

UNCLASSIFIED

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN COLOMBIA

ISSUE

Colombia, a country facing a serious problem with drug traffickers and an ongoing internal civil conflict, has been a focus for international concern given the nature and extent of human rights problems in the country.

BACKGROUND

Despite its well established democratic political system, Colombia has experienced a steady increase in violence over the past five years. Political motives accounted for approximately 10% of the 23,000 homicides recorded in 1989. The assassination of three Presidential candidates prior to the 1990 elections underscores the seriousness of politically motivated killings. Most killings were the result of widespread social violence, of which kidnapping, disappearances and extortion are also manifestations.

The major actors in the violence and killing in Colombia are the guerrillas, military, para-military and self-defense groups and, particularly over the last 18 months, criminal organizations involved in the drug trade. Within the Armed Forces and the Police there are elements that have played a part in the massacres and murders, but systematic repression is not practised on an institutional basis. The Colombian government under President Gaviria has attempted to correct the abuses in the security forces and several of those responsible have been prosecuted and sentenced. Recently the commander of an infantry battalion was charged for his part in the deaths of 11 peasants. Peace negotiations being undertaken by the Colombian government with guerrilla groups may help to stem some of the violence which arises from confrontations between the military and the guerrillas. In addition the government, while ruling out direct talks with the drug traffickers, has been prepared to adopt a flexible position with respect to the resolution of the problem of drug related violence, extortion and kidnapping.

The main violations of human rights are the result of confrontations including guerrilla groups, the numerous para-military organizations and organizations of drug traffickers. Civilians caught in the cross-fire are often forced to flee or are made victims of intimidation, extortion and disappearances. Torture is commonly used as a means of obtaining information. Individuals in of the army and the police have been found guilty - through negligence, complicity or active participation - in these violations of human rights. The government has endeavoured to identify, convict and sentence the guilty parties.