

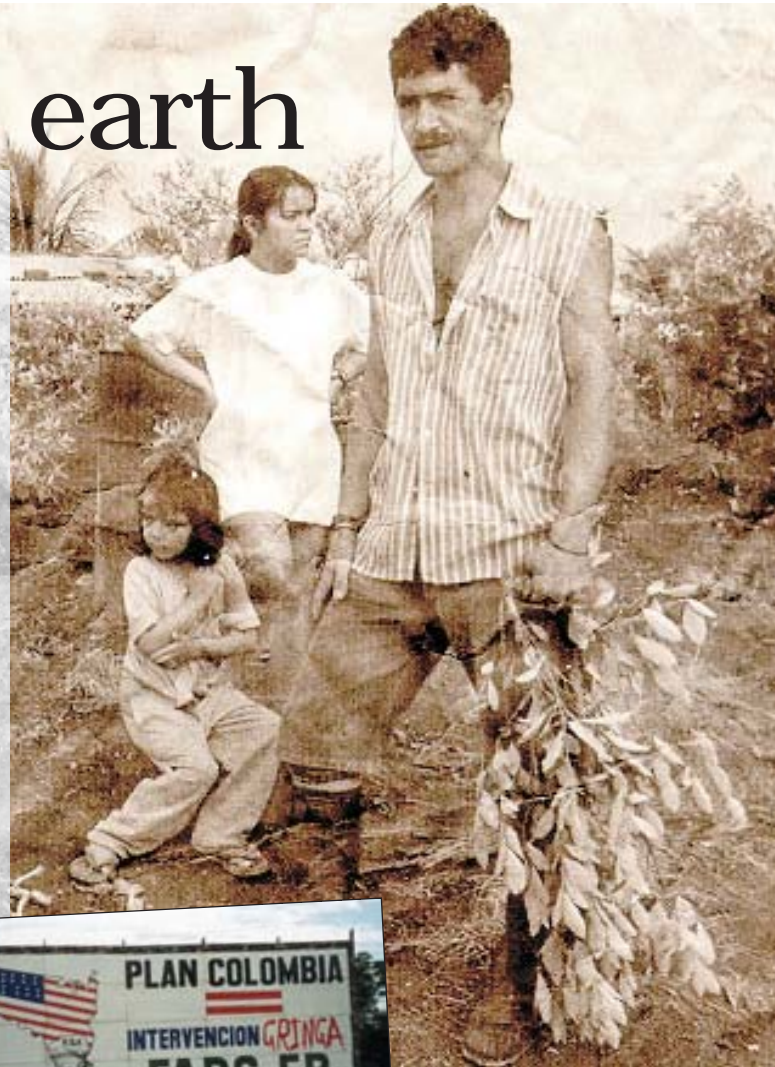
Scorched earth

THE USA has taken an active interventionist role in Colombia. As part of its "War on Drugs", Plan Colombia, and now the Andean Initiative, the U.S. has poured billions of dollars into the hands of the Colombian armed forces. Most of this has gone to finance paramilitary groups closely associated with the army, as well as large landowners and transnational corporations.

A growing problem associated with the "War on Drugs" is the wide use of herbicides in the countryside to destroy the drug crops. Most farmers would rather not grow illegal crops but to feed their families they cultivate the only crop that pays— drugs.

As the poisons are dropped on their fields, farmers and their families face a wide range of serious health problems. Meanwhile all research clearly shows that the spraying of herbicides is costly and ineffective at curbing the drug trade.

All the organizations within the popular movement are acutely aware of recent peace negotiations in Guatemala and El Salvador and their failure to address the underlying causes of inequality and injustice in Colombia. A consensus exists among these movements that the peace negotiations in Colombia must include representatives of indigenous, campesinas, Afro-Colombian, women and other social movements.



