelo prison in Bogotá, leaving 32 people dead. An ex-advisor to the prison service outlines what prison is like for those convicted or on remand.

Contents:

1. Plan Colombia
2. Political Crisis
3. **Peace Process**
4. Human Rights
5. Internal Displacement And A Growing Refugee Flow
6. Prison Crisis

1. Plan Colombia: The cure is worse than the disease

Plan Colombia, a development plan that the Pastrana administration is seeking to fund through international donors, first appeared on the political agenda in 1998 and since that time has undergone a considerable transformation.

Originally conceived as a kind of Marshall Plan for Colombia, one that would tackle some of the worst inequities in social development in the regions most affected by the decades-long conflict, it has now become a controversial anti-narcotics strategy, warped by the real-politik of Colombia's geo-strategic proximity to the United States. Plan Colombia now contains \$US1.7b of US assistance to the Colombian military for its 'war on drugs', designated as a 'push into Southern Colombia' in order to re-take a zone controlled by the FARC.

Alongside this part of the Plan, some \$US1.3b is being sought for humanitarian,

social development and infrastructure aid, largely from the European Union states, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, and Japan. The Colombian Government itself has pledged \$4b from its national budget and Peace Bonds. It is not clear where this money is to come from, given the serious fiscal deficit and a recent round of substantial spending cuts from the already agreed national budget. More cuts are likely if the reforms Colombian Government has signed up to as part of an IMF structural adjustment package pass through the Congress.

The US part of the package, despite consistent vocal support from President Clinton, is currently mired in domestic squabbles in the US Senate. Passed by the Congress, its route through the Senate has proved more complicated. The Clinton administration has attempted to force the package through the emergency appropriations procedure. Leader of the Senate Trent Lott supports the Colombia package, but believes that the Clinton administration is abusing this emergency procedure by swelling it out with non-emergency funding for other issues. At the same time, those Senators who believe that the anti-narcotic policy as represented by this Colombia bill is flawed and could lead to increased human rights abuses, have introduced serious monitoring amendments to the package and re-formulated the funding spread. Clinton has threatened to veto the Bill should it pass in its amended state.

The vote by the Senate on the Bill has now been postponed until the early July. Those in support of the full military package are claiming that the delays are fatally undermining the Pastrana administration and seriously damaging the 'war on drugs'. What is clear is that in a US Presidential election year, drugs is high on the domestic agenda, and this package may have less to do with the so-called regional threat that Colombia poses and more to do with elections.

In Europe, the Spanish and British governments are leading the effort to bring the non-US states on board with what is known as European Plan Colombia. This

has also undergone several changes, largely led by an attempt to dis-articulate this plan from the US package. While in the US doubting Congressional and Senate representatives have been assured that the carrot of social and humanitarian support will be provided by the Europeans, in Europe the concerns over an increased militarisation of the South of Colombia has encouraged the Government of Colombia to erase any mention of military aid at all from the Plan. Meetings to discuss levels of possible support are going on all over Europe, with two official meetings planned for 19th June in London, and 7th July in Madrid. The Government of Colombia is seeking substantial support for its entire emergency response to the internally displaced population, and for long-term social and alternative development, and infrastructure reconstruction.

The overall proposal has unleashed a fierce controversy with respect to the consequences of this aid on human rights and the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. Several members of Congress, intellectuals and the media have warned that its approval could involve the US in a new conflict that they do not hesitate to compare with Vietnam. They point to the dangers that could result from giving aid to an army that has long been accused of having paramilitary links, a topic raised again in recent international human rights reports. It has also been heavily criticised inside Colombia for the lack of consultation with civil and elected organisations and institutions (there are persistent rumours that the document was actually written in the offices of the US State Department), for the flawed analysis on which it is based, and its potentially negative impact on the peace process.

Lack of discussion and consultation on the Plan inside Colombia has fuelled rumour and confusion. According to some Colombian academics, it is unclear whether Plan Colombia is a state policy paper, a request for a loan, or how it relates to the current government's Development Plan (a plan that has to be approved by the legislature at the beginning of the government's term of office)

Colombian NGOs, social organisations and academics have unanimously condemned the Plan as one that will fuel the conflict and contribute to a more serious deterioration of the country's humanitarian crisis. (The 'push into Southern Colombia is officially estimated to lead to the forced displacement of over 10,000 small growers.) While the Plan is supposed to be a 'Plan for Peace', evidence suggests that the FARC is reacting speedily to the potential for military escalation in its heartland. There has been a significant increase in kidnappings and extortion by the FARC in the last few months, in particular, in the central department of Cundinamarca and the capital Bogota. The FARC issued Law 002 in early May, by which it is demanding that anyone worth over US\$1m must voluntarily pay a war tax to the FARC or face extortion. Rumours from the southern region indicate that forced recruitment and arming has dramatically increased and that internal displacement has been fuelled by fears and insecurity. The FARC have reportedly set themselves the goal of raising US\$600 million at any cost so as not to fall behind in the arms race.

