

Action on Colombia

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Election 1997: Colombia

CSN Secures Election Observers for Apartadó

With the October national elections in Colombia, violence was threatened (and acted upon) by several players in that country. Guerrillas, paramilitaries and others threatened to disrupt the electoral process in various regions. Of particular concern to CSN was Apartadó, Dane County Wisconsin's sister community.

At the request of Apartadó Mayor Gloria Cuartas, CSN-Madison agreed to send an election observer, Board Member Mark Pocan, to that violence-torn community to observe local elections for Mayor and City Council. Pocan is a former member of the Dane County Board of Supervisors and has visited Apartadó twice before. However, when he tried to join up with the Organization of American States (OAS) election observers, Pocan was unsuccessful.

This was the first time that the Colombian government has allowed election observers. The OAS was chosen as the "official" credentialing agency. They were sending approximately thirty five observers to Colombia, but only six or seven to the entire state of Antioquia of which Apartadó is a remote part. When CSN approached the OAS they said that they were not allowing United States citizens to go for fear of kidnapping and violence.

CSN and Pocan persisted, however. They solicited the support of both Wisconsin United States Senators Russ Feingold and Herb Kohl. Additionally, the office of Ambassador Harriet Babbitt, the United States representative with the OAS, lobbied the OAS to allow Pocan to be credentialed. Senator Feingold took special interest and wrote a letter to the OAS and Ambassador Babbitt to help secure credentials for Pocan or at minimum to send election observers to the Apartadó area.

Thanks to the hard work and persistence of CSN, Senators Feingold and Kohl, Pocan and Ambassador Harriet Babbitt's office, the OAS agreed to send two of their non-United States citizen observers to Apartadó, to help ensure fair and free elections. All of us at CSN thank those involved for their assistance.

Apartadó Press Bulletin

The elections in the municipality of Apartadó demonstrated very good results regarding the democratic process. In general terms there was an atmosphere of normality and tranquility.

The population of Apartadó also expressed its desire for peace in the October 26th elections. At the same time, the international community expressed solidarity with our municipality through the accompaniment of various international delegations. Two

delegates participated in the process as International Observers demonstrating their voluntary cooperation with the community.

According to the latest summary of information by the Apartadó Municipal Register, these are the election results:

Newly elected Mayor, Mr. Teodoro Manuel Díaz Lobo from the Democratic Alliance Movement, M-19, a former guerrilla movement turned political party, won with 5047 votes.

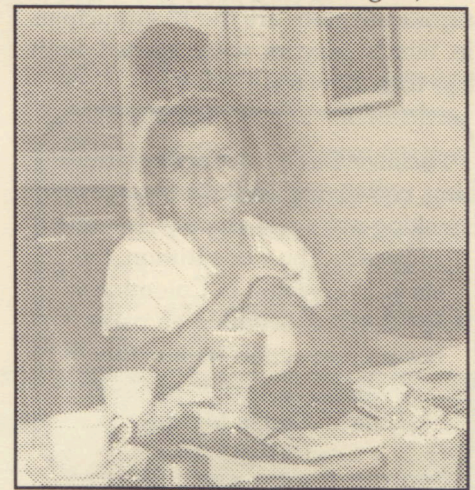
Other candidates receiving votes:

José Phildalgo Banguero, Colombian Liberal Party - 4034

José María Betancur, Indigenous Social Movement Alliance - 665

José Antonio Franco, Colombian Liberal Party - 629

(Continued on Page 2)



Gloria Cuartas - Outgoing Mayor of Apartadó

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National Newsbrief

After the paramilitary's declaration that they would not permit the participation of leftist political organizations in the local elections, the FARC and ELN guerrillas announced their intention to sabotage the elections.

