
COLOMBIA PEACE ASSOCIATION

BREAKING THE SILENCE

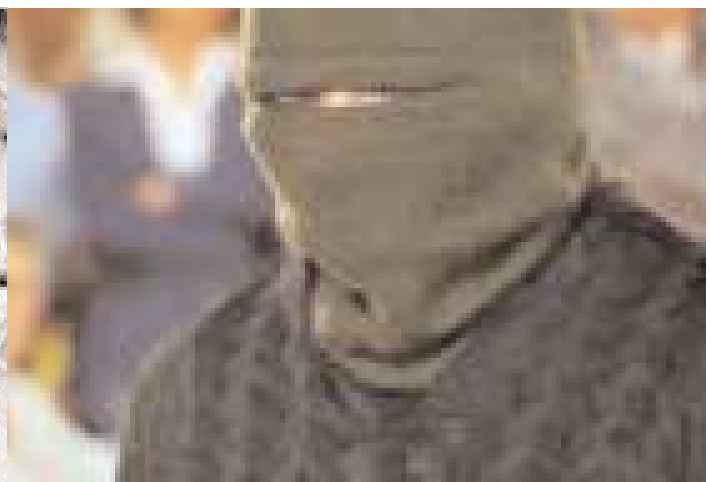
WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING IN COLOMBIA?

OCTOBER 2002

spot the difference



AUC paramilitary



Member of new informer network

The Firm Hand of Fascism

...the most notorious aspect of the Uribe plan is the proposed million-strong network of state informers from civil society, armed and paid by the government, and working alongside the security forces. By all intents and purposes this is a vastly enhanced version of Uribe's first experiment with arming civilian self-defence groups when he was governor of Antioquia from 1995-97. The Convivir, as they were known, were going to bring wellbeing, progress and peace to the community. Instead they came to be seen as the legal face of paramilitarism.

Just like the current network of informers in Uribe Velez's "Community State", the Convivir were described as a network of private security cooperatives authorised by the government with the objective of enabling citizens to cooperate more closely with the public security forces and bring greater security to Colombians, especially in rural areas. People were told that these were not paramilitaries, they would only have arms capable of self-defence and their role would only be to provide intelligence to the army and police.

What emerged was something quite different. Far from simply having weapons of self-defence, these private security armies were provided with a whole range of sophisticated weaponry, and, once they appeared in an area, massacres, assassinations, forced disappearances, forced displacements and social cleansing operations increased dramatically. Their promotion saw the expansion of paramilitarism on a massive scale. Antioquia, the department in which Alvaro Uribe Velez was governor at this time, is the first and foremost example of this. *See page 7 for full article.*

Colombia Peace Association

Children of Colombia Fund

One aspect of the work of the Colombia Peace Association is to raise money for projects designed to help vulnerable children in Colombia. This help may range from buying food, clothes and blankets for displaced families, paying for hospital or medical treatment for sick children or sponsoring welcome and rehabilitation centres for displaced and street children where they can get a meal, take part in activities or classes organised by trained youth workers and get some respite from their difficult lives.

**If you want to make a donation,
you can send a cheque, payable to the**

*Children of Colombia Fund ,
to Liz Atherton, Colombia Peace Association,
86 Durham Road, East Finchley, London N2 9DS.*

**Or you could make a donation at any bank
into the following account:**

*Children of Colombia Fund
Account Number: 00167511; Sort Code: 11-12-65*

**Or you could make a regular contribution
by completing the standing order form at the end of this bulletin.**

All projects will be coordinated through the Colombian NGO, ANDAS.

Thanks for your support

BREAKING THE SILENCE

What is Really Happening in Colombia?

‘an axis of evil has united against the leftist FARC-EP and the poor people of Colombia to maintain the status quo of violence and drug dealing. The US played the decisive role in establishing this nexus when it brought the AUC into the killer networks that the US established in 1991. Without massive US financial support the corrupt Colombian government would have fallen to the FARC last year’ – *see article on page 19*

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Contents

1. Declaration on Plan Colombia	5
2. Alvaro Uribe Velez: The Firm Hand of Fascism	7
3. War is Brewing in Colombia	10
4. Tonic for Colombia Troops	13
5. FARC Statement on the Decision of the European Union	15
6. Decree 2002	16
7. Each Year is Worse for Colombian Workers	17
8. Free Markets have Failed a Continent	19
9. The Political Economy of a Narco-Terrorist State	20
10. Campesinos Mobilise for Dignity, Food Sovereignty, Against ALCA and Forced Migration	30
11. Don't Fumigate Us Any More!!!	31
12. Our Objectives and Magic Realism	33
13. An Ongoing Political Genocide	35
14. Persecution of Political Prisoners in US-style Prisons	37
15. Suffer the Little Children	39
16. Reality for Displaced Children	41
17. Standing Order Form for Children of Colombia Fund	43

1. Declaration on Plan Colombia

We believe:

1. That Plan Colombia is yet another example of direct United States military intervention in the internal affairs of a Latin American sovereign State, this time, the Republic of Colombia, and it follows the trend set by the Monroe Doctrine and the policies which evolved from it during the Roosevelt administration, the destruction of Salvador Allende's legitimate government in Chile, the constant aggression directed against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, direct participation in the war in Central America and the maintenance of year after year of hostilities and a criminal embargo against Cuba, in spite of criticism from the United Nations.
2. That this intervention constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, of the right of peoples to self-determination and is a threat to the peace and stability of the region.
3. That because it is intrinsically a counterinsurgency plan, Plan Colombia is directed primarily against Colombia's civilian population, its immediate goal to destroy or neutralise any kind of social resistance to the neoliberal restructuring of the Colombian and Latin American economy.
4. That Plan Colombia, in reality, is a military plan which is involving other countries in the region, committing them to intervention in various ways, leaving no doubt about its aim to control the Amazon basin and undermining the sovereignty of those countries which comprise it. It jeopardises the process that has been undertaken by Commander Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.
5. That Plan Colombia, as a plan for war, is the main obstacle to the search for solutions to the Colombian conflict which offer an alternative to war.
6. That, moreover, it is causing the massive displacement of the civilian population living in rural areas to both to other parts of Colombia and to neighbouring countries.
7. That the use of the most modern war technology, including that of chemical and biological weapons against coca plantations, constitutes an unprecedented and very serious threat to the ecology of the world's most important area of biodiversity, the Amazon and to the health and livelihood of Colombia's campesino and indigenous populations.
8. That the plan for regional military intervention in Colombia is weakening both integration prospects and good relations between neighbouring countries and is setting the scene for war, creating uncertainty and anxiety among the peoples of the region.

We resolve:

1. To denounce and reject Plan Colombia as a plan for United States military intervention which will adversely affect prospects for peace, democratic stability and the economic development of the peoples and States of Latin America.
2. To denounce the proven and widespread collaboration between paramilitaries and the Colombian security forces with the complicity of the State which takes no action to stop this collaboration and the atrocities they commit together against the Colombian people.
3. To demand the dismantling of paramilitary groups and an end to the immunity enjoyed by paramilitaries and members of the security forces implicated in human rights atrocities.
4. To denounce the extreme security measures imposed by President Alvaro Uribe Velez, including the 'state of emergency' which gives untold powers and immunity to a military with the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere, and the 'informer network' which is none other than a massive expansion of the paramilitary strategy.
5. To promote international solidarity among peoples and governments with the struggles of the Colombian people who are seeking an alternative to war to solve the country's social and armed conflict.
6. To find ways of strengthening the bonds of friendship, integration and good will, and so create the building blocks for social justice and peace.
7. The call for the reinitiation of peace talks between the Colombian government and the country's rebel forces and continue to support a political solution to the social, political and armed conflict.
8. To support proposals for substituting illicit cultivations without resorting to toxic fumigations but by providing genuine and substantial long-term assistance to Colombia's campesino populations, enabling them to grow and market their traditional legitimate crops and reestablish national food security and sovereignty, as well as personal dignity.
9. To support proposals for combating drugs trafficking without resorting to war, as this is an economic and social phenomenon which affects all humanity.

The Colombia Peace Association

2. Alvaro Uribe Velez: The Firm Hand of Fascism

Liz Atherton

On 7 August 2002, Alvaro Uribe Velez, who for very many people represents the brutal 90s manifestation of the paramilitary phenomenon in Colombia, was inaugurated as the new president of Colombia.

His slogan? Firm hand, big heart.

But within days of taking office, it was clear that the firm hand of this right-winger was to keep the people repressed while the big heart was reserved for the country's political and economic elite, multinationals and the imperialist government of the United States.

Both in his electoral campaign and his inaugural speech, he spoke of wanting to bring peace to Colombia where rebels have maintained an undefeated armed resistance to a murderous oligarchic state for forty years.

Yet as he unveiled his "integral security plan", making expert use, just like Ariel Sharon of Israel, of all the terrorist rhetoric the United States had unleashed upon the world in the wake of 11 September, it became clear that his solution both to the conflict and the social problems at the root of it, was not to negotiate, but to obliterate the insurgency with military might and kill off remaining popular movements through repression, state terror and a massive overdose of people-toxic neoliberalism.

By day three of his presidency, Uribe Velez had set in motion a series of legislative measures designed to prepare the country for all-out war while firmly establishing the basis for a neoliberal takeover by predatory multinationals chomping at the bit to take advantage of some newly "pacified" cheap labour.

Uribe declared a "state of national emergency", streamlining parts of the state by fusing ministries, starting with the Ministries of the Interior and of Justice, and proposing to concentrate power in one House of Congress instead of two. One aim was to prevent any constitutional challenges to his decrees. Another was to legalise the institution of a war tax to partly fund his war campaign. Through the same "state of national emergency" he enacted a series of laws which give enormous new powers to state security forces with the sole purpose of severely curtailing people's fundamental and civil rights. They gave the army and police authority to detain people on the mere suspicion of supporting the guerrillas, without evidence and without legal counsel, and to break into and search people's homes without a warrant. The first example of this repression came very soon after the decree when the family home of the Director of the Human Rights Department of the Central Trade Union Federation (CUT) was raided by the army, allegedly searching for subversive literature and weapons. Needless to say, they didn't find any.

The new laws allow the army to control people's movement, either by restricting it or by forcibly displacing them in the interests of "national security". They can intercept private internet and telephone communications, and ban the use of mobile phones, something they frequently do in rural areas where mobile phones can be the only way for campesinos to alert one another to an impending paramilitary/army massacre.

Of course, such extreme manifestations of repression by the army and their paramilitary allies, who commit more than 80 per cent of human rights abuses, have been tolerated by the state for a very long time. The only difference now is that Uribe Velez is making constitutional reforms which “legalise” such activities within the framework of his “war on terrorism” and is also building up the apparatus to prevent information reaching the outside. Press freedom has been restricted and the government intends to rule on the legality of both national and international NGOs. Only pro-government, anti-guerrilla organisations, such as Pais Libre (funded by the US embassy and the wealthy family of Francisco Santos, Uribe’s extremist vice-president) are likely to survive the scrutiny. Both human rights organisations and trade unions across the country have been keeping copies of their legal records in safe places since Uribe Velez was elected in anticipation of “security” raids on their premises. Some trade union leaders are even considering setting up a shadow structure so that they can still function if their offices are shut down.

Perhaps the most notorious aspect of the Uribe plan is the proposed million-strong network of state informers from civil society, armed and paid by the government, and working alongside the security forces. By all intents and purposes this is a vastly enhanced version of Uribe’s first experiment with arming civilian self-defence groups when he was governor of Antioquia from 1995-97. The Convivir, as they were known, were going to bring wellbeing, progress and peace to the community. Instead they came to be seen as the legal face of paramilitarism.

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An 800-strong informer unit has already been set up in Cesar. Others have been established in Uraba and Magdalena. Many, seeing the staged fragmentation of the AUC paramilitaries, and Uribe’s recent encouragement to the governor of Cordoba and the President of the elite landowning Monteria Farmers’ Federation to hold talks with the paramilitaries, are fearing the legalisation and politicisation of paramilitarism and its growth through the informer networks on a scale never seen before.

Other “security” measures include swelling the ranks of the armed forces with some 100,000 campesinos serving as part-time reservists and 100,000 newly trained regular soldiers; making under-16s criminally accountable and liable to be sent to prison; as well as further militarising prisons and making sentences more severe. In addition, Uribe has made changes in the ranks of his military command, filling top posts with ultra-militant generals well versed in the art of scorched earth practices and the indiscriminate bombing of densely populated areas.

On the labour front, the new president has not been slow to demonstrate his neoliberal credentials, this in spite of the fact that since the Colombian economy was “opened up” in the early 1990s, the gap between

the rich and the poor has increased to such an extent that in 1990, the richest 10 per cent of Colombians earned 40 times more than the poorest 10 per cent, while in 2001, this had risen to 60 times more. It is estimated that today more than 65 per cent of Colombians live in conditions of extreme poverty, while more than 25 per cent live in absolute poverty. As many as 10 million of the country's 40 million people are unemployed or underemployed. Yet Uribe Velez, the World Bank, IMF and "supportive" governments in North America and Europe want to see neoliberal economic policies press ahead with labour flexibilisation, pension reform, privatisation of public services and the commoditisation of social benefits.