Plan Colombia is essentially a strategy of defence and security aimed at strengthening the armed forces and police in the fight against drugs, justified by claims of reduced national resources for these issues. However, the increase in defence spending has gone from US\$1.5m at the beginning of the last decade to US\$2.2m by the end, representing 4.5% of GDP.

Plan Colombia is ambitious in economic terms. Funding to the value of US\$ 7,5b is being sought within a two year period. Of this figure, US\$ 3,5bis being requested in aid mainly from the United States and Europe, with some help from Asian countries, in addition to US\$733 in loans from multilateral organisations such as the Interamerican Development Bank. The Colombian Nation will contribute US\$ 4b. The source of Colombia's own contribution remains unclear; the country is going through its worst economic crisis in the last few decades and industry is in decline. The fiscal deficit is close to 5% of GDP, the official figure for unemployment has hovered

around 20% for several months and there are no recovery symptoms. Under these circumstances the government plans to raise funds through privatisation, (e.g. from the electricity industry) but these resources have already been committed. The only way left is by credit, but debt service has gone from representing 19.1% of GDP in the last decade, to 41%.

2. Political crisis – Pastrana in trouble?

While the on-going struggle to raise funds is being played out in the international arena, at home President Pastrana is mired in a corruption and political crisis which threatens his credibility abroad and is prompting some commentators to predict that he won't see out his term. Elected on a broad alliance against corruption, The Alliance for Change, Pastrana's administration is now suffering corruption scandals of its own. These emerged after Pastrana had proposed a 17 point national referendum aimed at purging corruption. The measure includes the dissolution of the current Congress and new elections. The move rocked the political terrain: the Liberals abandoned the Alliance for Change, with which Pastrana's administration had managed to constitute a fictitious majority in the Congress. Corruption allegations were made against Pastrana's closest staff who are accused of using an inter-ministerial fund to buy votes in Congress.

Juan Hernandez, General Secretary of the President's Office; Virgilio Galvis, the Health Minister; and Néstor Humberto Martínez, the Home Secretary, all resigned. Martínez was quickly replaced by the Ambassador to the UK, Humberto de la Calle Lombana, as a way to bring the Liberals back on board. The resignation was followed by a presidential address calling for a 'grand national cross-party agreement' on the fundamental issues of international relations, drug trafficking, the economic agenda and the peace talks. However, many sectors have expressed their concern that this will end in just another power-sharing agreement, as is traditionally the case in Colombian politics. In the interim, the Executive decided to withdraw the referendum proposal and use an

alternative mechanism to hold a referendum that bypasses Congress.

Congress in return proposed an alternative referendum to establish a Constituent Assembly, and Horacio Serpa, the Liberal candidate beaten by Pastrana at the last election, has offered to agree to a referendum if Pastrana himself resigns and stands for re-election. Currently, there are three differing referendum proposals on the table, which all may be put to the electorate on the same day. However, the Public Prosecutor and the Attorney General have made it clear that Colombia does not need more laws in order to fight corruption as the existing ones are sufficient. What is needed is the political will to make progress in the anti-corruption struggle.

At the same time, however, rumours of clandestine documents and plans for a coup have re-emerged. There is no doubt that the leader of the paramilitary umbrella the AUC, Carlos Castaño, is building a political career, and some say that he is leading the plans for a coup should the peace talks fail. Earlier in the year he gave his first full-face interview to the media, claiming to represent the middle-classes in Colombia who have been victims of the guerrilla. Opinion polls taken after this interview was televised indicated a significant level of popularity. At the same time, others are talking about the existence of a Memorandum of Intent between the FARC and Pastrana, which would extend his term for two years and bring the key political power holders into a National Constituent Assembly with the FARC to address issues of political reform.

The Social and Political Front – an opportunity in the crisis

The political crisis seems to have given new energy and direction to the left. The Social and Political Front, launched on 12th April, brings together different social sectors including political movements such as the Unión Patriótica (the Patriotic Union), the Colombian Communist Party and the Corriente de Renovación Socialista (Socialist Renovation Movement); the principal workers' unions led by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Workers' Unions Umbrella Group-CUT); the Network of

Citizens' Initiatives against the War and in favour of Peace, (REDEPAZ) and the Comisión de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Commission).