On October 26th, mayors, municipal council members, governors and representatives to the departmental assemblies were elected. According to the National Registrar, under the pressure of diverse armed groups 153 candidates of the country's 1100 municipal regions resigned. In 22 of these municipalities there were no candidates for mayor or city council and in more than 5 municipalities candidates resigned. In total, 359 candidates for mayor and 1520 city council candidates resigned; 25 of the electoral organization sites were blown up and a municipal registrar was kidnapped.

At the same time, ELN kidnapped two international observers from the Organization of American States, for three weeks. This action was amply rejected for violating International Human Rights. Finally, the armed pressure in various municipalities has made the vote very scarce. The most significant cases are the 10 municipalities in which mayors were elected with less than 20 votes.

"I believe that we are acting, thinking, conceiving and trying to go on making not a real country, but one of paper. The Constitution, the laws...everything in Colombia is magnificent, everything on paper. It has no connection with reality."

Gabriel García Márquez -
Colombian writer

**Colombia Bulletin's Fall/Winter
1997-98 issue is now available**

Read about:

**Colombian Media and the Mapiripán
Massacre; U.S. Steps up Military
Aid; Colombian Gay Activist Seeks
Asylum in U.S.; Congress Passes
New Leahy Amendment; Josué
Giraldo Remembered; and more**

A Brief History of Apartadó and Urabá

Excerpts from an article in RESIST Newsletter, September 1997.

by John Fournelle

A key project of CSN is a sister community project with Apartadó, a town in the Urabá region of the northwest, not far from the Darien Gap and Panama. For the past few years this area has suffered intense attacks by paramilitary gunmen organized by regional druglords with support from some businessmen and the Colombian military. CSN has, until recently, been working with Gloria Cuartas, the former mayor of Apartadó, to try to rally international pressure and assistance to the region, to defuse some of the violence.

In April 1995 when three assassins were detailed to murder Gloria, CSN created a "Gloria Cuartas Web Page" on its web site (www.igc.apc.org/csn) and issued an alert via internet, fax and phone. The alerts generated pressure on the U.S. embassy in Bogota. Gloria has stated that the international pressure created by the web page plus support from UNESCO saved her life. People all over the U.S. demanded that the U.S. Ambassador and State Department withhold visas for Colombian military officers implicated in human rights abuses.

The Urabá region, and the adjacent Choco, have been historically frontier regions where political dissidents and others have fled the periodic waves of violence sweeping the country during the Twentieth Century. The Choco was settled by escaped slaves and is heavily Afro-Colombian; indigenous communities are also scattered throughout Urabá and the Choco. This region holds a strategic economic and military position, and with the reversion of the canal in Panama, there is increasing interest in construction of one or more water or combined water-road trans-oceanic canals here. Add to that Colombia's "Plan Pacifico" of economic development (read exploitation) of the mineral and forest resources, plus interest in neoliberal "free trade zones" and it all spells disaster for the traditional inhabitants of these lands. What better excuse to seize the land than to send in paramilitary gunmen, strafing and bombing the areas, "to clean out the guerrillas!" The wave of refugees from the Choco flooded in Apartadó and nearby Turbo late last year, swelling the numbers of those who fled south to escape the "Mochacabezas" (head-choppers) up there.

The horrific violence imparted by the mochacabezas has been documented in detail by Fr. Javier Giraldo, S.J., of the Bogota non-governmental organization (NGO) Justicia y Paz. His letters to the Colombian authorities have been translated and posted on CSN's web page with calls for concerned people to write to U.S. and Colombian officials. CSN works with Justicia y Paz and other Colombian NGOs, attempting to get the information translated into English, and into the hands (or on the computer screens) of people in the U.S. CSN translated and helped publish Fr. Giraldo's book, **Colombia: the Genocidal Democracy** (Common Courage Press) [and available from CSN, page 11].

An important CSN project is a 48-page quarterly magazine, *Colombia Bulletin*, which gives an in-depth coverage to the human rights situation. The publication also provides background information about Colombia to counter the simplistic viewpoint put out by the mass media that the problem with Colombia is drugs.