In a labour reform designed to increase the benefits to employers and reduce the security and wages of employees, Uribe is proposing to extend the working day to 16 hours, reduce overtime pay, eliminate holiday pay and create the circumstances whereby employers can take on and dismiss people at will without notice or compensation. The conditions will be set for Colombia to become an export processing zone just like its Latin cousins, Guatemala and Mexico.

These days a government can be voted into power by fewer than 25 per cent of eligible voters, with, in this case, many thousands of potential voters in rural areas effectively disenfranchised by Uribe's paramilitary supporters, and it is still considered democratic by other governments. It was hailed as a landslide victory in the media and by jubilant paramilitaries who not only claimed that a third of congress was made up of paramilitary allies but that now they even had a paramilitary president. However, the first legislative measures taken by Uribe Velez have erased any lingering impressions of democracy in Colombia and we are witnessing the emergence of a fascist state dead set on war.

The United States and Britain were quick to brush aside allegations about Uribe Velez's dark past as hearsay. Britain, one of the biggest European investors in Colombia, is continuing to provide unspecified "anti-terrorist" aid to unspecified units in the Colombian security forces, seemingly not too concerned about the potential escalation of human rights violations against the Colombian people. Meanwhile, the United States is being pressed for more aid, but there's no talk of human rights abuses by the Colombian security forces this time. Further military aid will be conditional only upon there being immunity for United States personnel if they are charged with human rights abuses. This is a sure indication that war is imminent and that greater direct US intervention is a forgone conclusion.

Recently, the vice-president of the Defence and Foreign Policy Unit of the US government think-tank CATO, Ted Galen Carpenter, published a report suggesting that George Bush could be about to repeat past US "mistakes" in Peru and El Salvador by supporting and strengthening the Uribe regime. If that is the case for the US, then the same clearly applies to Britain and we cannot let that happen.

Experts agree that, even with direct US intervention, the Colombian state cannot win a war against the guerrilla movements. Yet, in spite of repeated proposals by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for new peace talks, Uribe Velez is intent on his "final solution" which is not only a declaration of war on the insurgency but is a declaration of war against all popular movements and against the people. There is more to this war than beating a bunch of die-hard rebels. It is also about making Colombian society submissive to the neoliberal agenda and weakening it to the point that rebellion will be unthinkable in the future.

Or so they may think ... Popular resistance to this latest government offensive is expected to grow rapidly, and those who see no hope on the ground will take to the mountains and fight with the guerrillas.

3. War is Brewing in Colombia

Oliver Houston

War is brewing in Colombia.

A strange thing to say, perhaps, about a country that has been in the grip of civil conflict for the last 50 years, but while the world's attention is on Iraq, Israel and India, the South American country that's just a stone's throw from the Washington hawks' nest is set to erupt and we could soon be seeing the "Vietnamisation" of the whole Amazon region.

Under Plan Colombia, begun by the Clinton administration, the US pledged \$1.3 billion in military aid to Colombia, making it the leading recipient in the Western Hemisphere, ranking only behind Israel and Egypt worldwide. George Bush wants the total package increased to \$2 billion, and has succeeded in lifting all restrictions (such as they are) on how the aid can be used.

Colombia's new President, Alvaro Uribe Velez, who visited British Prime Minister Tony Blair in July, ran on a "final solution" ticket, promising to crush the peasant revolt that now controls 40 percent of the country by doubling the number of troops and creating a one million-strong "civilian" militia. Even before Uribe's election, the creation of the new Supreme Council of National Defence represented, according to Federico Andreu Guzmán, a UN expert on human rights and a legal advisor to Amnesty International, "a Coup d'Etat within the state. It is the legalisation of the transformation of Colombia into a de facto military dictatorship disguised as a formal civil democracy".

Uribe's links with the brutal, right-wing AUC paramilitary umbrella organization that works hand in glove with the Colombian military – and is said by Human Rights Watch to be responsible for 80 percent of the country's human rights violations and by the United Nations to be Colombia's largest drug cartel – are well documented.

But Uribe is coy about his relationship with the now extinct Medellin drug cartel: as mayor of Medellin, Uribe was connected to the famous drug lord Pablo Escobar; as director of the Civil Aeronautics Agency he granted pilots' licences to the cartel; and as a Senator he vehemently opposed the extradition of drug traffickers to the United States. Furthermore, the DEA has been interested for some years in Pedro Villa, Uribe's friend and campaign manager, whose company, GMP Productos Químicos, sells precursor chemicals used in the production of cocaine.

The new president has also vowed to continue the unpopular austerity measures, slashing public spending and privatising public utilities, to service the \$2.7 billion IMF loan taken out in December 1999. Only 46 percent of the 24 million people registered to vote in Colombia participated in the May ballot, leaving Uribe, who had a media mogul as his running partner, with just 5.8 million votes, less than a quarter of the electorate.

Many on the left-of-centre remain suspicious of "democratic engagement". The civil war in Colombia began when the popular Liberal candidate for the 1950 presidential election was assassinated, and, after the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and others laid down their arms in 1985 to form the Patriotic Union and contest elections, 5,000 of its candidates and campaign workers were killed, including a presidential candidate and his replacement.

So guerrilla recruitment continues apace, with few other avenues seemingly open to reformers. For instance, Colombia's right-wing death squads assassinate three out of every four trade union activists murdered worldwide each year. The EU raised the issue with the UN Commission on Human Rights in March, and US and international trade unions have recently joined Colombian workers in filing lawsuits in US courts against Coca-Cola and coal giant Drummond for orchestrating paramilitary campaigns of intimidation, torture and killing at their Colombian plants. Yet the murders continue, with over 100 trade unionists having been assassinated already this year, plus countless human rights workers, land reform advocates, academics and journalists.

Stan Goff, a retired US army Delta Force sergeant, jungle operations instructor and West Point military science teacher who was active in Panama, Grenada, Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia and Peru, insists: "If the guerrillas stood down tomorrow, the consequences for the peasants now partially under their protection would be horrendous. The people in the countryside are not facing a choice between violence and peace, but between self-defence or annihilation".

For its part, the FARC asserts, "Our voice is that of the Colombian people, [so] we will continue the struggle to find solutions to the problems of unemployment, lack of education, health, housing, land for the farmers, political freedom, democracy and national sovereignty and for a new government of national reconstruction and reconciliation".

The European Parliament voted against Plan Colombia in February 2001, and in June Britain's Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) withdrew its support too, disgusted by Plan Colombia's supposed coca fumigation programme that amounts to little more than a "scorched earth" policy. It is a policy that is exacerbating the internal refugee crisis through the use of chemical weapons that destroy food crops, pollute water supplies, and harm animals and people.

Undeterred, hawkish members of Congress, such as Senator Jesse Helms, supported by extremist members of the Bush administration and the powerful Cuban lobby in the swinging-chad state of Florida, where Jeb Bush is running for re-election this year, are pushing hard for a new "aid" package.

Larry Birns, director of the Council of Hemispheric Affairs and a former member of the UN economic commission for Latin America, says: "Those responsible for Latin America in the US State Department are the most extremist, off-the-wall team!" Chief amongst them is the notorious Otto Reich, who has a long record of covert meddling in Latin America and whom Bush appointed to the State Department in January against the advice of the Senate Foreign Relations committee. And in the Pentagon, there's Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, who was the aide to the head of the Contras when they were waging their US-backed war against the democratically elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

In April, US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, speaking to the House Appropriations Foreign Operations Subcommittee, claimed that Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah groups were operating near Ecuador's border with Colombia and Peru, coincidentally a guerrilla-controlled area where huge oil deposits have recently been found. The claim was branded "nonsense" by the Ecuadorian government, already upset that the United States has reneged on its agreement that the Manta airbase on Ecuador's Pacific coast (handed over in 1999) would not be used for Plan Colombia operations.

The Bush administration is prepared to spend an additional \$98 million to protect an oil pipeline in Colombia owned by Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum. Ron Paul, a Republican congressman from Texas and a member of the House International Relations Committee, warns that: "Pretending that the fighting there is somehow related to our international war on terrorism is to stretch the imagination

to breaking point. It is unwise and dangerous. It has nothing to do with our national defence or our security. It has more to do with oil, and we know it."

As the world's fourth largest oil exporter, Venezuela replaced Saudi Arabia as the United States' chief foreign source of oil after it shattered the embargo of 1973. This April, left-wing Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez tried to avert a US-backed coup by assuring Bush that Venezuela would not join the oil boycott called for by Iraq and Libya, having been alerted to the panic in the White House by OPEC's secretary general Ali Rodriguez. But Chávez's opponents said they would cut off supplies to Cuba and reverse his plan to double the royalties charged to foreign oil companies, principally Exxon-Mobil, so the coup attempt went ahead.

Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark explained to the New Colombia News Agency (ANNCOL), that the US role in Colombia is "the biggest intervention in the Western Hemisphere in our history. It involves not only Colombia, but also Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. They are afraid of the spreading of political insurrection, turmoil and rebellion. They are afraid of the spreading of political beliefs that are opposed to US policies".

Yet nothing will hasten the spread of such beliefs more effectively than Washington's escalation of military intervention. The Andean and Amazonian regions need peace and prosperity, not a US war for oil.

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Colombia Peace Association website at:**

www.colombiapeace.org

4. Tonic for Colombia Troops

Tom Gill

Article first appeared in *Tribune*, 16/23 August 2002.

Colombia's new President Alvaro Uribe is likely to intensify state-sponsored terror. So why are the British still training Colombia's armed forces? Drugs and terror have long been dragging down South America's third-most populous country. But they have also helped catapult this Harvard-educated man from the provinces to the pinnacle of political power.

The son of a wealthy cattle rancher who only escaped extradition on drug trafficking charges because of friends in high places, Uribe carried on the family tradition at the civil aviation authority, where he handed out dozens of licences to narco-pilots. During his tenure as mayor of Medellin, he was so helpful to the Pablo Escobar drug cartel that the city earned the nickname "the sanctuary" among drug traffickers.

It was Uribe who created "self-defence" units that displaced some 200,000 peasants during his governorship of Antioquia province. Today, they are an 11,000-strong paramilitary army, responsible for most of the 20 politically motivated murders a day.

Yet Uribe claims he's the man to end a cocaine-fuelled 40-year civil war that stepped up a gear in February after peace talks collapsed amid government inaction over paramilitary violence. He has promised a "firm hand" with FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the 18,000-strong Marxist guerrilla force, and has declared a state of emergency along with a tripling of military expenditure. He has also begun preparations to create a million-strong civilian militia. This plan, which will see arms distributed, could be a vehicle to legitimise paramilitary violence, human rights organisations fear.

It is said that Uribe, who also wants to deepen the pro-market economic reforms that have added to poverty and unemployment, has a popular mandate for such policies. And indeed, opinion polls ahead of the May elections showed his star rise as fast as that of the FARC fell. But these should be distrusted in a country where so few of the 24 million poor have access to a private telephone that it is a small minority of wealthy Colombians who shape public opinion. And despite winning the presidential election without facing a second round run-off, he was elected by less than 25 per cent of the voting population.

Still, the United States' government has celebrated Uribe's election by boosting aid to some \$1.6 billion under the military package, Plan Colombia. This includes hefty sums to defend the rich against kidnapping by the FARC and guerrilla attacks on US oil pipelines. George Bush has also won changes to the law so that the US government can openly fund military operations against the guerrillas in a move that completes the mutation of a failed war on drugs to an equally doomed war against the insurgency.

The British government has been less conspicuous. Yet Britain continues to provide anti-drug and other unspecified training to the Colombian armed forces and police. Tony Blair's reception of Uribe at Downing Street is likely to add to concerns that the British armed forces risk aiding elements in the Colombian army directly implicated in civilian atrocities or indirectly through links with the paramilitaries.

According to the Washington-based Human Rights Watch, at least half the army's 18 brigades are tainted. The Colombian government has launched a public relations exercise aimed at cleaning up its image. There have been stories that senior army officers have been dismissed. But the army has not said whether these dismissals are linked to human rights abuses. And of the few who have been charged with human rights abuses and kicked out, many are understood to have simply joined the paramilitaries. Meanwhile, paramilitaries who have been arrested are often released shortly afterwards.

Perhaps the most damning proof of the continuing terror was the horrendous Choco incident in May, which left 119 civilians dead in the small town of Bojaya in the remote jungle of north-west Colombia.

The worst casualty toll among the civilian population from a single battle in the four-decade-long civil war occurred when the FARC fired a cooking-gas cylinder packed with explosives that veered off target and hit a church where 300 villagers were being used as a human shield by paramilitaries who had come to the area to massacre and displace the rural communities.

