Human Rights in Colombia
by Mariko Frame

With its notoriously vicious paramilitary death squads, rampant drug trade and collusive government, Colombia remains a complex and tumultuous nation. Needless to say, the human rights history of this country has been marked by political violence, absence of due process, and at times a general lawlessness that has made it perpetually unstable. Coupled with Colombia's domestic problems, U.S. involvement in its 'war on drugs' has exacerbated the situations that already were at a boiling point. With an ongoing power struggle between the government, the military and the drug lords, it is no exaggeration to describe Colombia as in a constant state of war. All activists and marginalized peoples are under steady attack from all sides as they strive to secure for themselves and for their country a safe and peaceful future.

Books on Colombia


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This report examines a series of political reforms made between 1990-1991. It concludes that despite reforms, the government of Cesar Trujillo has been unable to curb politically motivated violence. It ascribes the responsibility of such violence to a broad range of actors including the government, paramilitary groups, and insurgents.


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In 1992, the Colombian President Trujillo adopted a series of executive decrees which restricted civil liberties and granted more power to the Colombian armed forces. These authoritarian decrees have not resulted in any progress against the insurgent forces; instead the Colombian armed forces themselves are implicated in serious cases of human rights abuses. This report criticizes the ongoing abuses perpetrated by both the Colombian armed forces and the insurgents.


This publication is a series of working papers written by various scholars. It contains presentations on the historical context of violence and human rights in Colombia, the international law and institutional efforts against impunity, and the Peace Process. It also seeks to present a variety of views and expose the complexities of the Colombian situation for a more intelligent policy debate in the United States.


Abstract: *Sara Cameron reports on the Children's Movement for Peace in Colombia which, with the support of organizations like UNICEF, has put into practice the fundamental principles of child rights and participation. Cameron shows how the Convention on the Rights of the Child gave the power to these children to protest against war in ways that have profoundly transformed communities across the country. She argues that the Children’s*
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Abstract: Examines human rights violation cases in Colombia from the viewpoint of a non-governmental organization working with the poor. Failure by the state to comply with its responsibilities; Denial of justice to the victims of violations; Government efforts to improve the performance of justice; Military criminal justice system; Role of the Public Ministry, headed by the Procurator General in protecting human rights.


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committed against international law. It also discusses the assassinations of political figures, other politically motivated crimes, and human rights abuses in Colombia.


This source presents detailed evidence of the continuing close ties between the Colombian Army and the paramilitary groups responsible for gross human rights violations. This evidence is compiled by Colombian government investigators and Human Rights Watch. Also, this source contends that military support for paramilitary activity continues even in areas which are receiving aid from the United States.


This Human Rights Watch publication examines the growing power of right-wing paramilitaries and their gross human rights abuses in Colombia. It also criticizes a newly approved law which is effectively a negotiation between paramilitaries and the Colombian government: it allows paramilitaries demobilization if they are immune from extradition for drug trafficking. Finally, it describes the ramifications of allowing paramilitaries legal protection against prosecution.


This book examines Colombia's war in the context of international law. It proposes that the failure to address fundamental issues, such as impunities for violations of both human rights and international laws, contributes greatly to Colombia's conflict. It also discusses transgressions against international law for both paramilitaries and guerillas and the role that the international community plays in the conflict.


This Human Rights Watch document contains a review of the Public Law 107-1115 signed by the Bush administration which will allow continued funding for the Colombian government to support its 'war on terror.' It concludes that the Colombian government has not satisfied conditions of protection for human rights. According to HRW, there is evidence that the government continues to support paramilitary groups responsible for human rights abuses. Finally, this document urges the Bush administration to implement measures which will help secure human rights in Colombia.


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counterinsurgency cannot be separated from counternarcotics, and it calls for a scaling back of restrictions on U.S. funding and training of counterinsurgency forces.


Abstract: Paramilitaries commit many of the human rights abuses in Colombia. Provides evidence on the relationship among Colombian army brigades, police and paramilitaries. Shows how the Colombian government has failed to take effective measures to break these links, and how the Colombian military and police often profit from paramilitaries. Also describes the failure of American policy makers to enforce U.S. human rights laws, and how the U.S. contributes to the situation by continuing to provide military assistance to the government despite its poor human rights abuses record.


Abstract: The article contains three reviews on books pertaining to Colombia: 'Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society,' by Frank Safford and Marco Palacios; 'Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability,' by Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk; and 'The Sixth Division: Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia,' by Human Rights Watch. In 'Colombia,' Safford and Palacios discuss the current turmoil taking place in Colombia, including economic troubles and violence. Rabasa and Chalk, in 'Colombian Labyrinth,' explore the strengths and weaknesses of Colombia's guerrillas and paramilitaries. Human Rights Watch, in 'The Sixth Division,' discuss Colombia's military and state institutions.