The Front recognises that it will have to overcome some serious obstacles if it is to be a viable political alternative to the traditional political parties which have held power for more than 150 years. It will also need to protect itself against attack by extreme right-wing groups that have so often violently silenced the political alternatives in Colombia, the most representative case being the genocide committed against the Patriotic Union. Finally, the real challenge is to overcome the historic divisions in the left itself, which has helped to marginalise it as a political force.

Luis Eduardo Garzón, president of the CUT and the driving force behind the Front, described it as an open space for debate, tolerant yet critical, with "colour, flavour and aroma": a collective project that will respect and tolerate diverse regional identities as well as the autonomy and identity of the social and political movements that form it. He hopes that the organisation will unite those in search of alternative politics.

At the launch Garzon stated that the Front supports a negotiated political solution to the armed conflict. He condemned the blowing up of electricity pylons by the ELN, the massive roadblock kidnappings and all actions against the civilian population. He strongly criticised Plan Colombia and current government's policies for causing a polarisation of society, a military escalation of the conflict and for delaying solutions to the most urgent problems of the country such as unemployment and poverty. He entered the referendum debate, calling for a popular constituent assembly that would make profound democratic reforms to regional and national life. He demanded that the traditional political class represented by the Liberal and Conservative parties take responsibility for the current situation of the country: a decrease of 5% in GDP, unemployment at 20% and underemployment at 58%. Regarding the economic model, he proposed the development of a mixed and plural economy, in which the state would be

responsible for social security, sovereignty, public services and basic social services. Lastly he proposed that the first national congress of the Front be held on 20 July this year.

3. The Peace Process – Under fire from extremists

Peace and the FARC

The Peace Process with the FARC is slowly recovering from one of its worst crises to date. On 15 May in the municipality of Chiquinquirá, (Boyacá), Doña Elvia Cortés had her head blown off by a necklace bomb that had been glued round her neck, allegedly as punishment for refusing to pay an extortion demand to the FARC. The local police struggled for six hours to remove it but it blew up before they succeeded, causing further casualties. Within three hours Generals Rosso José Serrano, Director of the National Police Force and Fernando Tapias, Commander in Chief of the Military Forces had blamed the FARC for this abominable act. The Government immediately suspended a proposed international meeting between 21 country representatives, the FARC and the government negotiating commission, due to be held on 29-30 May in the demilitarised zone. The United States supported Pastrana's stand. The FARC called a press conference in which they categorically denied responsibility for the killing and put the up-coming negotiations on ice. By the weekend, after initial investigations by the relevant authorities, the new High Commissioner for Peace, Camilo Gómez, stated that there was less and less evidence that the guerrillas of the FARC were responsible for the 'necklace bomb'.

Analysis of this latest grotesque outrage indicates that there are serious opponents who are taking more extreme measures to upset the process. The international meeting has now been re-instituted for the end of June, but no one is in any doubt as to the continuing fragility of the process.

The agenda for negotiations – inching forward

Formal negotiations have now started, with three issues to be discussed in the first 18-month period: the socio-economic model; human rights and international humanitarian law, and political reform, in that order. An arrangement has been agreed to avoid the process becoming blocked on a particular issue. If disagreements persist, a second round will be initiated, and following that, a record will be made and the talks will proceed to the next point so that the process is not paralysed.

The socio-economic discussion will include integral agrarian policy and the exploitation and conservation of natural resources. Colombians hope that discussion of the economic model will bring the true causes of the conflict onto the negotiation table. The Human Development Report on Colombia for 1999, prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), details how far the country has fallen behind in terms of quality of life, education, literacy and income per capita, figures which put Colombia among the bottom countries on the American continent. Pastrana's own Development Plan recognises that 55% of households are below the poverty line and that 8.3 million Colombians live in poverty, meaning that at least 75% of the inhabitants of this country live in abject poverty, a situation set to deteriorate with IMF-agreed structural adjustment still to be implemented

Public Audiences

As a controlled way of engaging a wider range of social and political actors in the process, a series of hearings on the issue of employment have been held. More than 200 people have participated from all over the country. A further 300 proposals been received by post or Internet.

Cease-fire – hopes or dreams?

