



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Colombia

Colombia – COL36831 – Santander –
National Liberation Army (ELN) – Frente
Efrain Pabon Pabon – State protection –
Internal relocation

19 July 2010

1. Was an ELN guerrilla group ‘Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon’ active in Santander in 2007/8? Is it active now? If so, in what parts of Colombia and who does it generally target?

The National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or ELN) guerrilla group Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon was active in the department of Santander in 2007 and 2008, as well as being active in the department prior to and since that time. It remains active in other municipalities of Santander department, as well as in other Colombian departments. Reports located regarding Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon activity in Santander refer to gun battles with Colombian security forces in December 2005, July 2006 and March 2007. Specific information on the targets of the Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon was not located, but the ELN generally targets police and government security forces, members of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC), supporters and members of paramilitary groups, politicians, teachers, doctors, religious leaders, journalists, and civilians in conflict zones or in drug or weapon transport corridors.

A Google translation of a document sourced from the ELN website ‘Patria Libre’ indicates that the Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon was formed in 1983 to operate in the province of Garcia Rovira, in the east of Santander Department and near the municipality of Piedecuesta. According to this source, the Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon also operates in the province of Pamplona in Norte de Santander, the neighbouring department to the north-east of Santander and close to Piedecuesta.¹ A 2002 article sourced from the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional*, and purportedly based on a leaked Venezuelan Military Intelligence Directorate document, claims that the “Efrain Pabon Pabon squad” of the ELN is comprised of “3 commissions of 300 members”.²

¹ Eastern Front War 2008, ‘Ephemeris: 28 Years of History’, Google translation from Patria Libre website, 1 September
http://translate.google.com.au/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.nodo50.org/patrialibre/nuestravoz/nv2008_80.htm&ei=gGY-TN2dFIKmvGOU4Z2IDw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CCQO7gEwAg&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522efrain%2BPabon%2BPabon%2522%26hl%3Den%26safe%3Doff%26rlz%3D1T4EGLC_enAU386AU386%26prmd%3Do – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 1; ‘Santander Department (Colombia)’ 2009, Flagspot website, 2 October <http://flagspot.net/flags/co-san.html> – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 2.

² ‘General News’ 2002, VHeadline.com website, (source: *El Nacional*) 18 March
<http://vheadline.com/readnews.asp?id=8574> – Accessed 12 July 2010 – Attachment 3.

The map below shows the location of Santander, Norte de Santander and Arauca Departments (blue arrows), and the approximate location of Piedecuesta (pink arrow and text).³



³ 'Colombia' 2008, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, (source: Central Intelligence Agency) http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/txu-oclc-256488229-colombia_pol_2008.jpg – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 4.

Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon activity in Santander and Norte de Santander in 2007-2008

No references were located to Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon activity in Santander in 2007-2008, but a report was located of an armed clash in July 2006. The website of the Second Division of the Colombian Army reported the clash with members of the Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon in the Cepita municipality of Santander Department.⁴ Cepita is to the immediate south of Piedecuesta municipality.

A March 2007 report of the Colombian Army News Agency noted that two members of the “Efrain Pabon Pabon”⁵ died in a clash with the Colombian armed forces in San Calixto in the Norte de Santander Department.⁶ As noted, the municipality of Piedecuesta is close to the border between Santander and Norte de Santander.

ELN activity in and around Piedecuesta in 2007-2008

Only one reference was located to ELN activity in Piedecuesta in the period 2007-2008. In March 2007, Colombian security forces killed one ELN member from an unnamed front during combat at “Umpala village, Piedecuesta municipality rural area, Santander Department”, according to the website of the Colombian Army.⁷

Of the surrounding municipalities, according to an October 2007 briefing paper from the International Crisis Group (ICG), as of November 2007 there were small ELN fronts active in the Santander municipalities of Charta, Tona, Surata and Matanza, all to the immediate north of Piedecuesta. Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon is not specifically mentioned in this report as being among these active fronts; the Claudia Isabel Escobar front and the José Fernando Porras front are the two ELN fronts named.⁸

There are reports of ELN activity in Santander Department outside of the specified time period which may be of interest. The Colombian Air Force website carries a December 2005 article sourced from the Santander newspaper *Vanguardia Liberal* which reports a gunfight between soldiers and ELN members at Sevilla, in Piedecuesta municipality, in which one ELN member was killed and two surrendered.⁹

It may be of further interest to note that the ELN does have a history of attacking politicians in Piedecuesta; in February 1994, ELN members bombed four political party

⁴ ‘Blow to the structures of ELN’ 2006, Google translation of Segunda Division Ejercito Nacional website, 26 July http://translate.google.com.au/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.segundadivision.mil.co/index.php%3Fidcategoria%3D107841&ei=gGY-TN2dFIKmvGOU4Z2IDw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CEYQ7gEwCQ&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522efrain%2BPabon%2BPabon%2522%26hl%3Den%26safe%3Doff%26rlz%3DIT4EGLC_enAU386AU386%26prmd%3Do – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 10.