While a report prepared by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) condemned the guerrillas, it also bitterly condemned paramilitary fighters who were hiding among the civilians to defend themselves from the rebel attack. But its most damning conclusion was that the government, the police and the army not only ignored warnings of an impending tragedy, but appeared to have openly collaborated with the outlawed paramilitary forces by facilitating their entry into the region.

A 250-person heavily armed paramilitary unit sailed up the River Atrato in seven large boats and passed through two police and one army checkpoint without the slightest problem, the OHCHR found. Paramilitary fighters in civilian clothes began returning to the village of Bojaya and a sister community, Vigia del Suerte, as soon as the army flew 800 troops in and took back control.

In addition, paramilitary commanders flew into the town aboard light aircraft at a time when the town was under full military control and only army aircraft were authorised to land on the small strip.

Against such a backdrop, it would be reasonable to expect the British government to clarify which British forces are active in Colombia, who exactly they are training and how they are ensuring this military training is not being used to abuse human rights. Yet it refuses. Releasing such information "would be harmful to national security, defence or international relations," the then Minister of Defence, John Spellar, said in an answer to a written parliamentary question last year.

The British government's secrecy contrasts with the US administration, which under the Leahy Amendment is compelled to spell out exactly what military aid it is giving to Colombia.

The government's defenders, noting that Britain is the second largest investor in the country after the US, might argue that its attitude is informed by a "war on terror" that only targets armed groups, such as FARC, which threaten British and US interests. The more sceptical, looking for some evidence of Labour's ethical foreign policy and promises of open government will be looking for an explanation.

5. FARC Statement on the Decision of the European Union

Communique from the Secretariat of the Central General Command of the FARC-EP

1. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - Army of the People (FARC-EP), through various press sources, learned that the European Union were probably going to include their Guerrilla Organisation in the EU list of “terrorist” groups. The information from the press was confirmed by the political decision taken by the Commission of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) of the 15 member countries of the European Union, on 13 June 2002, to include the FARC-EP in the list of organisations classified by the EU as “terrorist”.
2. It is a pity that the 15 member countries of the European Union, having enthusiastically contributed to the Peace Negotiations between the Pastrana Government and the FARC-EP as representatives of the international community and as Friendly and Facilitating Countries for the Peace Process between Colombians, as well as having built friendship and confidence between all of us, have now decided unilaterally to exclude themselves from any participation in future peace talks between the Government and the FARC-EP by taking sides with one of the parties, in this case with the Government. There is no doubt that you are responding to strong pressures from the governments of the United States and Colombia. In spite of this, the FARC-EP hope that in the future, if there are favourable political, economic, social and cultural changes in the world, you will be able once more to actively participate in a process of reconciliation guaranteed by both parties.
3. We know perfectly well that the governments of the United States, through their Ambassadors who were party to the Government-FARC-EP negotiations, are aware of the gravity of the internal conflict in Colombia, as well as of the serious difficulties there were in reconciling the two political positions at the Negotiating Table, and they witnessed the undeniable perseverance of the FARC in trying to contribute initiatives designed to lead to agreements which would consolidate the peace process.
4. The FARC-EP are grateful for all the contributions made by the governments and peoples of the European Union, whether they were to the process of trying to build peace with social justice, or whether certain countries were prepared to receive our representatives.
5. The FARC-EP will never give up their revolutionary beliefs and principles and ratify once more that as a politico-military organisation that has taken up arms against the Colombian State, they will go forward without anyone or anything holding them back in their struggle to win the political power to govern Colombia; they have made their commitment to the country’s poor to construct a Homeland where prevalence is given to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, social justice, and independence and sovereignty for the poor majority of the people, dispossessed and marginalised by the egotistical interests of a handful of families that make up the governing class.

Secretariat of the Central General Command of the FARC-EP

Mountains of Colombia

18 July 2002

6. Decree 2002

Colombian Communist Party , 10 September 2002

The Colombian government has instituted new measures based on the declaration of a state of national emergency, decreasing people's freedoms and eroding still further the thin facade of democracy and what masquerades as a State of Law.

Decree 2002, passed yesterday (10 September), reestablishes the provisions of the Law of Defence and National Security previously dismissed by the Constitutional Court on the grounds of procedural flaws. The decree gives free rein to the security forces to carry out raids and arrests without the need for a warrant. This will result in the legalisation of forced disappearances by the establishment, the likes of which the country already has all-too-recent and bitter memories.

The decree will create "Rehabilitation Zones" under the authority of a military commander, the aim of which is to restrict the free circulation of citizens and register the population in order to limit their rights of movement and residency. This decree is an attack on democratic freedoms and guarantees and lends itself to all manner of violations on the part of the armed forces, establishing a form of military dictatorship which will severely damage human rights.

This measure fractures the unity and management of the State by making it answerable to military powers; it places governors and mayors at the service of military commanders, channels State assets into military projects and leaves judicial activities in the hands of soldiers, splitting the division of powers and delegating States functions to the military.

The Colombian Communist Party can only repeat its rejection of Uribe's policy of violence against the people which will not only increase hunger and abject poverty, but also intends to confront the country's acute crisis by means of war. We reiterate that the only way out is through a political solution to the social and armed conflict, and at the centre of this must be the reopening of dialogue with the guerrilla movements.

Central Executive Committee, Bogota, 11 September 2002

Justice for Colombia

**British trade unions campaigning for
justice for the people of Colombia
and an end to the assassinations of
Colombian trade unionists**

***To join contact Justice for Colombia:
9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB
Tel: 020 7317 8600***

7. Each Year is Worse for Colombian Workers

Sara Cifuentes Ortiz

In 2001, 77 per cent of Colombian workers earned less than two minimum salaries while the family shopping basket cost 2.4 minimum salaries. 153 trade unionists were assassinated, 72 more were reported disappeared and around 10,000 live under the threat of death.

The year 2001 closed on a very negative note, especially for Colombian workers who found themselves under attack from many fronts and saw their stability, security and right to dignified work being snatched away. There was also a serious intensification in the violation of trade union rights.

The situation for workers and the Colombian trade union movement has had a common denominator over the last two years and that has been unemployment. Figures supplied by the CUT (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores – Central Workers Union) and DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística – National Statistics Bureau) reveal the highest levels of unemployment in the history of Colombia, with unemployment increasing from 11.9 per cent in 1996 to 19.7 per cent in 2000. For the year 2001 the figure has hovered between 18.7 per cent and 20 per cent of the economically fully active population. This translates as meaning that a large number of people are not actually included in the statistics. Figures for underemployment in 2001 stood at 34 per cent and the number of people working in the informal sector topped 62 per cent.

As a consequence of increasing unemployment, the level of poverty has also increased and there has been a deterioration in the distribution of wealth. Evidence of this is shown in shocking statistics which reveal that the number of people living in poverty has increased from 20 million in 1996 to almost 23 million in 2001.

According to figures produced by the National Planning Board, 77 per cent of workers earn less than two minimum salaries and the family shopping basket costs more than 2.4 minimum salaries. This means that thousands of Colombians are not receiving adequate nutrition, many have had to take their children out of education and hundreds more families have no access to health care.

Trade Unions Under Attack

80 per cent of the workers dismissed in 2001 belonged to a trade union

The percentage of workers affiliating to trade unions, according to the CUT, has declined from 8 per cent in 1998 to around 5.5 per cent in 2001. This situation is attributed to the fact that people's right of association is violated, there are massive dismissals of trade union affiliated workers, 'voluntary' redundancy agreements, company liquidations, extermination campaigns against trade unions, assassinations, persecution, death threats and attacks on trade union leaders, etc. Between 1991 and 2001, more than 195 trade union organisations were dissolved and in the same period of time, more than 356 trade unions went into recess. In other words, today there are 100,061 trade union members and 541 trade union organisations fewer than in years prior to 1991.

In 1990 a law was passed which introduced substantial reforms into the labour market in order, it was said, to generate employment. These reforms included reducing labour costs and making labour more flexible. Paradoxically, the law actually increased unemployment, the economic conditions of workers deteriorated, their job security was undermined with dismissal a constant threat and they saw the

foundations of a maquila system of labour being laid. Suddenly changes were being made to the working day and the working week, job security was disappearing, the trade union movement was being weakened and salaries were being reduced in real terms. Law 100, passed in 1993, introduced the privatisation of the health service which brought with it a deterioration in public health as the network of state hospitals disappeared. Today there are 600 public health establishments that are financially bankrupt and cannot honour their obligations to the people, and in particular to the workers.

Solidarity and Human Rights

In 2001 violations of human rights increased with the implementation of policies which eroded people's fundamental rights.

The mining workers denounced that the new Mining Code was not only damaging to workers in this sector but also opened the doors to the deadly curse of paramilitarism, as they were forced into a position of having to fight for their rights. The same situation happened with the teachers who recently opposed law 012 which reduced government funding to municipalities and as a consequence reduced the amount of money available for the education and health sectors. Their opposition to this law increased the number of assassinations of members of the teachers and health workers' unions.

The government did not take seriously the very grave human rights situation affecting trade unionists in Colombia and did not make any real commitment to fight against paramilitaries who are responsible for the vast majority of the assassinations of trade union leaders. Indeed the participation of the state in certain of these crimes has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, not least in the case of the attempt on the life of Fenaltralse union leader, Wilson Borja, to mention but one incidence.

As for trade union activity, the year 2001 was exemplary, in that tremendous efforts were made to create unity and strengthen the struggle. The case of Funtrammetal and Fedepetrol is a good example. These federations united under the new name of Funtraenergetico and the new organisation includes oil workers, miners, metallurgists, electricians, metal workers and car construction workers. Over the year and while this unification process was underway, 11 of their members were assassinated. Likewise, the end of 2001 saw the unification of ATT and Sittelecom which became the Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores de las Comunicaciones and brought renewed strength to the struggle to defend the the country's telecommunications industries.

The year saw a number of strikes and stoppages, such as the 71 day strike at Bavaria, the Red Cross strike and the 10-day strike by the workers at Drummond. The oil workers' union (USO), and the teachers' union (FECODE) also organised various strikes and stoppages over the year. There was also the badly hit National Agrarian Strike.

In spite of all the human rights violations of all kinds perpetrated against workers and their trade union organisations through the year, which resulted in 153 trade union leaders assassinated, 72 disappeared, 27 who very nearly died after being attacked with firearms and 10,000 who were threatened, workers and their union have remained steadfast in the defence of their rights and have not lost heart even knowing that they are risking their lives. Being a trade unionist has become a high-risk occupation and trade unionists frequently have to pay with their own lives.

8. Free Markets have Failed a Continent:

Latin America is gagging on the prescriptions of the Bush family

Isabel Hilton

This article first appeared in *The Guardian* on 23 July 2002

When George Bush came to power, he was not reputed to be a man with an extensive grasp of the world outside the US. There was, though, one area that he was thought to know a little about. As governor of Texas, he had charge of the largest Latino communities in the US and, it was said, spoke Spanish. Latin America, at least, now had a US president who might understand.

Bush's reputation as a master of the Latin American brief took a knock when he confessed his amazement to Brazil's urbane and intellectual president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, that Brazil's population was not entirely white. "You mean, you have blacks too?" he said. But then, they speak Portuguese in Brazil, so perhaps it was a special blind spot. Let's hope so, because far from thriving since George Bush became US president, Latin America is looking distinctly frayed.

Ten years ago, the view from Washington was that Latin America was a success story. Democracy had returned to countries that for years had suffered dictatorships - most of them, as it happened, overtly or covertly supported by the US. Only Cuba was left as a lonely memory of a different world and Castro, surely, could not last much longer.

Even more important, the new governments had been persuaded to abandon the economic protectionism that had been the region's predominant economic orthodoxy in favour of free-market liberalism. Prosperity, the new orthodoxy said, would surely follow.

For some it did. But for the majority, the story of the 90s was one of a steadily widening income gap between the few who prospered under regimes of privatisation and free markets, and the rest. Now, even that thin prosperity is a fading memory.

Castro is still there and has a new ally in Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who survived a coup attempt earlier this year, to Washington's ill-concealed disappointment. He remains in power, delivering a message of defiance of the US and populist promises of creation and welfare. At least he remains popular. In Paraguay, President Luis Gonzalez Macchi declared a state of emergency this month after protests against free-market policies left two people dead. He was forced to scrap a privatisation drive which was a condition for a standby loan from the IMF. In Bolivia, too, miners recently took to the streets to protest against free-market policies. In Guatemala, where serious malnutrition has been reported, a peace settlement reached after more than 30 years of civil war is coming apart.

And in Argentina, the country that most faithfully followed the the free market and prescriptions of the IMF, national income has shrunk by nearly two-thirds in a year. More than half the people of this once comfortable country are below the poverty line and protests have become a way of life. So absolute is the loss of confidence in government that even former President Raul Alfonsin, who bears no responsibility for the crisis, can hardly venture out for fear of public reaction. It seems only a matter of time before a new demagogue emerges.