CSN's March 1997 Faceless Justice Conference showed that there is a basis for building a grassroots movement to aid Colombia. Participants decided to organize broadly, mainly throughout the Midwest. ...

RESIST is a non-profit organization that funds social change. They have been a consistent supporter of CSN for many years. For more information and to receive their newsletter, contact them at 259 Elm St., Suite 201
Sommerville MA 02144 or call them at (617) 623-5110

5 MYTHS ABOUT COLOMBIA

MYTH 1

NO ONE UNDERSTANDS THE SERIOUS SITUATION OF VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

FACT: Human Rights organizations in Colombia, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch-Americas, a number of support organizations in Europe, the United States and Canada have been denouncing the grave human rights situation in Colombia for the past 15 years. Their denunciations and reports have explained the origin of the situation, the role of any trafficking - as well as that of the government of the United States during the so called "War on Drugs." It is important to review this documentation in order to understand the past and present situation in Colombia.

MYTH 2

NO ONE KNOWS WHERE THE BULLETS COME FROM THAT ARE KILLING COLOMBIANS

FACT: During the last 15 years the violence in Colombia has claimed legal opposition organizations, as well as peasant, indigenous, union or grassroots organizations as its principal victims. The responsibility and the role of accomplice on the part of the Colombian State in this political violence has resulted in a

collapse of the judicial system. In turn, the daily conflicts in Colombia have become increasingly violent while the perpetrators of this violence receive impunity.

MYTH 3

COLOMBIA IS A CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY WITH SOLID INSTITUTIONS.

FACT: It is true that Colombia has had a tradition of civil governments, for the majority of this century. However it is also true that historically, the political and social violence has gone hand in hand with great restrictions of civil and political rights. There are vast areas where the local civil authorities have subordinated themselves to the military authorities. The solidity of the Colombian institutions only appears on paper. An example is the judicial system, which was recently restructured by the constitutional reform of 1991. Even though reform was instituted, impunity rates have been officially estimated at 97%.

MYTH 4

THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT IS DOING EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO OVERCOME THE GRAVE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

FACT: The Colombian Government has not had sufficient political will to attack the root of the causes of the serious human rights violations which have taken place over the past 15 years. Not only has it not attacked the paramilitary groups, it is actually seeking ways to legalize them.

MYTH 5

PARAMILITARY GROUPS ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF THE COLOMBIAN

FACT: The paramilitary groups were created by the Colombian military in the counterinsurgent fight against the guerrillas and all forms of community organizations in rural areas. Paramilitary groups act closely with the military



San José de Apartadó - Comunidad de Paz

Request for Support for Jose Antonio Lopez Bula

Dear Friend of CSN,

Jose Antonio Lopez Bula, the former mayor of Apartadó and Patriotic Union party leader wrote to CSN from Itagui prison in Colombia on January 29, 1998, updating us on his case and asking for our support. Jose Antonio was a progressive mayor under whose administration many important public works were carried out. He worked ceaselessly for peace in a terribly conflictive area. He sought to improve living conditions for poor residents of the city and for refugees streaming in from the countryside. He traveled as leader of a delegation from Apartadó to the sister community of Dane County, Wisconsin, where Madison is located.

Yet this peacemaker and promoter of

progress in Apartadó was wrongfully charged with planning a massacre in January 1994 in which 35 people were killed in Apartadó. His case was assigned to the "faceless Justice" courts, but in July 1997 he was found totally innocent of all charges, even given the difficulty that system presents for defending oneself. His case is now before the National Tribunal in consultation, and he has asked that people in the U.S. write to support the confirmation of the decision that he was innocent and for his prompt release from prison, where he has spent the last 4 years charged with a crime he did not commit.