⁵ This is the same group as Frente Efrain Pabon Pabon (Frente translates as ‘front’).

⁶ ‘Guerillas fighters die in combats against the Army’ 2007, Republic of Colombia Army website, (source: Army News Agency), 2 March <http://www.army.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=190131> – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 9.

⁷ ‘Eleven criminals die in combats with the Army’ 2007, Republic of Colombia Army website, 29 March <http://www.army.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=190611> – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 6.

⁸ International Crisis Group 2007, *Colombia: Moving Forward with the ELN?*, Latin America Briefing No. 16, 11 October, p. 3 – Attachment 5.

⁹ ‘ELN had camp in Sevilla’ 2005, Colombian Air Force website, (source: *Vanguardia Liberal*), 12 December <http://www.fac.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=6357> – Accessed 16 July 2010 – Attachment 7.

offices in and around the capital of Santander Department Bucamaranga, including in Piedecuesta.¹⁰

Recent reports on Frente Efraín Pabón Pabón and the ELN in Santander and nearby departments

Recent reports sourced from the Colombian media, the Colombian military, and international media and governmental sources indicate that the Frente Efraín Pabón Pabón arm of the ELN and the ELN more broadly continue to operate in Santander and in other departments.

- On 20 June 2010, the day of the presidential run-off election in Colombia, seven police officers died in a minefield laid by the ELN in Norte de Santander department.¹¹
- On 17 April 2010, Colombian media sources *Radio Santa Fe* and *El Tiempo* reported the arrest in La Palma, in the municipality of Piedecuesta, of a member of the “Mario Efraín Ramírez Ortiz Pabón Pabón Front” of the ELN. The man, known as “Pipe”, is reported to have carried out kidnappings and extortion in the villages of Cubin, Sevilla, La Palma and Crystals, in Piedecuesta municipality, and in the neighbouring municipalities of Santa Barbara and Guaca, over the previous ten years.¹²
- The USDOS March 2010 human rights report on Colombia lists Santander as being among the “high-conflict areas” in Colombia “where the military was involved in active hostilities against insurgents”, including the ELN.¹³
- The website of the Republic of Colombia Army carries a report claiming that in February 2009 a member of the Efraín Pabón Pabón “voluntarily turned himself in at Samore, Santander” to troops from the army’s Second Division.¹⁴
- The newspaper *El Colombiano* reports that at least nine people died in conflict between members of the ELN and FARC in Arauca department in north-east

¹⁰ ‘Political party offices bombed in Santander Department’ 1994, *BBC Monitoring Service: Latin America*, (source: *EFE* news agency), 7 February – Attachment 8.

¹¹ Bristow, M. 2010, ‘Colombian Election-Day Violence Claims 7 Police, 3 Soldiers’, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 20 June <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-06-20/colombian-election-day-violence-claims-7-police-3-soldiers.html> – Accessed 16 July 2010 – Attachment 11.

¹² ‘Captured one of the most sought after Santander’ 2010, Google translation from *Radio Santa Fe*, 17 April http://translate.google.com.au/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.radiosantafe.com/2010/04/17/capturan-a-uno-de-los-mas-buscados-de-santander/&ei=gGY-TN2dFIKmvGOU4Z2IDw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CDsO7gEwBw&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522efrain%2BPabon%2BPabon%2522%26hl%3Den%26safe%3Doff%26rlz%3D1T4EGLC_enAU386AU386%26prmd%3Do – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 12; ‘Santander caught in a ‘Pipe’, a member of the Front of the ELN Efraín Pabón Pabón’ (undated), Google translation from *El Tiempo*, http://translate.google.com.au/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/oriente/ARTICULO-WEB-PLANTILLA_NOTA_INTERIOR-7611910.html&ei=Fd8yTOqFGs2LkAX5v6ihDA&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBoQ7gEwAA&prev=/search%3Fq%3DFrente%2BEfracin%2BPabon%26hl%3Den%26safe%3Doff%26rlz%3D1T4EGLC_enAU386AU386%26prmd%3Do – Accessed 6 July 2010 – Attachment 13.