Argentina's collapse has taken place with scarcely a murmur from the rest of the world and, even now, the remedies offered by the IMF and the World Bank prescribe yet more politically unsustainable pain.

Colombia, the country with which the US is most directly involved, has a new president-elect, Alvaro Uribe, whose authoritarian instincts were summed up in his campaign slogan, "Firm hand, big heart". Last week, he visited Britain, promoting his ideas for dealing with Colombia's 40-year civil war and drugs crisis. A ceasefire negotiated under the previous president, Andres Pastrana, unravelled in the final weeks of his mandate.

Uribe wants to arm a civilian militia a million strong, a move that will drag into the war a rural population that desperately wants to stay out of it. He plans, too, to weaken the powers of the judicial body that can prosecute those in the army responsible for human rights abuses. He has been in Washington arguing for more military aid and a lifting of restrictions on how it is used. What began as a major US intervention in the name of the war on drugs has morphed seamlessly into a military intervention into Colombia's intractable politics.

It is a dismal panorama and requires attention, particularly from the regional superpower. The team that Bush put in place to attend to Latin America bore a startling resemblance to the one his father relied on when the seeds of today's triumph were planted. Their policy involved support for rightwing regimes, overt and covert military intervention and turning a blind eye to systematic human rights abuses - all in the name of fighting for democracy and the free markets. These arrived and, across the continent, there is rage and hunger. As far as the people on the streets are concerned, the experiment has failed.

9. The Political Economy of a Narco-Terrorist State

Marcel Idels of Ecosolidaridad-Andes

Colombia and Corporate Profits

"I think that the people of the United States have no idea what is happening outside the US. The news they see does not inform them about what is happening," Martin Moyano, a resident of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, speaking at a popular assembly meeting on a warm summer night in February, 2002.

The most censored and ignored story of the last – and the next – five years must be: "Global Economy Caters to US Addictions". Half of the world's problems are caused by the US addictions to oil and all kinds of drugs. The illegal drug trade is the second largest sector of the global economy. Include all of the legal drugs that US citizens are addicted to and "Drugs" would be the largest sector by far. The global petroleum market is the third largest sector of the world economy. The US is the largest consumer of oil and its economy is so fragile and oil-dependent that it relies on a dangerous militarism to maintain reliable supplies.

The rest of the world's problems are the consequence of the largest sector of the world economy: military spending and arms sales. The US has always dominated this market and typically controls more than half of global arms sales with a majority of these sales to less developed nations. The US uses these commodities as carrot and stick and as profitable enterprises to sustain its military industrial complex. The US spends half of the world's defence budget, perhaps three-quarters of the whole budget if private security costs are included.

The three main sectors of global trade serve US addictions and are self-reinforcing.

US "Drugs", US "Guns" and a US needy for oil.

Neo-Liberal Economic and Political Crash: Another Lost Decade for Latin America

Social and political upheavals – unlike any before – grip many nations in Latin America. The failure of neoliberalism to deliver prosperity is turning against many of the political parties there. The entire concept of liberal democracy is discredited and crumbling – serious change is in the air. Large US corporations and the IMF have perpetuated this economic war against the people and the environment with help from the Latin American upper class, who steadfastly – and brutally – resist sharing any of their land or wealth. This region has the greatest disparity of incomes of anywhere on Earth. [1]

By this November the "Face of Latin America" will have changed forever. Lula and the Workers Party will have captured the Presidency of Brazil with the left-of-centre parties controlling 60 percent of the Brazilian legislature. A new model of liberation, decentralisation and participatory economics will be loosed to inspire and incite 100s of millions of people in Brazil and throughout Latin America.

With broad support this model of participatory budgeting, agrarian reform, South American integration and alternative policies (renewable energy, organic farming and a ban on GMOs) will flourish. This time the US will be blocked from intervention. [2]

Big changes are coming soon, but the US will not roll over and some regions will bear the brunt of US frustration and violence.

Will Peace Ever Come to Colombia?

The country which has received the full spectrum of neoliberal attacks is also one of the most biologically important places on earth: Colombia. This country of 44 million people is an extreme example of the local oligarchy colluding with multinational corporations and US militarism to make grotesque profits while the people and environment are devastated. The headwaters of the Amazon, Orinoco and Magdalena rivers are being poisoned by oil spills and the chemicals used to manufacture cocaine and heroin. Billions of dollars from the US and the drug cartels are keeping the people from overthrowing the oligarchy which kills 5,000 to 10,000 people every year. (3)

More than half of all legal Colombian exports travel to the US – if you add the value of cocaine and heroin the percentage goes to 80. Colombia has become a lucrative profit centre for the US, one based on violence and ecological destruction. The Colombian oligarchy is the business partner for many US corporations and it is the ally of the US and its foreign policy.

Like the Colombian Government and its military, they are corrupted at all levels by the narcotics trade. In terms of human rights and ecological abuse some of the worst corporate or State-sponsored businesses are:

CZN and Exxon-Mobil Corporation

(incorporating: BHP-Billiton (Australia and UK-based), Anglo-American (South Africa and UK-based), Glencore International (A private company with sales of \$44 billion).

In 2000, ExxonMobil had the largest corporate profit that has ever been reported – \$17.7 billion. In terms of revenue it is the largest corporation on Earth. It is the largest oil company and the largest polluter in the world.

This Texas-based mega-corporation is also known as Exxon Mobil Coal and Minerals, Imperial Oil, ESSO and Monterrey Coal Company, Compania Minera Disputada de Las Condes Limitada (Chile),

Intercor (Colombia) and dozens of other companies that produce a wide range of chemicals, plastics and consumer products. With \$1.4 billion in revenues from its Colombian operations in 2000, Exxon Mobil was the second largest corporation in Colombia after the state-owned Ecopetrol. It no longer holds that title since it sold the massive Cerrejon Coal mine to CZN and its copper mining operations to Anglo American this year.

Colombia is the fourth largest exporter of coal. For the last 15 years an average of 15 million tons per year has been extracted from the opencast El Cerrejon Coal Mine under its subsidiary Intercor. It is one of the largest open-pit mines in the world (30 miles long). The CZN Consortium purchased Intercor and Exxon's share in April. The area of the mine is inhabited by the Wayuu Indians who have opposed the mine since 1980.

At the start 5000 Indians were employed but most of them were dismissed when the mine began operations two years later. In 1988 the last Indians were fired for union activities. Intercor evicted all residents of the indigenous community of Tabaco to make way for the expansion of the mine. Residents are resisting and claim that the relocation arrangements made would break up communities and not give people sufficient funds to buy land to live on. The Colombian army guards the mine and has assisted strikebreaking in the past.

To extract the coal, Exxon sucked up the groundwater, dried up the rivers and, in the process, denuded the grasslands on which the Wayuu depend for subsistence. (www.emagazine.com/july-august_1996/0796_curr2.html). Indians have also suffered from respiratory diseases caused by coal dust and heavy noise pollution. An international campaign organised by Greenpeace is targeting ExxonMobil for being one of the main obstacles to greenhouse gas reductions.

Twenty-one percent of stockholders recently voted for ExxonMobil to adopt a renewable energy plan. See www.stopesso.org; www.campaignexxonmobil.org; www.stopmobil.net; www.pressurepoint.org; www.greenpeace.org/climate

CZN also has mining operations in Cerrejon Central and they are actively pursuing new mining opportunities in Cerrejon Sur. Mine expansions are imminent.

Drummond Inc.

Drummond has fallen from the 318th largest private company in 1999 to a rank of 492. In 2001 it generated revenues of \$615 million with 2,800 employees. It mines coal; produces coke; develops real estate. Drummond's ABC Coke plant in Tarrant, Alabama, is the largest single producer of foundry coke in the US.

Most of Drummond's coal and profits come from the La Loma mine in the Cesar region of Colombia. Each year Drummond exports about 6 million tons of coal from Colombia to US electrical utility companies. Douglas N. Daft, Chairman of the Board and CEO of Coca Cola practises the same kind of labour relations as Drummond: they pay death squads to kill workers or anyone they want, anywhere they want. Ligia Ines Alzate, a longtime labour activist and General Secretary of the Confederation of Trade Unions for the state of Antioquia, toured the US and spoke to groups in Alabama in April.

A Colombian union, Sintramienergetica, has sued Drummond Co. in federal court claiming that Drummond hired hitmen to kidnap, torture and murder three men last year for their ties to the union that represents Drummond workers. Alzate said many foreign multinational companies hire paramilitary

groups to target union leaders during contract negotiations or when restless workers protest company practices. Coca Cola is also being sued for encouraging death squads to kill union members. The United Mine Workers and the United Steel Workers Unions support the lawsuit against Drummond.

Dole Food Company Inc.

Dole is the leading producer and supplier of fresh fruit and vegetables and a leader in the production of bananas and pineapples (2001 revenues of \$4.5 billion). It has been expanding into fresh-cut flower production and markets a growing line of packaged foods. Dole is the largest employer in Colombia and employs 51,000 workers in Latin America on 44,000 hectares of prime farmlands.

They control banana production in Colombia and in 1998 they bought 25 percent of the flower cultivation industry. Colombia is the second largest exporter of flowers in the world. Two-thirds of fresh-cut flowers sold in the United States come from Colombia. Dole is the largest producer of fresh flowers in Latin America with over 90 percent of production shipped to North America.

The industry has hurt the environment of a central savanna where most of the flowers are grown. Aquifers there have dried up, requiring water to be brought in from Bogota, the capital. Toxic residues from pesticides banned in Europe have turned up in groundwater. One-fifth of the chemicals used in the Colombian industry's greenhouses have been restricted in the United States for health reasons (Aldicarb, DDT, Lindane, Aldrin and Metomil).

Studies by local nongovernmental organizations have found that nearly two-thirds of Colombian flower workers suffer from peculiar symptoms, ranging from nausea to miscarriage. Dole employs 11,133 mostly women workers in the Colombian flower industry. Many make less than 60 cents an hour and women who become pregnant are immediately terminated from their jobs. Last year Dole agreed to participate in an environmental standards programme, but the government provides no effective monitoring or enforcement of the standards. (4)

The IUF, an international union of agricultural and restaurant workers, has been waging a campaign for a year now against Dole Food. This dispute originated over Dole's treatment of banana workers and subcontracted cooperatives in the Philippines (see: www.iuf.org). Dole gets about 40 percent of its bananas from Colombia and Ecuador. In Ecuador, Dole is considered the largest employer of child labour and is active in resisting unions and improvements in working conditions. In mid-July Dole agreed to pay \$24 million to 3,000 Honduran banana workers exposed to sterility and cancer causing pesticides used on company plantations over the last 30 years.

Ecopetrol: Empresas Colombiana de Petroleos

Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe has named former Ecopetrol board member Isaac Yanovich to head the state oil firm. He replaces outgoing Ecopetrol President Alberto Calderon. Oil is Colombia's biggest foreign exchange earner and the government's top source of revenue. Calderon has signed 60 exploration agreements with foreign companies in the past 30 months. Oil generates \$2 billion in government revenue a year.

Colombia's Congress has slashed the amount of royalties oil companies must pay the state on newly discovered oil fields from 16 percent to 5. Foreign firms say that lower royalties are crucial to continue doing business in Colombia, where kidnappings and attacks on pipelines by guerrillas, who have fought the government for 38 years, drive up operational costs and scare off investment.

The city of Barrancabermeja, is home to Colombia's largest oil refinery. From here 70 percent of oil exports flow down the Magdalena River. An army base is located in the city and yet paramilitaries have intensified a terror campaign murdering 100s of civilians in the last year. In June, USO oil union workers went on strike to protest the assassination of union officer, Cesar Blanco.

Two hundred and one unionists were killed in Colombia in 2001 – more than 80 percent of the world total. An international consortium led by Canadian Occidental Petroleum expects as much as 300 million barrels from a new oil field, called Boqueron – the nation's third largest deposit.

Other major investors in Colombian oil have included Exxon, Shell and Elf-Aquitane. They have helped boost oil production 80 percent over the last decade. Ecopetrol diverts most of its profit to federal and local governments, but average Colombians see little benefit. Officials face pressure from rightwing paramilitaries to pay protection money. Many officials simply steal or squander the money.

Arauca, a boomtown about 25 miles from the Cano Limon oilfield, has received millions of dollars annually in oil royalties but is ringed by shantytowns. In a petroleum-rich central valley known as the Middle Magdalena, more than 70 percent of the 750,000 inhabitants live in poverty and nearly 40 percent are unemployed, double the official nationwide rate.

BP Amoco (British Petroleum)

Colombia's biggest foreign investor is BP Amoco, formed when British Petroleum merged with Chicago-based Amoco in 1998. The London-based giant controls Colombia's largest oilfield, a 1.5-billion-barrel trove called Cusiana-Cupiagua in the northeastern province of Casanare. This region produces almost half of Colombia's total crude output of 600,000 barrels a day.