Sincerely,

COLOMBIA SUPPORT NETWORK
Madison, WI

REPORT ON JULY/AUGUST PHONEATHON AND FUNDRAISER

A mailing went out at the end of June announcing a "Phoneathon" to raise support for WICOLA/CSN. Five hundred calls were made, and the total received through 8/28/97 was \$4,031 from 113 donors (average \$36). In addition, \$300 was received from a church group and \$2,000 from Dane County (Wisconsin). The total of \$6,331 was more than enough to match a challenge grant of \$5,000. The grand total for the fundraiser was therefore over \$11,000.

Since WICOLA/CSN expenses are around \$3,000 a month, fundraising has to be a continuous process throughout the year. If you missed the fundraiser or can make an additional donation to support operating expenses, we encourage you to use the enclosed form and help us now.

Please accept our thanks for your response to the fundraiser. We do our best to send a "thank you" to every person who sends support to us. Let us know if we cashed your check but somehow missed sending you a note.

Name: _____
Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Enclosed is my contribution:

___ \$10	___ \$25
___ \$50	___ \$100
___ \$500	___ \$1000

___ Please keep me informed about future delegations to Colombia.

___ I would like to help with the CSN newsletter.

___ I would like to be part of CSN's Rapid Response Network.

___ I would like to translate.

___ I would like to help with fundraising.

___ Contact me about planned giving.

MODEL LETTER

Court Magistrates
Honorable Tribunal Nacional
Reference: Case # 8769
Fax 011 57 1 288- 8717
Calle 31 # 6 -24
Bogota, Colombia

Dear Court Magistrates :

We have followed with interest for the past several years the case of Dr. JOSE ANTONIO LOPEZ-BULA in the Colombian Court system. He is an important political leader of Colombia with whom we are acquainted and whose efforts for peace, progress and harmony we value highly. He has dedicated his efforts to peace and progress, particularly in the Urabá region of Antioquia province.

We have always believed in the total innocence of Dr. LOPEZ-BULA of the charges which the national Attorney General's office brought against him. Thus numerous organizations and important persons in our country are aware of his humanistic work and his respect for the institutional life of Colombia. We have followed closely

the criminal court proceedings in which he was unjustly involved.

In the month of July last year, a federal judge in a correct decision exonerated him completely of the charges formulated against him. However, we have been informed that the case was remitted to the consideration of the National Tribunal.

We hope that this high-ranking judicial authority will confirm in its entirety the exculpatory decision in favor of Dr. LOPEZ-BULA. We also hope that the decision will be adopted soon, so that he may regain his freedom and rejoin his family and society.

We are certain that a decision confirming his innocence will promote respect for the Colombian system of justice and will be valued positively by the international community and world opinion.

Respectfully,

Name of organization or person

El Aro Massacre: Paramilitary Terror in Northern Antioquia

Between Oct. 25 and 30, the small town of El Aro, in the municipality of Ituango was converted into a concentration camp. The denunciations made by the the Human Rights Committee of Antioquia proved to be worthless. Paramilitary groups and members of the Colombian Army continued with their joint operations in the rural zone of Ituango, in Northern Antioquia. According to the denunciations, in one year alone, joint operations caused the death of 130 peasants, whom they accused of "collaborating with the guerrillas". The following events were described to the press by a survivor.

The paramilitaries arrived October 25 with the intention of "doing away with the guerrilla". They ordered the inhabitants out of their houses and rounded them up in the town's central park. There they killed

Andres Mendoza, Wilmar Restrepo, Rosa Maria Barrera and Dora Angela Areiza. Later, the paramilitary began to search houses for arms and robbed the town's inhabitants.

The townspeople were forced to stand in the main plaza for the five days and nights. Witnesses told how two paramilitaries were killed by the guerrillas during the fighting. When the other paramilitaries realized that two campesinos had been planting beans in a nearby field, they decided that they should have seen the guerrillas and warned them of their presence. The peasants were murdered as a punishment for their alleged "betrayal".

The townspeople of El Aro accuse the military of complicity. "There were people who tried to escape when the paramilitaries weren't watching, but they couldn't get away

because the Army was nearby and brought them back".

