

The deliberate targeting of indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, trade unionists, human rights defenders, journalists, members of the judicial and legal profession, and others by the paramilitary and guerrilla is of great concern to the Canadian government, and we publicly condemn violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all armed actors. To underline the importance we attach to the protection of human rights in Colombia, the Embassy meets regularly with human rights officials such as the Director of the Bogota Office of the UNHCHR, the National Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo), the President’s Human Rights Counsellor, officials of the Ministry of the Interior responsible for the protection of human rights activists, and a range of NGOs. The Embassy also travels to parts of Colombia to gain first-hand knowledge of a particular situation, monitor the progress of investigations, apply continuing pressure on the authorities to act, and to show international solidarity with targeted communities. The Embassy is in regular touch with threatened groups and intervenes with the Colombian government on their behalf to request protection or follow-up after an attack. The Embassy also continues to accompany the displaced back to their homes and communities.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has contributed a total of \$1.8 million to the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Bogota, Cali and Medellin since 1999, and will consider future requests for additional funding.

Canada will also look for opportunities to support human rights training for the Colombian military. Colombia is one of 12 Latin American countries that is benefiting from a six-year, \$2.4 million CIDA project aimed at improving the knowledge and application of the principles of international humanitarian law by the armed forces. Colombia’s portion of the total is approximately \$200,000. The project is executed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Canadian Red Cross Society, with participation from the Department of National Defence, and it ends in 2004. Canada, through the Embassy, has also helped develop and expand a distance learning course in human rights and international humanitarian law for junior officers and officer cadets of the Colombian Army offered by the Autonomous University of Bucaramanga. Nearly 2,500 students have benefited from this course since 1999. In February 2001, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre presented a successful week-long symposium/workshop on military and civilian aspects of peacekeeping, the role of the UN and OAS, and truth and justice in the post-conflict period.

Canada’s source-country refugee program provides sanctuary to an increasing number of threatened Colombians. The number of Colombians accepted under this program has grown from 20 in 1998 to 875 in 2001. The target for 2002 is 925.