Hopes for a cease-fire have been raised despite the FARC's position of not calling a cease-fire until 80% of the agenda has been negotiated. Since 27 April, the government and the FARC have been presenting their proposals for a cease-fire to the negotiating table, and calls for proposals to be made to the table by those outside the formal process have been issued with a deadline of

July 3rd. Proposals include an initial three-month multi-lateral cease-fire covering all state security bodies, with a verification commission with members from the two sides. In all cases, a mechanism to make the paramilitary groups respect the cease fire would also have to be determined. According to the FARC, this is the responsibility of the government.

The Peace Process and the International Community

There is no doubt that the United Nations, the United States and the European Union are all now on the brink of serious political involvement in Colombia's peace process. UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on Colombia, Jan Egeland, is playing a significant role in engaging support for the process, and will make representations at both the London and Madrid meetings convened for Plan Colombia discussions. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, along with the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Peace Initiatives Network and representatives of different sectors of civil society have demanded the immediate signing of a humanitarian agreement. The Government of Colombia and the FARC are seeking dialogue on the issue of illicit crops and possible crop substitution programmes, an issue of great importance to the United States and Europe. The US is predicating its support on reciprocal support from Government of Colombia for its eradication programme, something the FARC opposes. The European Union has historically held the view that alternative development is a preferred method of reducing production levels.

This involvement is the next stage of the international community's engagement with the process which began in earnest earlier this year. The then High Commissioner for Peace, Victor G Ricardo, and a commission from the FARC, undertook a tour of European states ostensibly to examine their political and economic models. An agenda was put together for the purpose of enriching the discussions at the negotiation table. The tour set off on 1 February and included various meetings in Sweden and Norway concerning economic management

models, the structure of the state and political system, the role of the trade unions and employers, property, justice and social security among others issues. The tour was extended to include meetings in Rome with delegates from the Italian government and Monsignor Giorgio Lingua, a Vatican Foreign Office official and expert on Colombia. With this gesture Pope John Paul showed his support for the peace process. All who participated agreed it had been a significant contribution to essential trust-building between the parties

The Bolivarian Movement – a repeat of the Union Patriótica?

Quite apart from the negotiating process itself, the FARC has been busy with the launch of a new clandestine political movement and the start of a process in which it appears to be constituting itself as an alternative state.

The FARC announced the public launch of their political wing, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, on Saturday 29 April. The intention is that this should be a clandestine movement, in an attempt to avoid the kind of repression and assassinations that the UP (Patriotic Union) met with. More than three thousand members of this last group were murdered. The guerrilla group has stated that it will not participate in local elections in October. They will support popular candidates instead. The launch of this movement shows the political interest of the FARC not only with regard to the peace process but also with regard the current political crisis that the country is experiencing.

FARC and Plan Colombia

Many commentators believe that the upsurge in kidnapping and distortion in departments such as Cundinamarca is directly related to the FARC's need to strengthen its hand faced with increased US involvement in the military arena. This can be seen in the FARC's Law 002, aimed at exacting a 10% 'voluntary' tax contribution from everyone with assets equal to or above US\$1m and in an order from Jorge Briceño, alias Mono Jojoy, to all fronts to up their membership, with the aim of reaching 32,000 men-at-arms, from the 16,000 at present. In addition, Manuel Marulanda,

Commander-in-chief of the FARC, has announced that the FARC will create their own justice system.

Such pronouncements have seriously undermined support for the government's peace efforts. In response the Government of Colombia has announced a new peace team: Camilo Gómez Alzate, a lawyer, is the new High Commissioner for Peace, (replacing Victor G. Ricardo) and Luis Guillermo Giraldo, Alfonso López Caballero and Monsignor Alberto Giraldo join the negotiation team.

Peace and the ELN

On 24 April an agreement was announced that made way for a 'zone for meeting and coexistence' as a place to hold the 'National Convention', the preferred mechanism of the ELN. The 'meeting zone' will initially last for nine months, and covers the municipalities of San Pablo and Cantagallo (Bolívar) and Yondó (Antioquia) comprising an area of 4749 km². It is 10% of the area of the demilitarised zone created for the peace talks with the FARC-EP. Due to criticisms of alleged excesses on the part of the FARC in their military-free zone, the new 'meeting zone' will have continuous national and international monitoring and the judicial authorities will remain in place. Emphasis will be placed on providing mechanisms to protect the fundamental rights of the population and to ensure that the area will not be used to strengthen the military capacity of the ELN.

