

of four members of a Medellín human rights NGO and the killing of two members of another NGO at the end of January 1999, both incidents condemned by Canada, represent a serious development in the ongoing war apparently being waged by paramilitaries on the human rights movement. At least 32 government prosecutors working on investigations involving the military, paramilitaries or narcotraffickers have also been murdered over the past two years. Impunity in such cases is widespread, but arrests have been made in the killing of human rights activist Eduardo Umana and in the 1997 CINEP killings.

Colombia's overall murder rate improved slightly in 1998, with 23,133 homicides (cf. 25,379 in 1997); however, Colombia is still among the top three most violent countries in the world; Medellín's murder rate is 100 times Canada's. Although the political conflict accounts for only 15% of these killings, it is generally thought to have a direct multiplying effect on the overall homicide rate. An estimated 97% of reported murders are not prosecuted.

The election of the Pastrana government has, as yet, done little to slow the tide of human rights abuses. The appointment of Vice President Gustavo Bell as Senior Advisor on human rights has been a positive step; however, clear, well-articulated and adequately-funded policies in the areas of human rights and displaced persons have yet to emerge. Internal displacement of civilians, typically as a direct result of the armed conflict and/or Paramilitary terror tactics, has similarly reached crisis levels. Cumulative estimates of 1.2 million displaced persons are likely accurate. While the passage of important legislation categorising forced disappearance as a crime looks to be imminent, critical legislation reducing military immunity from prosecution is hardly advancing.

The Bogota office of the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** played a constructive and high-profile role in 1998, and is currently in the process of expansion. There was some controversy as to the degree to which the Office should concern itself with the peace process. A recently established smaller presence of the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees** is starting to be felt.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada continues to step up the attention given the protection and promotion of human rights in Colombia, in terms of financial and human resources and time. In 1997, Canada committed \$1.5 million for a 3 year project involving 4 NGOs to create awareness and respect for human rights. In addition, the **Canada Fund for Local Initiatives** allocates at least \$100,000 annually in support for small-scale projects submitted for funding by NGOs. In August 1998, \$1 million in new funds were announced, destined principally for the local activities of the ICRC, PAHO and Médecins Sans Frontières. Later in the year, a framework agreement was reached with the Bogota office of the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, by which Canada will disburse \$500,000 over 18 months for a variety of activities to be undertaken by the Office.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Embassy in Bogota has sought to improve the human rights climate by providing **strong and visible support to Colombian groups and individuals** working to promote human rights. Over the past year, senior Embassy representatives have travelled several times to conflictive areas such as Meta, the Magdalena Medio, Urabá, Chocó, and Putumayo. Embassy officials hold discussions with other like-minded countries to improve **information sharing and cooperation** for the promotion of human rights and our concerns are raised at all levels in both bilateral meetings and at multilateral fora.