This book documents the criminal activities of the Colombian armed forces. It contains interviews with witnesses and victims who retell their stories of murder and death threats issued by government forces. It also criticizes the Colombian government for its state-sponsored terrorist operations in the war against guerrillas and narcotraffickers.


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This report is a testimony by the Assistant Secretary of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement before the U.S. Senate Committee. It presents his views considering the progress the U.S. has made in its fight against drug trafficking. He concludes by praising the success of Plan Colombia, but insists that continued efforts must be made to eradicate all sources of drug trafficking.


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Plan Colombia is the main financial aid program provided by the United States in an effort to support counterinsurgency projects by the Colombian government. Plan Colombia is a $7.5 billion project which provides funding to the Colombian military, as well as military training. This U.S. State Department website contains information on the mission and financial allocations of 'Plan Colombia,' and also provides pertinent links to Department of State releases concerning Plan Colombia.


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This Amnesty International website contains information regarding human rights abuses in Colombia and links to the latest news and reports on Colombia's human rights crisis. It also provides links to important official, related websites and U.S. Policy organizations. Finally, it provides information on grassroots organizations which are protesting against Colombian human rights abuses, as well as information on how to get involved.


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Colombia Support Network is a grassroots organization that is seeking to build a democratic and economically-just Colombia. The organization condemns human rights abuses by all factions of Colombia's crisis, including paramilitaries, insurgents, the government, and U.S.-backed projects. This website provides background information on Colombia and links to various articles related to the rival factions, the destruction of Colombia's environment, human rights abuses, U.S. involvement, etc.


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This source, written by the Americas Watch Committee, contains an analysis of Colombia's paradoxical political setting which is characterized by a functioning democracy and a militarized society. Critically examines the violations against civil rights and human rights in Colombia's crisis. It also provides the political context for Colombia's crisis and discusses the government's role.


This report examines a series of political reforms made between 1990-1991. It concludes that despite reforms, the government of Cesar Trujillo has been unable to curb politically motivated violence. It ascribes the responsibility of such violence to a broad range of actors including the government, paramilitary groups, and insurgents.


In 1992, the Colombian President Trujillo adopted a series of executive decrees which restricted civil liberties and granted more power to the Colombian armed forces. These authoritarian decrees have not resulted in any progress against the insurgent forces; instead the Colombian armed forces themselves are implicated in serious cases of human rights abuses. This report criticizes the ongoing abuses perpetrated by both the Colombian armed forces and the insurgents.


*Abstract:* Describes the role of the U.S. in helping Colombia to carry out human rights abuses. Shows the connection between military and death squad activities, and how responsibility of abuses committed by
paramilitaries is shifted away from the Colombian military. Also provides information for what Americans can do to change the situation.


This Human Rights Watch publication criticizes Colombia's Attorney General for failing to make progress in curtailing human rights abuses by directly undermining prosecutions and investigations of major human rights violations in Colombia.


This Human Rights Watch publication examines the actions of the left-wing insurgency group FARC in the context of international law. It analyzes the transgressions that FARC has committed against international law. It also discusses the assassinations of political figures, other politically motivated crimes, and human rights abuses in Colombia.


This source presents detailed evidence of the continuing close ties between the Colombian Army and paramilitary groups responsible for gross human rights violations. This evidence is compiled by Colombian government investigators and Human Rights Watch. Also, this source contends that military support for paramilitary activity continues even in areas which are receiving aid from the United States.


This Human Rights Watch publication examines the growing power of right-wing paramilitaries and their gross human rights abuses in Colombia. It also criticizes a newly approved law which is effectively a negotiation between paramilitaries and the Colombian government in which paramilitaries will demobilize if they can avoid extradition for drug trafficking. Finally, it describes the ramifications of allowing paramilitaries legal protection against prosecution.

Human Rights Watch. The Ties That Bind: Colombia and Military-Paramilitary Links.

This source presents detailed evidence of the continuing close ties between the Colombian army and the paramilitary groups responsible for many of the worst human rights abuses in Colombia. This evidence is compiled by Colombian government investigators and Human Rights Watch. It contains first-hand accounts and interviews of victims of Colombia's human rights crisis. Finally, it describes in detail which brigades of the Colombian military have paramilitary links.