¹³ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Reports: Colombia*, 11 March – Attachment 14.

¹⁴ ‘Army continues offensive action in Santander’ 2009, Republic of Colombia Army website, 21 February <http://www.army.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=215785> – Accessed 15 July 2010 – Attachment 15.

Colombia in June 2010. It is not known how many of the dead were members of either group, or how many were local civilians caught in the fighting.¹⁵

- In May 2010, *El Colombiano* reported that a local ELN leader had been killed by the Colombian military in Lebanon municipality, Tolima department.¹⁶
- A *BBC News* report from November 2009 states that members of the ELN broke a top ELN leader out of prison in Arauca Department in October 2009; this report claims that the ELN is influential and has “deep roots” in the community in Arauca.¹⁷
- According to the 2010 USDOS human rights report on Colombia, ELN members killed three police officers and three civilians in an ambush in Norte de Santander Department on 12 February 2009.¹⁸
- A February 2010 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report on attacks on teachers and educational facilities in Colombia notes that on 15 June 2008, the ELN burned down a village school near Sabanalarga. There are three towns named Sabanalarga in Colombia, and this report does not specify in which town this attack took place.¹⁹

ELN activities and targets in Colombia

As noted above, the Frente Efraim Pabon Pabon is reported to have been active in the Santander, Norte de Santander, and Arauca Departments. Although the specific targets of the group were not located, it is a front of the ELN, which is reported to target police and security forces, members of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC), supporters and members of paramilitary groups, politicians, teachers, doctors, religious leaders, journalists, and civilians in conflict zones or in drug or weapon transport corridors. Given the little information located on the activities of the Frente Efraim Pabon Pabon in Santander, the information that follows refers to ELN targets in Colombia generally.

The US Department of State’s (USDOS) March 2010 human rights report on Colombia provides the following summary of ELN and FARC activities and targets (a similar paragraph was also used in the 2008, 2007 and 2006 USDOS human rights reports, which could indicate the consistent nature of ELN and FARC activity over the past several years):

...The FARC and ELN committed the following human rights abuses: political killings; widespread use of landmines; killings of off-duty members of the public security forces and local officials; kidnappings and forced disappearances; massive forced displacements; subornation and intimidation of judges, prosecutors, and witnesses; infringement on citizens’ privacy rights; restrictions on freedom of movement; widespread recruitment of child soldiers; attacks against human rights

¹⁵ ‘ELN-FARC left nine murders’ 2010, Colombian Air Force website, (source: *El Colombiano*), 2 June <http://www.fac.mil.co/index.php?idcategoria=52236> – Accessed 16 July 2010 – Attachment 16.

¹⁶ Giraldo, J.C. 2010, ‘Die heads of FARC and ELN’, Google translation from *El Colombiano*, 13 May http://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.elcolombiano.com/BancoConocimiento/M/mueren_jefes_de_farc_y_eln/mueren_jefes_de_farc_y_eln.asp&rurl=translate.google.com&usg=ALkJrhXR VHVntjLyh8Buo9Mc2AtCnYr7A – Accessed 16 July 2010 – Attachment 17.

¹⁷ McDermott, J. 2009, ‘Colombia’s ELN rebels show new vigour’, *BBC News*, 5 November – Attachment 19.

¹⁸ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Reports: Colombia*, 11 March – Attachment 14.

¹⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2010, *Education under Attack 2010 – Colombia*, 10 February – Attachment 20.

activists; violence against women, including rape and forced abortions; and harassment, intimidation, and killings of teachers and trade unionists.

The 2010 USDOS report goes on to claim that “FARC and ELN guerrillas killed journalists, religious leaders, candidates for public office, local elected officials and politicians, alleged paramilitary collaborators, and members of government security forces”, although few examples are given of when and where such activities took place. In one instance, ELN members killed three police officers and three civilians in an ambush in Norte de Santander Department on 12 February 2009, as previously noted.