The danger now appears to lie in the paramilitary threat. Paramilitary presence in the area is considerable and while Carlos Castaño has told the Human Rights Ombudsman that he is ready to withdraw his troops from the designated area if the ELN promises to implement a cease-fire, there has been strong local opposition. Roadblocks have been set up along several roads in the Magdalena Valley by peasant farmers protesting because they do not want to become victims of guerrilla atrocities. Even though the paramilitaries have claimed not to be behind these demonstrations, serious doubts remain as to the spontaneity of these inhabitants' protests. There also seems to have been a lack of communication on the part of the

government to explain exactly the content and process of the ELN dialogue.

Visits by several members of the facilitating committee to try to convince the local population that negotiations leading to a peaceful solution with the ELN would be beneficial to the country have been unsuccessful, despite guarantees for fundamental rights, and the proposed national and international verification committees.

The ELN have stated that they would cease their actions on the Bogotá-Medellín road, allow the return of displaced persons as well as the repair of destroyed electricity pylons as gestures of peace. They also announced that they would accept the participation of serving military officials in the verification committees.

Talks are continuing to try to set a start date.

4. Human Rights – the same old story

During the period of this Update the 56th UN Commission on Human Rights received the third of the High Commissioner's reports from her office in Bogotá, which largely repeated the same recommendations and raised the same concerns as in the past. The Chair of the Commission read out a statement on Colombia that did not differ substantially from previous years. In overall terms there continues to be deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian crisis, and a continuing lack of real progress in the fight against impunity, or the paramilitary apparatus. Just prior to the Commission, Human Rights Watch produced a highly controversial report, *The Ties that Bind*, that highlights in detail the links between three of the Colombian Army's brigades and paramilitary groups. (See executive summary attached). It states without ambiguity that there is "detailed, abundant and convincing evidence of the habitual close links between the Colombian Army and the paramilitary groups responsible for serious human rights violations". It specifies that the III, IV and XIII Brigades have directly participated in massacres of civilians in their counter-insurgency fight. HRW also gives

concrete examples of this involvement, by stipulating, for example, that the so-called paramilitary group 'Frente Calima' (the 'Calima Front'), responsible for massacres in the department of Valle, is actually a group belonging to the army itself. While this report had significant impact in many circles, it has not deflected the US administration from its determination to support the Colombian military with counter-narcotics aid. This is despite very real doubts about the Colombian Army's human rights record, which the US state Department's annual report on the human rights situation in Colombia itself recognises.

5. Internal Displacement And A Growing Refugee Flow

According to the Consultoría para los derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES) 288,127 people were displaced by violence in 1999. The problem has also spread to neighbouring countries: around 11,700 Colombians have fled to Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador in search of refuge. Internally displaced persons continue to be one of the most worrying indications of the conflict. Close to 89% of the displaced persons fled for reasons directly or indirectly linked to the war.

While those who have the resources seek a route out of the country, those dependent on the State for support continue to be inadequately served by a failing state and lack of political will. The shift in responsibilities to the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Security Network - RSS) has seen an erratic and wholly inadequate response. This appears to have encouraged a series of occupations of public offices by displaced persons, culminating in a prolonged and ongoing occupation of the offices of the ICRC. Initially the ICRC suspended its operations in 16 locations in Colombia, seriously affecting its humanitarian work with respect to visits to political prisoners, mediation with guerrilla groups to communicate with kidnapped persons and other matters related to its duties. A solution to the occupation still has not been achieved.

For the rest of the displaced population in other parts of Colombia the situation continues to be unstable. Efforts by the Catholic Church to accompany return processes in the department of Chocó, continue to meet with numerous obstacles, among them constant harassment by the armed actors, combat between armed groups, and direct attacks by paramilitary groups. Thanks to the constant accompaniment by diplomatic delegations and the stubbornness of organisations for the displaced, the national and international NGOs and the Church have managed to maintain a presence offering humanitarian aid in the whole of the Urabá region. Other areas continue to be under-served.

The exodus grows

The well-known television presenter with the longest track record in the industry, Pacheco, is the latest in a long list of well-known Colombians seeking refuge abroad. He follows hard on the heels of Francisco 'Pacho' Santos, editor of *El Tiempo*, and director of the Fundación País Libre (Free Country Foundation). Many other journalists, intellectuals, human rights defenders and other Colombians, alone or with their families have also left in the last few years, the majority of them without the fame or recognition afforded by the media. This exodus of the population has now taken on alarming proportions. An article in the *New York Times* on 5 March calculated that 800,000 Colombians have emigrated in the last four years (.e. 2% of a population of 40 million). This coincides with the Colombian Government figures of 600 people leaving the country every day by land or by air.