This book examines Colombia's war in the context of international law. It proposes that the failure to address fundamental issues, such as impunities for violations of both human rights and international laws, contributes greatly to Colombia's conflict. It also discusses transgressions
against international law for both paramilitaries and guerillas and the role that the international community plays in the conflict.


This Human Rights Watch document contains a review of the Public Law 107-1115 signed by the Bush administration which will allow continued funding for the Colombian government to support its 'war on terror.' It concludes that the Colombian government has not satisfied conditions of protection for human rights. According to HRW, there is evidence that the government continues to support paramilitary groups responsible for human rights abuses. Finally, this document urges the Bush administration to implement measures which will help to secure human rights in Colombia.


Abstract: Discusses the policies of the Virgilio Barco and Cesar Gaviria governments; drug and self-defense policies, as well as for the paramilitary groups. Explains how Colombian state failed to maintain military control, provide an adequate police force, and court system to protect civilian rights. Also provides a historical context concerning the weak Colombian state and the emergence of opposition.


This book provides the context for Colombia's conflict in terms of politics and the government, discussing the administrations of Virgilio Barco and Gaviria Trujillo. It also examines the role that paramilitary forces and drug trafficking play in the crisis, and discusses the human rights abuses being committed by Colombia's rival factions.


Abstract: Investigates whether the U.S. government uses the “Drug War” as a smokescreen to justify arms sales to Colombia and exposes the human rights abuses of the Colombian army against its people and how women specifically have responded to this. In 1996, a delegation sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) traveled to Colombia to take part in the International Day of Actions Against Violence Against Women. The delegation traveled to Apartado in support of its mayor, a courageous young woman named Gloria Cuartas, who is trying to govern the city in an atmosphere of terror. Includes an interview with Mayor Cuartas. [videorecording]. 1 videocassette (24 min.)


Abstract: Paramilitaries commit many of the human rights abuses in Colombia. Provides evidence on the relation between Colombian army brigades, police and paramilitaries. Shows how the Colombian government has failed to take effective measures to break these links, and how the Colombian military and police often profit from paramilitaries. Also describes the failure of American policy makers to enforce U.S. human rights laws, and how
the U.S. contributes to the situation by continuing to provide military assistance to the government despite its poor human rights abuses record.


Abstract: The article contains three reviews on books pertaining to Colombia: 'Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society,' by Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, 'Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability,' by Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, and 'The Sixth Division: Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia,' by Human Rights Watch. In 'Colombia,' Safford and Palacios discuss the current turmoil taking place in Colombia, including economic troubles and violence. Rabasa and Chalk, in 'Colombian Labyrinth,' explore the strengths and weaknesses of Colombia's guerrillas and paramilitaries. Human Rights Watch, in 'The Sixth Division,' discuss Colombia's military and state institutions.


This book documents the criminal activities of the Colombian armed forces. It contains interviews with witnesses and victims who retell their stories of murder and death threats issued by government forces. It also criticizes the Colombian government for its state-sponsored terrorist operations in the war against guerrillas and narcotraffickers.


Abstract: The paper explores processes of social movement learning within SINTRAEMCALI, a public service trade union in the South West of Colombia, which has successfully prevented a series of attempts by the national government to privatise public utilities. The paper develops the concept of 'strategic learning' and applies it to an exploration of the transformation of SINTRAEMCALI from a narrow 'corporate' trade union focused on the defence of members' particular interests, to a 'social movement union' that linked workers and local communities in the defence of public services and operated on a range of scales from the local to the global.


This website is the homepage of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army: FARC-EP. It contains their mission statement and plenum. The self-ascribed history of FARC is provided, as well as interviews and dialogues with various FARC members. The website also contains information on the laws enacted within the insurgent army and the protocol expected of its members. Finally, it provides pertinent documents and criticisms of the role of the U.S. in Colombia's crisis.


Abstract: The article traces the founding of Colombian paramilitaries to the Cold War era when the U.S. helped the Colombian and Central American governments establish proxy paramilitary forces in its fight against
international communism. The author summarizes the devastating effects this paramilitarism had on Colombian and Central American society during the 1960s to the late 20th century. A concluding section provides an update on the impact of paramilitarism on human rights in contemporary Colombia, and on the implications for peace in the region.


This book critically analyzes of the role of the United States in funding and training the Colombian military. It contains Cold War and post-Cold War history of the U.S.'s role in Latin and South America in supporting various regimes, and it seeks to illustrate the ulterior economic motives behind America's continued role rather than defaulting to the orthodox explanations of “Soviet containment” or a “war on terror.”