A bad American plan gets worse

FOLLOWING the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11th, the Bush government announced it was increasing its provision of military training and equipment to Colombia. The U.S. government has given millions of dollars in military aid to the Colombian military despite that government's continued failure to meet human rights conditions that were outlined by the U.S. Congress.



Stay informed. Get involved

National Union Colombia page
www.nupge.ca/colombia/colombia.htm

Public Services International
www.world-psi.org

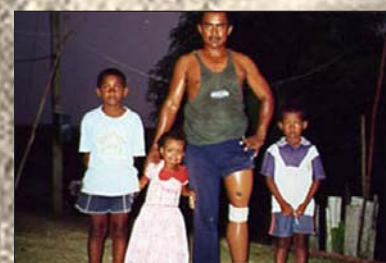
ZNet's resources on the conflict in Colombia
www.zmag.org/crisescurevts/colombia/colombiatop.htm



www.nupge.ca
 613 228-9800



Colombia



Victim of Wars

Drug War Battlefield: A Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Rebel, walks by a burning oil pipeline



MAKE WAR TO HIDE WAR

MENTION Colombia and most people conjure up images of war – civil war, drug wars, and the war on terrorism.

But, under the cover of all these various wars, Colombia's government is fighting a war against its own people – its own civil society. On the front lines are workers, peasants, women, Afro-Colombians, and Indigenous peoples.

More than 80% of the casualties of the various "wars" in Colombia are civilians. Estimates are that the guerrilla movements are responsible for about 5% of the deaths, the army for about 10% and right-wing paramilitary forces for about 85%.

And far from condemning and trying to

stop the violence, the government of President Alvaro Uribe has largely ignored the human rights crisis—or supported the paramilitaries outright. In October 2003 the President brought in legislation that allows paramilitary criminals, many of whom have committed extreme violent acts, the chance to pay fines instead of going to prison.

What measures the Colombian government has instituted to increase security are not targeting the illegal armed organizations but are directed at restricting the rights and freedoms of its average citizen.

Everyday life - and death

- More than 2.5 million campesinas have been forced from their land by economic conditions, fumigation and intimidation by right-wing paramilitary.
- 1.5 million displaced people are living in Bogotá alone, many in appalling conditions in shanty towns.
- Almost half the displaced in Bogotá are Afro-Colombian or indigenous.



Union leaders and activists are special targets

THE OVERWHELMING majority of Colombia's budget goes to repay foreign debt and to finance its police and military. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the government is rolling back labour rights as well as funding for health and education.

Unions representing private sector workers are confronted by government policies, often backed by military and paramilitary forces, that prioritize appeasing multinational corporations.

The wages of Public Sector workers are under a 2 year freeze—by Presidential decree. Colombian affiliates to Public Services International (a Global Union to which the National Union of Public and General Employees is also a member) report that they fear for their safety:

- SINTRAEMCALI, in the municipal services sector in Cali, strongly opposed to privatisation of the

company, has been the target of bomb blasts, assassinations and continuous death threats;

- shots were fired through the window of the home of the President of ASODEFENSA during the night although fortunately nobody was hurt;
- a member of the municipal workers' union, SINTRAEMSDES was assassinated; and
- the list of death threats, arbitrary dismissals, threats of transfers as a result of union activities continues to grow.

But the labour movement continues to provide a progressive voice in Colombian society. Colombia's Trade Union Congress (CUT) is actively involved in supporting mass movements and organizing for real social change.

The union movement is considered enough of a challenge to government and corporations that the leadership requires full-time body guards in response to the ongoing threats to their lives.



Thousands of protesting workers in Cali forced the government to abandon plans to privatize the municipal-owned public services company, EMCALI

Photo: Mario Novelli

Colombia's Trade Union Congress reports that in 2002:

- 172 trade unionists were killed, 49 were trade union leaders
- 26 trade unionists were abducted
- 17 suffered an abduction attempt
- 164 received death threats
- 132 were arbitrarily detained by the authorities
- 7 forcibly displaced
- around 80 went into exile