The oil fields are operated by BP, which has a 19 percent share in the project. France's TotalFinaElf has 19 percent and Triton Energy of the United States – a subsidiary of Amerada Hess Corp – has 12 percent. Ecopetrol owns 50 percent of the project. A 444-mile pipeline called Ocesa carries BP Amoco oil to the Caribbean port of Coveñas for export. BP and Ecopetrol are studying whether to spend \$130 million on a plant to allow them to sell natural gas from Cusiana-Cupiagua.

The Chuchupa field, operated offshore off the Caribbean coast by Chevron Texaco Corp, has similar reserves to Cusiana-Cupiagua and produces most of Colombia's current gas supply. BP maintains close ties with a number of rightwing paramilitaries who it helped to train and employ in the early 1990s.

Occidental (OXY) Petroleum

This Delaware corporation based in Los Angeles and Houston operates the Cano-Limon pipeline in northeastern Colombia. The Cano-Limon is 480 miles long and was bombed 79 times in 1999 by guerrillas (more than 1,000 bombings since it was built in 1986). Oxy claims to have lost \$100 million since 1995 because of guerrilla attacks.

At Bush and OXY's urging, the US Congress has passed a military appropriations bill that includes an additional \$98 million to pay for security on the pipeline. The new aid package constitutes a public revelation of Bush's shift from the pretence of fighting the war on drugs to a strategy of counter-insurgency. This aid will save OXY the \$30 million a year it has spent protecting the pipeline since the mid 1990s. (5)

Colombia is 7th largest supplier of oil to the US and has the largest untapped pool of petroleum in the

Western Hemisphere. Almost President, Al Gore controls up to one million dollars of family stock in Occidental. Lawrence P. Meriage, Occidental's public-affairs vice president, not only pushed for Plan Colombia last year but urged a house subcommittee to extend military aid to the nation's north to augment security for oil development operations.

They have temporarily pulled out of the disputed U'wa territory because of international publicity and pressure from their main stockholder: Sanford and Bernstein – parent company, Alliance Capital.

Another big scandal with OXY involved its Florida-based subcontractor AirScan who directed the cluster bomb attack on the village of Santo Domingo near the Cano Limon pipeline in Colombia. This attack resulted in the deaths of nine children and nine other civilians in 1998. Investigations continue into this massacre.

Across the border in Ecuador, OXY is a partner in the OCP petroleum pipeline – one of the most destructive and potentially catastrophic projects in the Andes. This pipeline cuts through one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. Mudslides and earthquakes are frequent threats to the area and now there will be crude oil flowing through it. (6)

DynCorp

DynCorp is one of the largest private contractors for the US armed forces with 2001 revenues of \$1.8 billion; up 34.5 percent for the year. It has assets of \$644 million and 2001 profits of \$102 million. DynCorp is the 121st largest private firm in the world and performs technical and consulting services including: aviation maintenance, logistical support, telecommunications, information systems, weapons testing and management.

In 2001, DynCorp received a \$600 million contract for Colombian fumigation and \$35 million for related services. Many of the DynCorp executives are former CIA or military personnel, others were formerly of Enron or Citigroup. The coca spraying campaign is directed by Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary for the Department of State's division of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and the State Department's secretive Air Wing.

DynCorp and its contractor, Eagle Aviation Services and Technology (EAST), have made millions of dollars spraying Monsanto's Roundup-Ultra (Glyphosate) over millions of acres of jungle and farmlands in Colombia. UK-based ICI recently pulled their soapy surfactant ingredients out of the spray mixture over concerns about liability and bad publicity.

Allman in *Rollingstone* magazine said of DynCorp's subcontractor EAST, "Once upon a time these pilots and crews were called mercenaries. Today they're known as contract personnel. Many come from US involvement in clandestine warfare in Cuba and Central America," (May 8, 2002). Eagle Aviation Services and Technology (EAST Inc.) is headquartered at Patrick Air Force Base, Cocoa Beach, Florida (www.ciponline.org/Columbia/contractors.htm).

Information on EAST Inc. is hard to obtain. It was founded by Richard Gadd and the current President is Thomas Fabyanic. Both are retired Air Force colonels. Photos of either of them are hard to find. They have a small office in Chantilly, Virginia, but their main operations are at Patrick Air Force Base where fumigation pilots are trained by the State Department's Bureau of Narcotics and International Law Enforcement – an operation referred to as the Air Division or the Air Wing. EAST is incorporated in several US states, but has refused to discuss its operations in Colombia.

The State Department has stated that EAST is concerned for the safety of its pilots. East maintains that its activities are classified. Based out of Larandia military base in Colombia, Blackhawk choppers fly cover for fumigation pilots. Despite these escorts, American pilots flying Vietnam-era Bronco DV-10s over FARC-EP dominated Caqueta department recently chose to abort their spray mission when they encountered heavy fire from the guerrillas. Reminiscent of Vietnam, the US-contracted pilots say that the Colombians would prefer it if the US fight their war for them. Four DynCorp and EAST pilots have died in crashes since 1997. One was killed in early August when guerrilla fire brought down a DynCorp-piloted Super Huey chopper. The pilot and four Colombian military personnel died. A computer expert working for DynCorp was killed the same day in Putumayo department when he walked into an aeroplane propeller. DynCorp's contracts with the CIA include covert work in Colombia and Peru, according to James Woolsey, former head of CIA, at Senate hearings.

Several DynCorp employees have been investigated for drug trafficking and it is common knowledge in Colombia that these US subcontractors consume hard drugs and are above the law. By most definitions they are terrorists and what they do to the environment of Colombia and Ecuador is eco-terrorism. EAST has a long history of CIA and clandestine operations. DynCorp has been awarded hundreds of millions of dollars in defence contracts in the US and in Bosnia – scandals follow their every step.

The spraying of defoliants has damaged vast areas of food crops and sensitive habitat. The International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) has filed suit in US federal court on behalf of 10,000 Ecuadorian peasant farmers and Amazonian Indians charging DynCorp with torture, infanticide and wrongful death for its role in the aerial spraying in the Amazonian jungle, along the border of Ecuador and Colombia

In a new development, Rand Beers, who heads up the US coca fumigation programme, has had to admit that he made false statements in a sworn affidavit in the Ecuadorian lawsuit. Desperate to avoid the lawsuit going forward, the State Department submitted numerous briefs to the court asking for the case to be rejected on national security grounds. Included in these statements was Beers' claim that the FARC-EP guerrillas had been to Afghanistan for terrorist training.

No one supports Beers on this wild statement. The court should ask George Bush's hack Otto Reich where this idea came from, since Reich is famous for doing illegal and quasi-legal propaganda and outright lies. But to a Federal Court? Terry Collingsworth of the ILRF, which is co-counsel for the plaintiffs, said the mistake indicates that the State Department and DynCorp were eager to tie Plan Colombia – the multi-billion dollar aid package that pays for DynCorp's contract – to the post-September 11 terror attacks. "They are so desperate to keep this suit away from a jury that they'll say anything to convince the judge it's related to terrorism," he said

Military Personnel Resources Inc. (MPRI)

Insiders joke that MPRI has more generals than the Pentagon. This high level mercenary group has over 1,000 elite military and law enforcement leaders on retainer, including Gen. Ed Soyster, former head of the Defence Intelligence Agency, Gen. Frederick Kroesen, former commander of the US Army in Europe and a former Assistant Director of the FBI. Many of its employees serve on the Council of Foreign Relations.

The President, Carl Vuono was the Army Chief of Staff during the invasion of Panama and the Gulf War. He retired after the war and joined MPRI in 1991. One of his first big jobs was advising the Croatian government when it split away from Yugoslavia. He is credited with the victorious military strategy of lightning armour drives that were used against the Serbs. MPRI is a military consultancy and also supplies pilots and special forces with elite training and security services worldwide. They recently

completed an \$800,000 contract to review and advise the Colombian military. MPRI also runs the US Army's college programme, the ROTC, at over 200 US universities.

The NARCO-TERROR COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT Inc.

(Incorporating Cartels, Armed Forces and Paramilitary Death Squads. Kingpin of Drugs and Power: George W. Bush; Acting President : Alvaro Uribe; Armed Forces: General Jorge Enrique Mora; Paramilitaries and Drug Cartels: Carlos Castano of the AUC/ACCU. (www.auc.com))

"Today we cannot expect to fight drug trafficking while we turn a blind eye to the corrupted ways of government. These are, after all, one and the same; they work together to make sure that things don't change. The Colombian government has permitted the creation of the paramilitary forces financed by powerful landlords and drug traffickers and trained by high-ranking army officers. As long as the AUC paramilitary forces are a clandestine instrument of the establishment, negotiations are impossible... in the end the Colombian government accepts illegal money to win a war that protects – not the lives of civilians – but the properties of those [drug lords] financing the war." – Ingrid Betancourt, *Until Death Do US Part* (page 223).

Ingrid Betancourt was apprehended by the FARC-EP when the Colombian government refused to let her fly into the former FARC-EP safehaven with the other major presidential candidates. (7)

Every NGO, International Agency, and most US State Department and DEA reports agree with the above summary by the Green Party presidential candidate, Betancourt, that an axis of evil has united against the leftist FARC-EP and the poor people of Colombia to maintain the status quo of violence and drug dealing. The US played the decisive role in establishing this nexus when it brought the AUC into the killer networks that the US established in 1991. Without massive US financial support the corrupt Colombian government would have fallen to the FARC last year. (8)

The UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention says that "Deforestation caused by coca and opium cultivation is close to 340,000 hectares. Each hectare of coca costs four hectares of Amazon forest. When vegetation is cut on slopes, the water supply downstream is affected, in addition to a loss of some 120-230 tons of topsoil per hectare.

Pollution of water sources results from use of herbicides and fertilisers applied to the drug crops, and from solvents and chemicals used in drug refinement – 20 million litres of ethyl ether, acetone, ammonia, sulphuric acid and hydrochloric acid are discarded from laboratories into the tributaries that feed the Amazon and Orinoco rivers – endangering 350 Andean floral species, 210 animal species, 600 birds species, 170 reptiles, 100 amphibians, and 600 fish species in the Amazon and Orinoco alone."

The use of herbicides to eradicate illicit crops causes additional environmental and social damage and yet has failed to reduce drug crop production at all. A phony drug war has become a bloody large-scale anti-guerrilla campaign that is guaranteed to devastate the flora, fauna and the peasants while making Colombia safe for massive, coal, oil, and mineral extraction for US markets. (9)

War Crimes lawsuits are pending against this US barbarity. (10)

NOTES:

1). Colburn, Forrest D., Latin America at the End of Politics, Princeton Univ. Press, 2002, page 82. Drawing from the Inter-American Development Bank's 1998-99 report "Economic and Social Progress in Latin America," Brazil is the most unequal country in the world – the top ten percent have 50 percent of national income, the bottom 50 percent have 10 percent of the

income; Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay are the next most unequal. The income of a third of Latin Americans (150 million people) is less than two dollars per day. And inequality is actually much worse than the statistics since income from capital is not included.

2). The US will react to the revolutions sweeping Latin America by the usual means – economic isolation, propaganda, and bribery of opposition leaders and movements – as we have seen in Venezuela. Assassination and contrived scandals are also possibilities. But the US no longer can call upon the local militaries to squash democracy, especially not in several countries at once. The militaries are generally discredited as institutions having already used brutality previously. Furthermore, the US model – neoliberalism – no longer offers any promise and so the region will go it alone or rather through regional integration and alliance with Europe.

3). Transnational Criminal Organizations and Drug Trafficking, UN Office of Drug Control, P. Williams and C. Florez, 1994. "Although drug trafficking has had little direct and positive effects on the Colombian economy, there is no doubt that the incidence of trafficking on the country's social and political instability has been very important. The escalation of violence coincides with the increase in drug trafficking, and there is a strong correlation between homicides and drug trafficking offences. And the drug traffickers fuel the armed conflict through their financial support. To protect their interests the drug traffickers are furthermore engaged in the large-scale corruption of politicians and civil servants with the predictable result that faith in institutions has declined further at incalculable cost to society" (Part V).

There are 25-30,000 homicides or disappearances every year in Colombia. Many thousands more are the victims of severe assaults and rape. The typical annual count of 3500-4000 dead from politically motivated crimes is low and misleading. Many of the other 20-25,000 deaths and 10s of thousands of assaults are directly connected to drug growing, dealing, processing and related violence. And additional murders are the result of crimes committed by criminal gangs of whom many are connected to or operate freely because of the presence of paramilitary death squads.

Ignoring the connections between the death squads, drug traffickers, the Colombian armed forces and most criminal gangs results in a distorted view of the levels of violence and who is primarily to blame. Under a more comprehensive accounting the percentages of murders and human rights violations attributable to the combined crimes of the Government-Drug Trafficker-Death Squad and related Criminal Gang actions would be close to 50 percent of all murders or at least 8- 10,000 victims.