Both the ELN and FARC are reported to have threatened and harassed doctors and nurses in high-conflict areas, and to have “prevented or limited the delivery of food and medicines to towns and regions in contested drug trafficking corridors”. The ELN were also responsible for the forcible displacement of peasants “to clear key drug and weapons transit routes in strategic zones and to remove individuals who collaborated with the government”. They are also reported to have “threatened, displaced, and killed educators and their families for political and financial reasons”, and to have “harassed, threatened, and sometimes killed religious leaders and activists, although often for their role as community leaders rather than for religious reasons”.²⁰

The most recent Amnesty International annual report on Colombia, from May 2010, claims that the ELN and FARC continue to commit human rights abuses and serious and repeated violations of international humanitarian law, including the killing of civilians, the recruitment of children and hostage-taking.²¹

The peace process and strength of the ELN

The ELN continues to be active, although its operational capacity and number of members have been considerably reduced since the early 2000s by the Colombian government’s military campaign against the ELN and FARC.

According to an October 2007 briefing paper from the International Crisis Group (ICG), a peace process between the ELN and the Colombian government formally began in December 2005, but this did not result in a ceasefire or put an end to kidnappings and other ELN activities. This report notes that the military capabilities of the ELN are “considerably reduced since the late 1990s” and that its numbers may have halved, due to military actions and conflict with FARC and paramilitary groups. Colombian government sources claim that “from 2002 to 2007 ELN military actions, including combat with security forces, ambushes, piracy and acts of terrorism, have gradually fallen from 195 per year to nineteen”.²²

More recently, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) produced research in April 2009 sourced from a report by the Colombian Foundation for Security and Democracy (*Fundación Seguridad y Democracia – FSD*). The FSD report states that between 2002 and 2008 the number of attacks committed by the ELN decreased by 77 percent, while the number of kidnappings decreased by 96 percent. Of the 29 kidnappings that did take place in 2008, 14 were in the department of Norte de Santander, to the

²⁰ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Reports: Colombia*, 11 March – Attachment 14.

²¹ Amnesty International 2010, *Annual Report – Colombia*, 28 May – Attachment 21.

²² International Crisis Group 2007, *Colombia: Moving Forward with the ELN?*, Latin America Briefing No. 16, 11 October, p. 3 – Attachment 5.

immediate north-east of Santander and near Piedecuesta.²³ Additionally, in December 2009, an ICG report quoted Colombian Ministry of Defence figures which claim that at least 2,742 ELN members have deserted the group since August 2002. Nonetheless, the report claims that the “ELN have adopted an approach of protracted resistance, demonstrating they still have the capacity to adapt to a changing security environment and gain new recruits mostly among the rural poor”.²⁴

As an arm of the ELN, it may be reasonable to conclude that the activities of the Frente Efraim Pabon Pabon have also diminished in recent years; however, kidnappings by the ELN in Norte de Santander account for nearly half of all ELN kidnappings nationally.

2. What protection is likely to be available by the authorities from threats or attacks by this group (or, if information on the group can't be located, by the ELN generally)?

No information was located on the availability of state protection for persons under threat or attack from the Frente Efraim Pabon Pabon specifically. Notwithstanding this, as Frente Efraim Pabon Pabon is part of the ELN, it is reasonable to think that information on state protection relating to the ELN also applies to its individual ‘*frente*’ (fronts).

The 2010 USDOS report on human rights in Colombia provides some detail on the government’s protection programme (administered by the Ministry of Interior under ‘Law 418 of 1995’²⁵) which extends to trade union leaders, journalists, human rights advocates, and “social leaders”. Despite the development of protection programmes, the report recognises that in 2009 “serious problems remained”, noting among these issues relating to governmental human rights abuses; unlawful and extrajudicial killings; forced disappearances; impunity; an inefficient judiciary subject to intimidation; corruption; and harassment of human rights groups.²⁶

According to a June 2010 ICG report, Colombia’s security forces lack a strategy to effectively protect citizens from the various armed paramilitary and guerrilla groups operating within the country, including the ELN. The size and range of the armed groups involved, “the fragmented nature of the groups and the unpredictability of their interactions complicate their identification and control”. This fragmentation is “adding a new dimension to the Colombian conflict, leading to a deterioration of security and endangering the civilian population”.²⁷ However, while protection is not universal, it has been increasing. In February 2010 the Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) undertook research into the viability of internal relocation in Colombia, and quoted a professor of Sociology at the National University of Colombia who claimed that while

²³ Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2009, *COL103020.FE – Colombia: Crime in Bogotá and Cali, activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) in those cities, government actions to combat the activities of these groups, and protection offered to victims*, 16 April – Attachment 22.

²⁴ International Crisis Group 2009, *Uribe’s Possible Third Term and Conflict Resolution in Colombia*, Latin America Report N°31, 18 December, pp. 3-4 http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/31_uribes_possible_third_term_and_conflict_resolution_in_colombia.ashx – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 23.