Before leaving El Aro, the paramilitaries assassinated Marco Aurelio Areiza. Prior to killing him, they tied him to a tree in the plaza, tortured him, pulled out his eyes and heart and then rubbed salt all over his body. His wife and children were forcefully taken to see his remains. According to witnesses, "the poor woman threw herself on top of the body so that her children would not see what had been done to him." Upon leaving, the paramilitaries burned the town and gunned down the pigs and chickens taking the cows with them

After the paramilitaries left, the 250 surviving townspeople burned the bodies and fled toward Ituango and Santa Rita, "with another 1500 campesinos from the region" where they denounced the events to the local authorities.

Congressman Farr's Letter to the State Department, January 30 1998

Dear Secretary Albright :

We are writing to express our serious concern with the worsening human rights situation in Colombia and urge you to take immediate steps to address this matter.

News reports and first-hand accounts indicate that violence in Colombia is escalating, particularly in the country's northern regions and the southern coca growing regions. Many different groups and individuals have been implicated in the violence, but an increasing number of human rights abuses are being instigated by paramilitary groups --armed civilians who torture, evict, kidnap and murder Colombian civilians.

Although paramilitary groups are officially independent from the Colombian military, there is evidence that the military tacitly supports their activities and prevents investigation of human rights abuses instigated by these groups. Local commanders such as General Rito Alejo del Rio, former Commander of the VXII Brigade, are among those cited for permitting or supporting human rights abuses by paramilitary groups in Urabá, Colombia, a largely Afro-Colombian region. Just last July, military officers allegedly assisted members of a paramilitary group to travel through a military-run airport. The group arrived at the hamlet of Mapiripán in the South-Eastern Plains of Colombia, where they murdered numerous townspeople at the local slaughter house.

There is also evidence of links between paramilitaries and local drug lords, who rely on paramilitary groups to undertake violent activities on their behalf. The Peasant Self-Defense Group of Córdoba and Urabá, a paramilitary group led by Carlos Castaño, is considered one of the most powerful paramilitary groups in Colombia. Reports indicate that last year Castaño's group killed hundreds, if not more than a thousand, peasants it accused of helping rebels. The conflict between the paramilitary and rebels to control the Urabá corridor is driven by greed for money and power -- the corridor is a major transit route for drugs and arms and Castaño is considered to be a "known drug trafficker".

The recent approval of equipment to help Colombia's security forces fight guerrillas involved in drug trafficking in the south is of grave concern. It is disconcerting to read comments by Colombian General Manuel Jose Bonnet that the aid could be used against guerrillas in the zone whether or not they are involved in drugs, "It's the same organization, and everyone in it is responsible." The temptation to use these materiel for counterinsurgency on the part of the Colombian security forces will be great. While human rights abuses are reportedly on the rise in northern Colombia, U.S. intentions to combat drug trafficking could easily result in a rise in human rights abuses in the target zone as well.

As concerned Members of Congress, we urge you to place the issue of human rights abuses and the problem of paramilitary groups in the forefront of your priority list in your dealings with Colombia. We understand that aid to the Colombian army is currently on hold because of human rights concerns and urge you to continue to withhold funding. We feel there is ample evidence that human rights abuses by the Colombian army are escalating and show little hope of decreasing. By the State Department's own account, more than 3,500 people were killed by the paramilitary, guerrillas and military in 1996, and preliminary reports indicate the death toll increased in 1997. Due to the upcoming elections, we can only expect that more peasants will be slaughtered in 1998.