Under this methodology, human rights violations by these government-sanctioned groups would rise to 8-12,000 cases, most of these are serious assaults and rapes. This would leave the guerrilla forces of the FARC-EP and ELN with almost no significant percentage of credible human rights violations (400-600 mostly military related deaths). The extreme cruelty and intentional use of terror by the right wing forces (chainsaw massacres, rape, and public execution/torture) are also relevant factors since the left-wing guerrillas rarely resort to such premeditated barbarity.

This accounting would explain why our interviews in many regions of Colombia find that in most cases people have heard of few, if any, unjustified or non-accidental crimes by the FARC-EP or ELN. This is strikingly true in the departments of Bolivar, Valle de Cauca, Magdalena Medio, Santander and North Santander where a large percentage of homicides and massacres occur.

4). "The Dark Side of Flowers," Sarah Cox, Georgia Straight, <http://zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=9&ItemID=1422> 2002. "Of the 134 pesticides approved for use in the Colombian flower industry, seven are considered by the Colombian government to be extremely toxic. At least 12 of the approved pesticides, including some on that extremely toxic list, are named by the US Environmental Protection Agency as possible or probable carcinogens. These include Aldicarb and Metomil, insecticides and nematicides that belong to a class of pesticides known as N-methyl carbonates. Both are suspected endocrine- system disrupters. Exposure can cause sterility or decreased fertility, impaired development, birth defects of the reproductive tract, and metabolic disorders, according to the Pesticide Action Network's on-line database." The article mentions the Florverde and European based ICC fair flowers programmes, but admits that "Colombia has rules governing pesticide use, but there are no specific rules specifically for greenhouses. 'The application of pesticides in greenhouses, constructions covered in plastic, triples the impact of these substances.' And greenhouses are where almost all the flower production takes place.

5). Laws have also been changed to allow for a higher percentage of foreign ownership from 50 percent to 75 percent. Now these corporations can extract more profits from poor Colombia. Coinciding with this is the steady increase in all types of US military, economic and intelligence aid in the guise of anti-terrorism for Colombia and the whole region. Most important has been the massive propaganda efforts of the US media and Otto Reich of the State Department.

The complicity of Europe has also given the US a slight aura of respectability – how EURO leaders can sleep at night after listing the FARC-EP as a terrorist group (38 years of civil war suddenly becomes terrorism?) will be a subject of debate for many years. The guerrillas commit 1–5 percent of human rights violations against a government-death squad alliance that has been committing atrocities against the poor for 65 years or longer!

6). See www.Amazonwatch.org

7). Betancourt, like her Liberal party mother, has been a constant thorn in the side to Colombian politicians who they saw as utterly corrupted by drug dealing, cigarette smuggling, tax evasion and currency exchange fraud. Her mother told Ingrid just before the popular presidential candidate Carlos Galan was assassinated in 1990, that Galan was the last hope for Colombia. The two Betancourts were nearly killed in the assassination of Galan at a political rally in Soacha. People on the street in Bogota almost laughed upon hearing she had been siezed by the FARC-EP since her programme was similar, though she did criticise the guerrillas' violence – as does almost everyone in Colombia, since to do otherwise is a certain death warrant.

8). The peace talks initiated by Pastrana were a clever ploy to buy time, since the FARC-EP had nearly taken out Castano's base in Nudo de Parramillo and surrounded the capital, Bogota in the year before they were granted the Switzerland-sized safe haven. The government dragged its feet much more than the guerrillas during the peace talks and nothing except negotiations over how to negotiate ever developed for the next several years. Meanwhile, the US military rushed in with Blackhawk choppers, additional spy planes and intelligence for the paramilitaries who launched an all-out pogrom in many areas outside of the FARC-EP safe haven, nearly eliminating the smaller guerrilla force, the ELN, which was forced to join up with the FARC-EP in some areas in order to survive.

9.) See note number three (same reference).

10). Contact USWarCrimes@Commision.zzn.com for more information or to support this important effort at justice and peace. They have a list of 170 suspected war criminals in Colombia and they need cross checking with Witness for Peace, Amnesty and other groups' lists.

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10. Campesinos Mobilise for Dignity, Food Sovereignty, Against ALCA and Forced Migration

National Campesino Association

On 16 September 2002, Colombia's campesino communities came together in a massive national mobilisation to protest about the government's agricultural policies and the subordination of domestic food production to the demands of foreign transnational corporations and the world market. Among other things they were demanding that the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (ALCA) and all related "fast-track" policies be rejected, that all food imports be suspended and that much more support and protection be given to small national food producers.

For the last decade, Colombia's rural populations have been faced with development policies that have resulted in massive increases in food imports; the elimination of state support for national agriculture; the breaking of the international coffee agreement; the destruction of national sovereignty and autonomous production; the erosion of food security; an increase in unemployment; the disenfranchisement and illegitimation of thousands of campesinos; more violence and the concentration of land in unproductive estates owned by the country's landowning elite.

While the country's domestic producers face financial ruin, transnational capital is taking over and controlling the production, transformation and marketing of Colombia's food, as well as the country's traditional forms of cultivation and consumption. Colombia's rural populations and food producers are being swept aside to allow for multi-billion-dollar investment projects such as mining, oil production, hydroelectric plants, motorways, canals, and export processing zones which are destroying traditional agriculture and knowledge. Campesinos are being displaced and instead of traditional crops campesinos are being forced to cultivate products demanded by the international market and which will only benefit the transnationals. They are being forced to make their primary products those that can be sold on the world market very cheaply, such as cooking oil, flowers, bananas and palm products to the detriment of national food production.

The imposition of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA) will dramatically increase food dependency, the displacement of campesinos and the social conflict in Colombia. Already, food transnationals control the market – Unilever-Bestfoods, with brands such as maizena, fruco, knorr, mazola and rama; Phillip Morris with kraft, nabisco, marlboro; those who market Colombia's coffee such as General Foods and Jacobs; Nestle, the international capital company producing milk products and sauces. Many of these companies effectively own national markets (through supermarkets) - in Bogota alone they control more than 60 per cent of food marketing.

The shareholders of these transnationals, such as Unilever, and the members of their boards, are the same as those who own the oil companies, such as Chevron-Texaco and British Petroleum, which, along with the electricity companies Enron, Reliant and Sithe-Termorrio, have plundered the country's natural resources. Then there are the pharmaceutical companies and manufacturers of glyphosate, which, like Monsanto, provide the chemicals used to fumigate the coca and poppy cultivations and the family allotments of campesino, indigenous and afro-Colombian populations. They are the same shareholders who own the plants that produce the helicopters being employed in Plan Colombia. United Technologies is one of them. And they are also the owners of huge banks such as Citibank, JP Morgan Chase, Barclays, Lloyds, ABN, Deutsche and UBS, among others, which are Colombia's main creditors.

As if that were not enough, the last government established the basis for a general agriculture law to approve and finance the dominium of these transnationals over the country, subordinating national food producers to them by transforming the existing lines of production into publically funded corporate parastate organisations which will gradually erode what is left of state institutions set up to support national farming communities. This same project takes no account of the fact that our natural resources and biodiversity are part of our collective heritage and intends to turn them into merchandise, the property of international capital. The new government, for its part, has announced that it will follow through with these policies which are against Colombia's national interest. Using its "firm hand" it will complete the process by approving environmental licences and handing over our agricultural production to big business. It will be a death sentence for the campesino economy and will devastate rural populations even further.

The requirements laid down by transnationals for Colombia to enter ALCA simply increase their domination and the dependency, political, economic, social and cultural subordination of the country. To import food, sew genetically modified seeds which do not reproduce, consume imported goods, fumigate and produce "exclusively" for the international market not only affects the national economy, but also traditional cultures, knowledge and understanding of the natural world, the country's natural resources and the people's ownership of their own land. In sum, an entire national identity is in jeopardy.

11. Don't Fumigate Us Any More!!!

COCCA

The fumigations in Colombia constitute a war against the Colombian campesino population and an assault on the delicate environment of the Amazon (the natural resources on which all humanity depends).

In the department of Putumayo, situated in the Colombian Amazon on the border with Ecuador, the massive fumigations with glyphosate, financed and imposed by the United States and carried out by its servant Colombian state, have been continuing. In recent months they have indiscriminately fumigated some 10,500 hectares of coca plantations and 33,000 hectares of legitimate crops in the municipality of La Hormiga. The fumigations have affected 43,000 of the 78,000 hectares of fertile land in the municipality, also known as Valle de Guamuez, and have destroyed not only coca crops but also fields of yucca, plantain, citrus fruits, maize and cocoa, as well as natural woodland and sources of water in the department of Putumayo. This was the condemnation levelled by local officials and campesino leaders. The People's Representative in La Hormiga, Leandro Romo, confirmed that in the last two months planes had shed vast quantities of glyphosate (produced by the US multinational Monsanto) over licit and illicit crops. He added that, as a result of the fumigations, some 7,000 campesinos and indigenous people, including women and children, are suffering with health problems, hunger and dangerously few resources. Some 3,500 of these campesinos had to abandon their plots of land and head for other parts of Putumayo. This is a clear indication that the indiscriminate fumigations are being used by the Colombian state to forcibly and systematically displace huge numbers of campesinos.

Washington is providing 17 million dollars annually for the poisonous spraying programme in Colombia, which is currently endowed with 15 fumigation planes and dozens of combat helicopters. In addition, the US is providing more than 1,300 million dollars in economic and military aid to finance Plan Colombia, with which it intends to reposition its geostrategic interests in Colombia and Latin America under cover of its false claims to be fighting a war on drugs.

In the year 2001, 84,000 hectares of coca crops were fumigated in Colombia, 58,000 in the year 2000. So far this year, 70,000 hectares have been fumigated. However, the crops continue to increase (there are currently 200,000 hectares of coca plantations), because as well as being an excuse to intervene militarily in Colombia, the fumigations are a strategic vicious cycle to benefit the multinational producers of glyphosate, planes, helicopters, weapons and private security (mercenary) firms (Dyncorp), all from the United States.

President Andres Pastrana, who stepped down as president on 7 August 2002, suspended spraying in Putumayo at the beginning of this year, because his government and the campesinos signed agreements to manually eradicate the crops as part of an alternative development programme. It was a programme that was never entirely accomplished. Spokespersons of the current government said that these agreements were not producing effective results, without acknowledging that the state did not fulfil its part of the agreements, and as a consequence Alvaro Uribe Velez, under pressure from the United States, decided to recommence the aerial fumigations.

Because of these fumigations, hundreds of campesinos have complained that they are suffering from respiratory and other health problems, and that they have been forced to abandon their tiny fields of cocoa, maize, plantain, yucca and other legal crops. Meanwhile, the North American State Department and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have cynically stated that the glyphosate being used in Putumayo is not harmful to health, but that they will make adjustments to the formulation so that its toxicity is reduced from grade 3, equivalent to 'gentle' to grade 4, 'light', (grade 1 being the most toxic).

The fumigations and their impact on campesino social organisation, on human health and on the environment are a crime against humanity committed by the imperialist United States and their Colombian lackeys.

The solution to the problem of coca cultivation in Colombia needs a political solution to the political, social and armed conflict. While the current system of land ownership and tenancy exists, while fertile land is used extensively for the livestock of the landowning elite, while the expropriation and displacement of the campesino population continues, and food go on being imported at an increasing rate (8 million tonnes annually), and while there is no development model based on the redistribution of wealth, there will be no solution to the problem.

We call on the international community to stop this barbarity. We invite international organisations to observe the violations of the economic, social, environmental and cultural rights of the campesino population, so that we can construct a common cause to defend life, dignity and the environment of the Colombian Amazon.

See the Colombia Peace Association website at:

www.colombiapeace.org

12. Our Objectives and Magic Realism

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC-EP

“The dead man with the bullet in his forehead was Aureliano the Sad, the last of the 18 murdered children of Colonel Aureliano Buendia. ‘Nobody remembers the war now’, thought Colonel Aureliano, and they did not pardon his rebellion against the government to demand the armistice be respected.’ There had been no strike, nor had 3,000 workers of the United Fruit Company been machine gunned and thrown into the sea from the trains, and who says so is dead for sure.”

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez produces a surreal description of Colombia with ‘magic realism’, wherein time revolves around the same interests through successive generations. It is a realism of events that happened and continue repeating themselves in a magic, Dantesque form.

Years after the defeat of Spain in the War of Independence, the Liberator, Simon Bolivar was the victim of an attack; his political heir, Marshall Sucre, was killed by the bullets of those seized by panic at the prospect of independence with social change. At the beginning of the 20th century, the same bullets cut down the great liberal leader, General Uribe Uribe, who had socialist ideas and was the hero of the War of a Thousand Days.