²⁵ ‘Antecedents’ (undated), Ministry of Interior and Justice, Colombia website, Google translation of http://www.mij.gov.co/pagina1_detalle.asp?doc=152&pag=591 – Accessed 5 February 2007 – Attachment 24. Please note that this translation is rough.

²⁶ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Reports: Colombia*, 11 March – Attachment 14.

²⁷ International Crisis Group 2010, *Improving Security Policy in Colombia*, Latin America Briefing No. 23, 29 June, pp. 11-12 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/colombia/B23%20Improving%20Security%20Policy%20in%20Colombia.ashx> – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 25.

“the capacity of the central State to provide protection is still insufficient, and it does not include the totality of the territory ... [this capacity] has been increased as far as the capacity to protect threatened or vulnerable people”.²⁸

Another area of weakness in the capacity of the state to protect citizens was noted in the December 2006 Overseas Development Institute²⁹ (ODI) background paper on state protection in Colombia. The report claimed that, historically, the Colombian government and armed forces “have been as great a threat to the civilian population as Colombia’s other armed groups”. The ODI report notes that the Colombian government’s response to the lack of security and protection faced by much of the country’s population is through widespread military deployments, which is problematic given government and government-backed forces have committed “widespread atrocities” with impunity. The state protection programmes initiated by the government, while welcomed by international actors such as UNHCR, are “greeted with distrust and derided by many civil society organisations” in Colombia, because they rely for their effectiveness on state military or other armed forces that have been responsible for past atrocities. In addition, once outside Bogota or other large urban areas, the “government’s ability to deliver protection on the ground when it is urgently required is highly questionable.” Notwithstanding this, the ODI report does claim a noticeable improvement in the behaviour of the Colombian armed forces over recent years, and notes that the government is establishing programmes to protect threatened individuals.³⁰

In addition to the problems posed by relying on government forces given their previous conduct, the UK Home Office reported in 2006 that the Colombian authorities’ willingness to offer protection to those at risk of harm is countered by the lack of effectiveness of any such protection. The government lacks the authority to counter the activities of guerrilla and paramilitary groups in many regions of the country, and these groups operate nationwide. As a result, the UK Home Office claimed that the Colombian government “cannot currently offer sufficient protection from these groups”.³¹ Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in March 2005 that “the inadequacy of state protection” in Colombia leaves citizens from all social strata and regions vulnerable to mistreatment by irregular armed groups of substantial size and with a national presence. The report also notes that seemingly innocuous actions or characteristics can result in persons being stigmatised as opponents of a particular group, whether it be the government, guerrilla or paramilitary.³² These findings appear to remain current given the abovementioned ICG report which observed the lack of an effective strategy to protect civilians in Colombia.

²⁸ Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *COL103286.E – Colombia: Whether the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP), the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) and the former United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) pursue victims who relocate to another area; whether these groups track their victims over the long term, even if the latter return to Colombia after an extended period of time*, 23 February – Attachment 26.

²⁹ ODI is a British think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

³⁰ Bonwick, A. 2006, *Protection in Colombia: a bottom-up approach*, Humanitarian Policy Group background paper, Overseas Development Institute website, December <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/289.pdf> – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 27.

³¹ UK Home Office 2006, *Operational Guidance Note – Colombia*, UK Home Office website, 18 September <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/colombiaogn?view=Binary> – Accessed 13 April 2007 – Attachment 28.

³² UNHCR 2005, *International Protection considerations regarding Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees*, March – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 29.

3. Are there any practical barriers to relocating within the country (to, for example, Bogota)?

The 2010 USDOS report on human rights in Colombia states that freedom of movement within Colombia is allowed by law, and the Colombian government generally respects this right except where rural conflict areas are affected by military operations and occupation.³³

In February 2010 the Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) undertook research into the viability of internal relocation in Colombia, consulting a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch, a professor of Sociology at Acadia University in Canada, and a professor of Law at Stetson University, Florida, who agreed that Colombian guerrilla groups, including the ELN, have the capacity to pursue victims throughout much of the country. The IRB also consulted a professor of Sociology at the National University of Colombia, who provided a contrasting perspective and claimed that it is “likely impossible” for a group such as the ELN to track a victim to another part of the country. The IRB research follows:

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch indicated that “[d]ue to their presence in vast sectors of Colombia, it is likely that the FARC, ELN and successor groups to the AUC have the capacity to pursue victims throughout many regions of the country” (9 Nov. 2009). This information was corroborated by a professor of Sociology at Acadia University and research member of the Atlantic Canada-Colombia Research Group, who, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, stated that, “[the FARC-EP and ELN] most certainly have the capacity and fortitude to continue targeting persons [they perceive] to be ‘class enemies’ or deterrents to their political and ideological objectives” (19 Jan. 2010).

Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of Law at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida and expert on international law and international criminal law, indicated that, “the FARC, and to a lesser extent the ELN, are absolutely capable of pursuing individuals nearly anywhere within the Colombian national territory if the individual’s threat or interest to either group warrants such effort” (21 Jan. 2010). In addition, she noted that these groups have the capacity to engage in intelligence gathering (Professor of Law 21 Jan. 2010). Furthermore, addressing the FARC “with the understanding that [these] statements apply to the ELN, as well”, she added that,

Colombia’s illegal armed groups ...have access to private bank records and credit card activities; they can track someone down based on their paper trail. They can eavesdrop on family members to determine where a target is located, or bribe acquaintances and neighbours for information.

...Colombia’s societal characteristics also play a role in the ability of an individual to resettle in a different part of the national territory. ... Regional identity is very important, especially among rural inhabitants of Antioquia (who are known as *paisas*), and it is virtually impossible to relocate from one part of the country to another without someone taking note.

...Whether the FARC would choose to continue pursuing a relocated individual depends greatly on the value of that individual to the FARC. If we are talking about a person of humble origins being relocated to another part of Colombia, it is possible that he could live in peace from further

³³ US Department of State 2010, *2009 Human Rights Reports: Colombia*, 11 March – Attachment 14.

FARC harassment. ... If the relocated individual is a member of the political elite, business class, academia, or professional class and was targeted by the FARC for extortion or coercion to cooperate and provide technical assistance to the FARC, that would render the individual a high-value target to the FARC. (ibid.)

However, in correspondence with the Research Directorate a professor of Sociology at the National University of Colombia (*Universidad Nacional de Colombia*) and author of articles on the armed conflict in Colombia stated that it is [translation] “likely impossible” for the FARC, ELN and former AUC to track their victims when they relocate from one part of the country to another (13 Jan. 2010). According to him, these groups do not have the capacity to carry out operations throughout the country (Professor, National University of Colombia 13 Jan. 2010).³⁴

The UNHCR examined the possibility of internal flight or relocation “for an individual fleeing non-state agents” in its March 2005 report on state protection in Colombia. After examining the general situation of the conflict and violence in Colombia, the report concluded that:

...it will be extremely difficult for an individual fleeing non-state agents of persecution to find an alternative area of relocation which could be considered safe. In regard to areas under the control of the authorities, the network of the irregular armed groups along with their ability to pursue their targets would continue to pose a threat to the individuals concerned, while the authorities will not be in a position to extend their protection to them. As a result, in many cases IDPs are repeatedly internally displaced due to recurring threats to their lives and security. There may also be reasons for such individuals not to approach the authorities since the authorities may perceive them as members of armed groups, and, furthermore any contacts with the authorities may expose the individuals concerned to further risks of being targeted by the irregular armed groups.

...Accessibility to alternative relocation areas may also not be safe given that there are large numbers of illegal checkpoints on travel routes throughout the country where individuals concerned may run the risk of indiscriminate violence or being identified and targeted. Given the widespread network of the irregular armed groups, the risk of being identified exists in rural areas as well as in big cities.

...given the situation in the country, the application of the internal relocation concept may generally be considered as irrelevant, unless in extremely clear-cut cases.³⁵

UK Home Office advice from September 2006 draws the same conclusion, based on the abovementioned UNHCR report.³⁶ The weight of evidence suggests that relocation can be problematic for those individuals in which the ELN and FARC have a particular interest.

³⁴ Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2010, *COL103286.E – Colombia: Whether the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP), the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) and the former United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) pursue victims who relocate to another area; whether these groups track their victims over the long term, even if the latter return to Colombia after an extended period of time*, 23 February – Attachment 26.

³⁵ UNHCR 2005, *International Protection considerations regarding Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees*, March – Accessed 19 July 2010 – Attachment 29.

³⁶ UK Home Office 2006, *Operational Guidance Note – Colombia*, UK Home Office website, 18 September <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/colombiaogn?view=Binary> – Accessed 13 April 2007 – Attachment 28.

Attachments

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