Clearly, human rights abuses must be given paramount consideration during the upcoming deliberations on whether to provide security assistance to Colombia. Therefore, we ask that you report to us by the end of March on what else is being done to discourage the violation of human rights by the Colombian security forces.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
Congressmembers Farr, Porter, Dellums, Meehan, Kaptur, Klug, McGovern, Furse, Oberstar, Defazio, Hinchey, Stark, Kleczka, Conyers, Wexler, Evans, Price, Brown, and Roybal-Allard

Reflections on Apartadó: Gloria Cuartas

November 27, 1997

Cordial greetings. In the following I am sending you the replies to the questions which you posed to me a few days ago:

1. How do you feel at the end of your term as Mayor?

Being Mayor has been very important to me as a woman, as a professional, and as a citizen, because the permanent strengthening of the civil society in a zone of social and armed conflict has been a way of creating a community in protection of its rights. But any action of the Mayor as a public servant is assumed by the armed actors to be an obstacle. All pronouncements and activities of the Mayor in the field of Human Rights are interpreted by the central government as a threat to its authority.

I was independent in my criteria and gave primary emphasis to respect for life and due process to strengthen justice, the basis of development of a people.

2. What did you learn from your experience as Mayor?

I learned that dedication to community work, that my activities as a public official, that a vigilant attitude towards warding off corruption, and that communication with national and international institutions, all constitute the basis for maintaining my local role in making a space for strengthening democracy, improving the standard of living, seeking to reduce poverty and forming strategic alliances with the community. Accompaniment of a civilian society suffering from armed conflicts, has been decisive in my personal life.

3. What is your greatest satisfaction?

To awaken the interest for the right to life and to generate a greater sensi-

bility for national community in relation to economic development. Urabá is a strategically and economically coveted region, and the national and international community should recognize this region as a space of development and should accompany this process.

4. What do you wish for Apartadó?

In Human Rights:

It is necessary to accompany communities under attack, since there exists selective death targets, displacement and the repercussion of social and armed conflict upon family and educational life. It is urgent to accompany the returning peasants from their displacement and to maintain vigilance to protect the life of citizens.

On the topic of welfare and social security:

There is a process which was initiated with women, youth, children, the elderly and the disabled with an emphasis upon social education and the generation of incomes in Apartadó. There remains in place a system of work and a bank of projects which must seek support. The NGO's also remain in the municipalities such as Compartir, which forms part of the Diocese of Apartadó. Compartir has a completely organized program which puts special emphasis on helping displaced persons.

On the Topic of the Environment:

To make strategic alliances with international NGO's around the theme of the environment in order to seek a following and accompaniment that will have an impact upon the following possibilities: the mining of coal in San Jose de Apartadó; the social and environmental implications of the proposed projects such as the Panamerican highway.

On the Topic of Urban Development:

To strengthen the search for economic support for development of the program of basic public health.

Aqueducts and waste water systems were initiated in this administration.

To legalize lands and to relocate houses.

5. How do you see the situation of San José de Apartadó?

This region forms part of the Abibe mountain range including a broad sector affected by armed conflict. About a thousand people live in the jurisdiction of San José who are supported by the Catholic Church in a "Community of Peace", but it is necessary for the international community to OBSERVE this process. Other supported families live in the urban area and in the City of Medellín.

6. What message do you send to the international community?

The same message that I sent to you for the Internet. (See the CSN web page.)

7. What do you think ought to be the role of the Colombia Support Network with respect to Apartadó at this time?

It is necessary to continue with the page on the Internet, to accompany the team in this phase of Apartadó's history which starts next year, to speak with the new Mayor and to institutional communication, to support and accompany the Diocese of Apartadó in San José and to keep informing the world of the social process in Urabá. International observation cannot be removed.

GLORIA ISABEL CUARTAS
MONTROYA

"Let us speak the same language:
CONSENSUS for an Apartadó that is possible."

U.S. Ambassador's Interview

The outgoing Ambassador of Colombia, Myles Frechette, declared in an interview with the Colombian magazine, SEMANA, that the U.S. State Department knows that the Colombian Army's Military Intelligence had and continues to have death squads.

(SEMANA #810, Nov. 10-17, 1997).