In the 1920s, the massacres of the banana plantation workers took place. At mid century, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, the dissident liberal leader who spoke out against the oligarchy and mobilised multitudes for peace, was murdered, and 300,000 died in the ensuing ten years of state terror. There was an armistice with the liberal guerrillas and then Guadalupe Salcedo and the other insurgents who signed it were murdered. In the 1980s, the Uribe Peace Accords signed between the government of President Betancur and the FARC-EP were followed by the assassination of the Patriotic Union presidential candidates, Jaime Pardo and Bernardo Jaramillo, and of its senators, deputies, councillors and 5,000 of its militants. There was the armistice with the 19th of April Movement and then the assassination of its leader, Carlos Pizarro. And this third millennium, Jairo Rojas, a conservative deputy who was not forgiven for the bridge he made between the government and the FARC-EP for the peace talks, was riddled with bullets. Their numbers have been added to by the more than 4,000 assassinated trade union activists, the butchered human rights defenders, community leaders, student leaders and indigenous leaders, the many thousands of campesinos murdered by state terrorism and the more than two-and-a-half million forcibly displaced internal refugees.

With the doors closed to struggle within the existing institutions, the only path for women and men is to rise up in arms to change the regime. There have been 38 years of intense learning, an extraordinary accumulation of strength and consolidation as a State within a State, advancing to take power in order to initiate the building of a new social order. The FARC-EP, armed Marxists, Leninists and Bolivarians, have, in the course of the struggle, developed politics beyond the armed struggle, but the class in power has imposed the armed struggle as the principle expression of its politics. We believe that a change of regime is only possible with popular participation, of women and men standing shoulder to shoulder and together with their People’s Army.

There are various proposals for a dialogue that would favour a peaceful solution, opening a democratic space for the great national majorities, allowing for their political and social organisation without their lives being in danger for that, and starting the construction of a new institutional framework that would guarantee the all-round growth of the country, with social justice for all Colombians.

The establishment has imposed armed force as the principal form of politics, while the FARC-People's Army has put militarism in its various forms in a corner to achieve political accords at the Dialogue and Negotiation Table. These are accords where the Colombian people must be present and participating in a Constituent Assembly called by the government and the FARC-EP.

In the hands of the people, the new constitution must be the tool for building the New Colombia that would permit the full and genuine exercise of democracy by the great majorities, guaranteed by a Bolivarian Army in its service and not for the preservation of narrow oligarchic and multinational interests, as is presently the case.

The New Colombia must guarantee land tenure for the campesinos who work the soil, employment with a decent salary for everyone, provision of public services and exploitation of natural resources by the State with the interests of the majorities in mind, complete education and free health care, investment in scientific investigation, development of culture and recreation, and full sovereignty for the country, among other things.

At this stage of State terrorism, there are two bodies for popular participation in the building of the New Colombia: one is the Public Hearings and Thematic Tables parallel to the Dialogue and Negotiation, in which more than 30,000 Colombians have participated, and the other is the Bolivarian Movement for the New Colombia, which is clandestine at this time, but broad and readying itself to erupt on the streets as a movement of millions in the near future.

By every means, we will continue defending the political objectives of the FARC-EP, which have been presented at the Table of Dialogue and Negotiation and to the Colombian people, the government and the international community, giving priority to a political solution. If this path is again closed to us, we will confront the situation imposed upon us until final victory, in order to carry through an authentically revolutionary programme of government.

Just as Remedios la Bella in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was immune to the civilisation of the United Fruit Company, the FARC-EP is immune to the tale that the world changed and the only alternative for peoples is to submit to imperialism. We are convinced socialism is the future of humanity.



Liberation

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13. An Ongoing Political Genocide

Colombian Communist Party

The current situation for the surviving members of the Patriotic Union and the Communist Party in Colombia, as well as their relatives, sympathisers or friends, is one of the worst ever examples of political persecution by forces of the far right. Between 1 March and 20 September 2001, more than 20 people belonging to the Patriotic Union/Communist Party were assassinated, more than nine were massacred in two paramilitary incursions, two were disappeared, 45 received death threats, there were four attempted assassinations, three were forced into exile and more than 250 families were internally displaced, forced to abandon their homes, their land and their work because of the threats and intimidation on the part of paramilitaries and, in many cases, State forces, even though they fruitlessly sought guarantees from the latter for the protection of their rights, as well as humanitarian assistance.

From March 2001 to the present day, the number of victims of forced displacement has been increasing at an horrific rate because of an escalation of paramilitary action in different regions of the country. A disproportionate number of these victims have been members of the Patriotic Union/Communist Party. The human rights crisis in Colombia, already critical before, has exceeded the bounds of human comprehension.

Today, thousands of members of the Patriotic Union/Communist Party, victims of persecution and genocide for 18 years, not only have to live each day with the anxiety that at any moment a hitman's bullets are going to end their lives, but also have to live in the knowledge that they are considered pariahs of society for the simple fact that they are displaced and forced into the position of having to beg for humanitarian assistance, for their lives to be protected, for their abused human rights to be guaranteed and for conditions to be established for them to return to their places of origin or to resettle somewhere else in a safe and dignified way.

Members of the Patriotic Union/Communist Party have had to leave various parts of the country, abandoning absolutely everything they own, including loved ones, personal belongings and culture, and have had to suffer terrible humiliations in their dealings with the various State bodies that are dutiful to ensure they have access to the help and protection the Law says they are entitled to. They are obliged to join long queues and endure endless complex procedures just to try and achieve the most basic conditions for survival in their strange environment.

Moreover, in some cases, such as the one that took place on 9 June 2001, in a district of Bogota, more than 300 displaced families, the majority Patriotic Union/Communist Party from different parts of the country, were victims of a sudden storm of violence by the metropolitan police and members of the civil defence force when they forcibly evicted them from an area of waste ground where the displaced families had set up camp a month before because the State had failed to provide them with a dignified place to stay. As a result, 20 people were injured, including a child who was shot in the face, one person was killed and a number of people were detained on charges of terrorism and violent protest.

One of the factors that has most contributed to the persecution of Patriotic Union/Communist Party activists in recent years has been the implementation of Plan Colombia in our country, especially in zones in which they have been carrying out fumigations against alleged illicit cultivations. In the departments of Narino, Putumayo, Caqueta, Cauca, South Bolivar, Magdalena, as well as the Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria and the Valle del Rio Cimitarra, Magdalena Medio, it works like this: the people

oppose the fumigations and even present alternative plans for manual eradication of illicit crops, but the fumigations and military operations go ahead regardless and in their wake comes paramilitary terror.

On 5 August 2001, 20 municipalities in the department of Narino were fumigated by aeroplanes and helicopter gunships, supposedly to eradicate illicit crops, but in reality they destroyed the subsistence crops of the campesinos such as potatoes, broad beans, sugar cane, cabbage, maize and cereals. The fumigations took place against the background of a heavy militarisation, and in this case, as in almost every other, after they had taken place, the paramilitaries appeared to further terrorise the people.

Almost exactly the same thing happened in Valle del Rio Cimitarra in February, and again in August. The fumigation of 30 regions of a number of different municipalities as part of the army's 'Operation Bolivar' left more than 870 hectares of subsistence crops destroyed in February and rendered useless more than 1,800 hectares of subsistence land in August.

Another factor that has aggravated the persecution against Patriotic Union/Communist Party members throughout the country has been the introduction of Law 81, of the Law for Defence and National Security, also known as the Antiterrorist Statute which gives a blank cheque to the army to use all available resources to escalate the armed conflict in the country in direct opposition to the promises of the current government to the international community and the efforts being made to advance the peace process, so extolled by President Pastrana as his government's flagship.

This statute worsens the human rights crisis in the country because it gives the military the power to act as judicial police without the presence of officials from the attorney general's office. It violates the principle of habeas habeas which is rendered practically obsolete for periods of detention of 36 hours. It also takes away the administrative and budgetary autonomy of municipal and departmental officials who have to answer to military commanders in those areas denominated 'theatres of operation', as well as restricting the freedom of movement of citizens and criminalising social, popular, trade union and political protest, especially in those regions with the highest level of guerrilla presence.

In this way, regions that historically attracted the most popular support for both the Patriotic Union and the Colombian Communist Party, or where the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or the People's Liberation Army (ELN) are present, or simply regions that are immensely rich in natural resources such as water, minerals and oil, are not only under the watchful eye of the Colombian military, but also of paramilitary groups that are paid by wealthy farmers, landowners and far-right politicians.

In May 2001, there was a shocking attempt to blow up the offices of the weekly Communist Party newspaper, Voz, using an MK-82 torpedo built in North America for purely military purposes. Fortunately the device was discovered before it could be activated. The device contained 250 kg (500 LB) of TNT and was hidden under fruit and vegetables in the back of a red Chevrolet truck, registration CIB-249. Had it exploded it would have destroyed buildings radiating out from Voz's offices for up to three blocks.

The planting of this bomb was disturbing not only because it was aimed at a leftist publication belonging to the Patriotic Union/Communist Party, a group that has been persecuted for more than 18 years, but also because it was an attack on freedom of expression in our country.

14. Persecution of Political Prisoners in US-style Prisons

Vicenzo Gonzalez

If you are a political prisoner in one of Colombia's prisons you have to fight for your life every single day of your detention. A substantial section of the prison guard, working with the police and the army openly supply paramilitary prisoners with the weapons and logistical support to intimidate and attack guerrilla prisoners of war or other political prisoners.

On 31 March 2000, an agreement on "cooperation regarding prisons" was signed by the US ambassador to Colombia and the then Colombian Minister for Justice which was called "Programme for the Improvement of the Colombian Prison System". Using the pretext that it was to control the illegal activities inside prisons of people who were allegedly involved in drugs trafficking the government of the United States would provide financial and technical aid for a new style of penitentiary establishment.

The new model imposed on Colombia's prisons by the Federal Prisons Bureau (FPB), supreme examples being the high-security units at Valledupar, Acacias and Girardot, in which more than 4.5 million dollars have been invested, has been designed to increase the repression and intimidation of those who are fighting for the rights of the people. With the new agreement, Colombian prisons have been turned into "theatres of military operation", where civil authority is subordinate to military and police authority and where universal and constitutional human rights are persistently violated.

Early in 2001, the former government of Andres Pastrana and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) struck a deal to reignite the peace process in which both parties would release an agreed number of their prisoners of war. The FARC kept their side of the bargain of releasing an initial 50 prisoners and then, by their own decision, went beyond that as a gesture of goodwill towards the peace process, since unilaterally terminated by Andres Pastrana under pressure from the United States, and released a total of around 250 prisoners. The government on the other hand only released 14 of the approximately 50 sick prisoners initially agreed. Many of those not released were immediately sent to the new US-designed high-security prisons. They had their heads shaved and their feet shackled and they were put in almost permanent solitary confinement with greatly restricted visiting. Many suffer serious health problems and receive no medical care. One, who had been on the release list, has lost the sight in one eye through glaucoma and is close to losing it in the other if he does not get an operation quickly.

It appears that political prisoners are invariably sent to those prisons with the highest concentrations of paramilitary inmates. Here, the National Police, military Rapid Response Forces and the US-trained Inpec Prison Guard frequently parade through the corridors and cells where political prisoners are being held, making intimidating references to their murderous paramilitary house guests. There is complacency and at times open complicity by the prison authorities with the paramilitary groups inside prisons who not only get preferential treatment, but are openly supplied with money and weapons which they then use to provoke, attack and kill political prisoners. At Palmira prison in Valle; the Modelo in Bucaramanga; Bellavista prison in Medellin; and, just last year, in the National Modelo prison in Bogota, heavily armed paramilitary units inside the prisons in collusion with the prison guard and the national police orchestrated vicious attacks on the political prisoners being held there.

The open interference of the United States in matters of justice and the manipulation of Colombia's prison system by the Federal Prisons Bureau has led to new levels of intimidation, humiliation and the constant violation of human rights.

According to the Political Prisoners Collective “Adan Izquierdo”, founded by FARC-EP prisoners in Valledupar high security prison, their members are severely tortured and grossly mistreated by the Inpec prison guard. Every time the FARC takes any action against paramilitaries on the outside, the prison guard punishes the prisoners inside with beatings and other forms of torture. It is their way of demonstrating their allegiance to the state paramilitary strategy.

The prisoners are denied the right to stay in touch with events outside the prison walls and are forbidden to receive newspapers or magazines. They are not allowed radio or television. Getting medical treatment requires extreme measures such as cutting the veins in their own wrists to attract attention. This is what one prisoner Enrique Horta Valle was forced to do when he desperately needed to see a doctor. They are frequently kept in their cells for 24 hours a day.

Visiting family and friends are warned by the paramilitaries patrolling the prisons that they will be killed if they ever come back. The Inpec guard goes to great lengths to point out which visitors are coming to see political prisoners.

Life inside is a constant battle for survival both physically and mentally. When Inpec gave the order for FARC political prisoner Yesid Arteta to be transferred to Valledupar prison, which operates under such high security measures that it violates the constitutional rights of the inmates, his head was completely shaved, he was made to wear a prisoner’s uniform and he was kept chained up in his cell almost all the time. He is not able to go outside for even the short amount of time allowed by the penitentiary regime because the paramilitaries being detained in the same prison have orders to assassinate him and no one in authority is likely to stop them. Contact with his lawyer, Jose Absalon Achury, is difficult, if not impossible, because he has received death threats and for security reasons cannot travel to Valledupar.