Plagued by the economic recession, unemployment, especially among professionals, the insecurity, threats and abuses committed as part of the armed conflict, and the increase in kidnappings (2663 people were kidnapped in 1999, a world record), streams of people from the middle and upper classes are hurriedly looking for other countries of residence.

As a result, visa applications have dramatically increased for many destinations, in particular Costa Rica, the United States, Canada, Australia and Western European countries. The number of

visa applications per year at the United States Embassy, for example, has leapt from 150,514 to 336,423 between 1997 and 1999; an increase of almost 150% in only two years. The earliest appointments for visa applications are for May 2001.

A serious implication of the exodus is that many of those who are leaving are professionals, in whose training the country has invested enormous resources; and social leaders, whose obligatory departure will further erode the social capital of the country. This has led Gonzalo Sanchez, a researcher at the National University, to warn of the risks for Colombia in a 'cultural brain drain' of unprecedented proportions.

Colombia: A threat to its neighbours?

Colombia shares land borders with five other Latin American countries, and is accessible by way of two oceans. This seems to give the Colombian conflict regional importance. Two central issues are possible spill over of the conflict and refugee flows.

In the last five years populations fleeing the violence have mainly ended up in Ecuador and Panama, less so in Venezuela, and at a very much lower rate in Brazil and Peru.

Ecuador has a clear policy on refugees and accepts asylum seekers. However, this country has been traditionally used by arms traffickers on their route for importing arms illegally to Colombia for the guerrillas or the paramilitaries. According to the recently opened UNHCR office in Quito, cases of Colombian asylum seekers are currently most numerous in Ecuador. The church and social and non-governmental organisations, carrying out humanitarian work with the displaced people, are also concerned about the negative impact that the renewed anti-drugs war as part of the Plan Colombia could have in the department of Putumayo.

The FARC's attack on the coastal village of Juradó (Chocó) in December 1999 produced a new exodus of the population, obliging them to flee to **Panama**. Almost 600 people, the majority of them from black or mixed race communities, arrived by motor boat, the remaining 130 people from Embera and Waunaan indigenous communities made a gruelling six day journey across the Darien

jungles. These refugees have now joined 500 others that fled from paramilitary attacks in the Gulf of Urabá Antioquia and Chocó.

The Panamanian government's policy has changed since 1997 when it forcibly returned (*refouled*) 230 asylum seekers in complicity with the Colombian authorities. Currently, thanks to a 1998 internal law displaced people have received provisional humanitarian protection, but there is nothing to guarantee that they will not be *refouled*. Panama, like Ecuador, has been a favourite place for arms and drugs traffickers, many of them Colombians, which tends to mean refugees are viewed with suspicion.

With respect to **Venezuela**, after the apparently voluntary return of the asylum seekers eight months ago when paramilitaries occupied the jungles of Catatumbo, (Norte de Santander), the two governments have insisted on a policy of containment that has not favoured refugees. The situation in **Peru** has not been sufficiently documented. Apart from the constant movement of Amazonian indigenous populations that have relatives on both sides of the border, the only thing that can be reported is that President Fujimori has begun a campaign to transfer military units towards the Colombian border. With respect to **Brazil**, information is even scarcer. No data is available on displacement of the population.

6. Prison Crisis – the war in microcosm

At the end of April the brewing crisis in the Prison service saw a pitched battle in the La Modelo prison in Bogotá which left over 30 people dead. What appeared to be a confrontation between the paramilitaries who control one of the landings and the so-called common criminals highlighted yet again the scandalous conditions in Colombia's prisons. According to an ex-advisor to the prison service, Alberto Caicedo, La Modelo is at 200% capacity, and conditions for inmates (60% of Colombia's prison inmates are on remand, but not kept separately) are some of the most inhumane in the world. He maintains that in order to eat decently, sleep on a

mattress, have access to toilets, bathrooms, washing facilities, health services and visitors, an inmate must pay on average \$3,000,000 Colombian pesos a month to those who control the landings. If they cannot, they must work for those in control, which means they often become paid killers. Caicedo suggest that it is often those who have been arrested for non-payment of child support who end up in this situation.

The tragedy in La Modelo also showed just how far Colombia's internal conflict is being played out inside the penal establishments. The battle in La Modelo served to split the prison more effectively into two halves, one controlled by the guerrilla, the other by the paramilitaries. Every inmate is now forced to align themselves with one side or the other, while the authorities seem to wash their hands of their constitutional and international obligations.