Jorge Augusto Bernal is another FARC political prisoner with a price on his head. Paramilitaries are offering money to whoever kills him first.

The Collective has written to the current government of Alvaro Uribe Velez about the conditions for political prisoners. It may come of no surprise that their pleas have gone unheeded by a regime set on (para)militarising prisons still further. “We are certain that the prisoners being held by our organisation in the mountains of Colombia are in better conditions than us,” they maintain. And add, “Our revolutionary fighting spirit will never be beaten out of us, but our health and life deteriorate a little more every day.”

Few people are aware of the conditions in which political prisoners are kept, especially since the new high-security prison culture was foisted upon Colombia by the Federal Prisons Bureau (FPB) of the United States. Chained hands and feet, shaven heads, uniforms and solitary confinement, moving prisoners to locations far, far away from their families, friends and legal support, all techniques designed to break the spirit, have become standard practice. The prisons are run to the dictates of the FPB and are staffed by paramilitaries disguised as Inpec guards.

Perhaps of most concern in Valledupar is the safety of those political prisoners kept in the cells of Tower One, 5th Floor, and Tower Five, Isolation and Special Treatment Wing. Humanitarian organisations never get to inspect these areas of the prison. The prison management and Inpec will not permit it.

15. Suffer the Little Children

Liz Atherton

While it is vitally important that we continue to condemn the cruelty and stark injustice of Plan Colombia, the escalating US-propelled drive for all-out war with the people of Colombia and the daily atrocities committed by paramilitaries and the armed forces, in a US-sponsored campaign of State Terror consisting of forced displacements, massacres, disappearances and selective assassinations, we must keep a special place in our minds and in the struggle for the children of Colombia. They make up around half the population of this youthful country of 40 million inhabitants and quietly carry much of the burden of the social and economic crisis and armed conflict on which their future is being built.

Displaced Children

It is estimated that, as a direct result of Plan Colombia's fumigations and the brutal paramilitary/army attacks on the civilian population that have increased fourfold since Plan Colombia was introduced, there is now an internally displaced population of more than two-and-a-half million people. Colombia has the world's second largest internally displaced population. Approximately half of the country's displaced population is made up of children and young people under 18 years of age. All have been cruelly uprooted from their homes at a moment's notice, brutalised and terrorised by paramilitary groups and unaided by the national armed forces which are usually stationed in the near vicinity of violent paramilitary incursions and are invariably working alongside the death squads to ensure that no aid reaches the campesinos under attack. At least two thirds have witnessed the brutal murder of a close family member or friend, frequently several. One young displaced woman was just 16 when her father was killed in the paramilitary massacre at Mapiripan in July 1997: "Some men came to the door. My father opened the door and they grabbed him and tied his hands. The men said they were looking for weapons. They searched the house and found nothing. They asked who was the eldest child – that was me. They said to me: 'Your father has weapons.' I told them he didn't. Then they told me that I had better tell the truth or they would kill my father. They took him away. We didn't know what happened to him until the next day when we found his body. ... The paramilitaries went around and gathered people up. They took them to the edge of the river and killed them. There were people there that I knew, and also friends of my father. Some of the children saw the massacre" (Save the Children UK). This was in 1997. Since that year, many thousands more children have been condemned to the eternal memory of their fathers, grandfathers, brothers and uncles being butchered by paramilitary/army assassins. Mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, even the children themselves may not escape the bullet, the chainsaw or the machete.

Displaced families, frequently just the remaining women and children, head for urban areas where they hope to find opportunities for work. They end up in makeshift shanty towns of corrugated metal, cardboard and plastic sheeting precariously built on wasteland on the outskirts of towns and cities. Bogotá's shanties climb the barren hillsides south of the city. There is no infrastructure to make these improvised dwellings safe, no drainage, no sewage system and only sporadic electricity and water supplies. When it rains the hillsides turn into a dangerous, shifting sea of mud and faeces. Needless to say, only the informal sector offers any real opportunity to earn a living for displaced people and the children grow up in poverty-stricken and unhealthy conditions, suffering from stress, for which they have few outlets, and malnutrition. Most displaced children have poor or non-existent health care.

Once displaced, education is virtually non-existent. More than 85 per cent of displaced children do not receive a primary education. While the government has set in place a system whereby, in theory, a

person registered as an internally displaced person should have access to free education and other assistance, it rarely works in practice. One reason is that registering with state agents puts the person at risk of reprisals by paramilitary vigilante groups and so most people prefer to remain invisible and without support. This fear of reprisals from paramilitaries coming in search of the victims they missed has created a culture of fear and silence among displaced communities that forces parents to transmit their anxiety to their children insisting that they never talk to anyone about where they have come from or what happened to them. Displaced children who do attend school are typically withdrawn or aggressive and their attention spans, memory and sleep patterns are disturbed. Vulnerable displaced children are also major targets of paramilitary forced recruitment offensives and it is believed that approximately one third of all paramilitaries are children. Having been victims of paramilitary atrocities, they are coerced into doing it themselves to others.

Poverty, violence, forced displacement, lack of opportunities for work, the relentless fumigations of land worked by already desperately impoverished subsistence farmers have taken their toll on children throughout the country. Malnutrition, poor health and weakened immune systems, lack of access to basic education and health care, these are facts of life for the majority of children both displaced and living in Colombia's underdeveloped rural communities where it can be three or four hours walk to the nearest school. It has been calculated that 66 per cent of Colombia's children living in areas exposed to conflict do not receive a secondary education. Their difficulties are cruelly exacerbated in areas designated for fumigation with toxic chemicals by the United States with children suffering respiratory problems, vomiting and skin blistering.

Working Children

Poverty has forced an estimated 2.7 million of Colombia's children into the labour market, 90 per cent of them employed in hazardous jobs in coal mines for example or in agricultural work such as the cut-flower industry. The work frequently involves the carrying of heavy loads and the unprotected use of toxic chemicals. It is estimated that working children between 7 and 15 earn as little as 13 per cent of the minimum wage. A recent analysis of education standards around the country revealed a startling underperformance in Putumayo, but when you consider that 70 per cent of children in this region between the ages of five to 18 are employed full time as coca pickers this is hardly surprising.

In a report published in the national daily El Tiempo around 323,000 displaced or impoverished rural families have been forced to send their children, the majority young girls, to work as domestics in other people's houses in conditions that border on slavery. Working up to 60 hours a week without a break, typically given responsibilities beyond their years, with 10-year-old girls left in charge of several infants, they suffer discrimination, isolation, low or non-existent wages, are not permitted to attend school and are denied practically all their rights. Many are given very little to eat or food of an inferior quality to their employers. They are made to stay in small, dark rooms and may be locked in for long periods of time. They are often denied wages under the pretext that they have caused breakages or damage to their employers' property and they are frequently abused sexually.

The appalling situation many people find themselves in is also forcing children into the sex trade. Desperate families who want a way out for their children are easily deceived by promises of a better life and job prospects in far away places, and young boys and girls are willingly handed over only to be trafficked abroad and forced to work as prostitutes in Europe, Asia and the United States.

Street Children

Prime candidates for the sex slave trade in Colombia's own flourishing urban sex shops are the forgotten children. They are known as the 'disposable ones' and live in Colombia's streets, in the sewers and on

rubbish dumps. These vulnerable children, numbering more than 30,000, some orphaned by paramilitary massacres, some victims of abuse at home, some born on the streets to other street children, all abandoned by the state, are unloved, unwanted, beaten, robbed, abused, raped and murdered on a daily basis. They are some of Colombia's most marginalised citizens, sniffing glue and petrol to stave off cold and hunger and resorting to begging and petty crime in order to survive. And yet they are just children. They are relentlessly targeted by a cruel and voracious child sex trade which takes advantage of their desperate need and their total lack of protection and by paramilitary/state security force gangs of vigilantes whose job is to 'clean up' the streets to satisfy the economic and political elite, the self-appointed representatives of 'decent people', by cold-bloodedly murdering more than 1,000 of these children every year. Some, as young as seven, are shot in broad daylight from passing cars without licence plates, but their occupants are frequently identified as police officers. Some are shot to death while they sleep in groups under piles of rags to keep warm. Others have been poisoned, set on fire, or had their heads covered with a blanket and smashed with rocks. Disappearances are common, and the bodies of those victims that are found invariably show signs of rape and torture. The deaths of these children go unheeded, and no one is ever prosecuted. The children's names are hardly ever known and, once they are gone, it is as if they never even existed.

16. Reality for Displaced Children

Camilo Raigozo A.

At 6:30 in the morning, the hills in the south of Bogota, where Ciudad Bolivar sits, get the first sunny rays of the new day, accompanied by an icy wind which eats into your very bones. There are still traces of mist and dew, residual evidence of the icy shroud of dawn. At that time the paths on the hillsides look like giant, multi-coloured ants' nests, their inhabitants waking and leaving their nocturnal refuge to confront one more day of despair and adversity.

Taking a lonely shortcut, pausing occasionally, distracted by something or other, is a child with a profound and sad expression adorned by the shadows of many hours of fasting, cheeks and ears burned by the sun of the afternoons and the cold of the mornings; he walks with some difficulty, at times dragging his left foot, not because he is lame, but because his trainer is so worn out that it keeps wanting to stay on the path; the other has been fixed more effectively and allows him in his childlike imagination to score goals like Ronaldinho with the stones he comes across on his way.

His trousers, three sizes too small, don't cover his ankles, and are threadbare and torn all over; his jacket, which was once green and served as a school uniform, is a bit big for him, has one sleeve more frayed than the other and has several holes through which the icy wind blows. A plastic bag is what Javier uses to carry his books – two exercise books with hardly any pages – and a small piece of pencil.

He still has twenty more blocks before he gets to school, but getting there late, for him, is neither here nor there. He just jumps over the wall and knows that it has to be before 10:15 in the morning, breaktime, when they give out refreshments to the children, which is the only reason why he attends Santo Domingo school.

Miriam, his teacher, tired of fighting against the way things are, knows this and accepts it, because the four years she has spent working in this place have given her a deep insight into the misery in which her pupils live. More than anyone she knows that the snack is the only food Javier will eat in the next 24 hours; she also knows that every day he does what he can to get two more snacks to calm the hunger of

his two little sisters waiting for him back at the shack, because at nine years old he helps his mother to sustain the family.

Laura, his mother, has been working for six months in a restaurant in the Restrepo district of Bogota, where she earns 130,000 pesos (around £35) a month. She starts at 6 in the morning and finishes at 8:30 in the night; when she gets back to the shack at 10, she almost always finds her three children asleep on the bed made from boards supported by bricks, with cardboard for a mattress and rags for blankets; one corner of the room serves as the kitchen; the floor is bare earth, cold and damp, which she sometimes carpets with newspapers; the walls, made from boards, cardboard boxes and pieces of metal, are shaken by the wind which threatens constantly to bring the structure crashing to the ground.

The suburb has no light, no water, no sanitation, much less telephones; she illuminates the room with a candle which she lights only long enough to contemplate the moving picture presented by her children. The pain of a mother overwhelms her, and in the dark she cries inconsolably for a long time, silently so as not to wake them, because sometimes she has no food to give them. Occasionally they let her collect customers' leftovers in the restaurant or they give her the scrapings from the pans. On those nights her children can eat. Worn out with crying, she starts to yearn for the happy days with her husband on their farm in Santander when they wanted for nothing. That was before Castano's men assassinated him and added her and her children to the long list of widows and orphans among the more than two million displaced who survive in a country where ephemeral hopes are turned to dust in the burning fire of social injustice.

STANDING ORDER FORM

Regular donations are the most effective way of providing the much needed support displaced and street children in Colombia need. Please return completed form to Liz Atherton, 86 Durham Road, London N2 9DS, or hand it in to your own bank.

Your name Title: Mr/Ms First name:
Last name:

Your address Address:
..... Post code:

Telephone number:

E-mail:

Your bank 1. To the Manager of Bank/Building Society
Full address of your branch:
..... Post code:

2. Name of account holder:

Your bank details 3. Bank sort code:

4. Account number:

- I instruct you to pay a standing order from my account to the Children of Colombia Fund
- I will instruct the bank in writing if I wish to cancel this instruction
- I understand that if any payment is made which breaks the terms of the instruction, the bank will make a refund

Amount 5. Amount to be paid: £
(The minimum amounts we can accept are £5 per month, £5 per quarter and £20 per year)

6. Each: Year ... Quarter ... Month ... (please tick one)

7. Starting on (date you wish to start payment):
(please allow around six weeks for order to be set up)

Your signature Please sign here:

To: The Halifax plc (sort code: 11-12-65). Account number 00167511

If this instruction ends existing banker's orders to Children of Colombia Fund, tick here ...