Parts of the interview follow:

SEMANA: "Does U.S. intelligence, and more concretely the Ambassador, have some theory about the assassination of Alvaro Gomez (conservative leader assassinated in 1996)?"

Ambassador Frechette: "No. No theory. Everyone knows perfectly well that various people were arrested that had some connection to the Army... This is the last trail that we have. Additionally, in last year's human rights report (from the U.S. State Department) we indicated that we were concerned with the activities of the 20th Brigade

SEMANA: "What are these concerns?"

Ambassador Frechette: "We put these in last year's report, that death squads were a part of the 20th Brigade activities. This is a continuing concern and one that will surely come out in the end of the year report. McCaffrey (U.S. Antidrug Czar) said something that I like very much, 'There has to be a confrontation of the paramilitaries. We would like to have evidence from the military here in this fight'.

Persecutions of Human Rights Activists Rise

The persecution against the defenders of human rights has reached unspeakable levels. In the last two years, approximately one human rights defender has been assassinated each month.

Possible Suspect Named in Assassination of Colombian Senator

The National Attorney General accused Carlos Castaño as possible intellectual author of the assassination of Senator of the Union Patriótica (a FARC supported political party), Manuel Cespeda, occurring in 1995. Army Sergeants Hernado Medina Camacho and Justo Gil Zuñiga Labrador were also accused as co-authors and detained for questioning.

Colombian Jesuit Priest Receives Human Rights Award

Fr. Javier Giraldo, S.J., Director of the Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace, was awarded the 1997 John Humphrey Freedom Award given annually by the Center of Human Rights in Montreal, Canada. The award was given for his outstanding work on an international level in support of human rights and democracy.

News Briefs

for more details see CSN's web page at www/igc.apc.org/csn

Closest vote yet on the School of the Americas

An amendment to cut funds to the U.S. Army School of the Americas was narrowly defeated by Congress in September by a vote of 217 to 210.

The vote, though disappointing, represents a partial victory for human rights activists. Since the last vote in 1994, 35 votes were gained despite the Republican takeover.

The Clinton Administration lobbied heavily against the Torres amendment, but 47 Republicans broke ranks to support it.

Of the 246 Colombian Army officers charged with human rights violations, 100 received training at the school based in Ft. Benning, GA..

Report links Colombian military, paramilitaries

A report issued by Amnesty International in early Oct documents at least five cases of joint operations between military battalions and paramilitary groups.

The report, "Colombia in Search of Refuge," restates AI's charges that the government has a policy of "coexistence" with the private armies known as paramilitaries.

Amnesty cited "Operation Return" in the Urabá region as an example of the alliance between the military, local elites and paramilitary forces. The operation was a campaign of terror killing and displacing thousands of civilians in the Northwestern region in an effort to root out Guerrilla forces

In October 1996 Amnesty International as well as Human Rights Watch asked the U.S. government to suspend all military aid to Colombia, since 14 army units committed atrocities with U.S. military equipment.

Colombian Army Develops Operations Against Guerrilla Groups

Between August and October 1997 the Colombian Army developed the largest military operation in the last seven years. The objective was to attack the Secretary General of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC). The operation forced the displacement of various indigenous communities and farmers that lived in the regions.

The Attorney General's Office confirmed on Jan. 23 that 16 people were killed in massacres last December in Urabá. The massacres had been denied by the Armed Forces

Municipal Councilmember Slain

Gloria Elena Cardona Clavijo, elected municipal councilmember in Apartadó was taken from her house and brutally murdered on Jan. 21, 1998. Clavijo represented the department of Antioquia on the National Council of Health Care Cooperatives (ESS) This is the first political crime of the year in Apartadó.

A Colombian journey:

by Blase Bonpane

We left Medellín with data from the Andean Commission of Jurists identifying two percent of Colombia's violence as drug related. We proceeded to Urabá.

Urabá is not a state or a province, it is a jungle region just south of the border of Panamá which includes coastal lands of the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

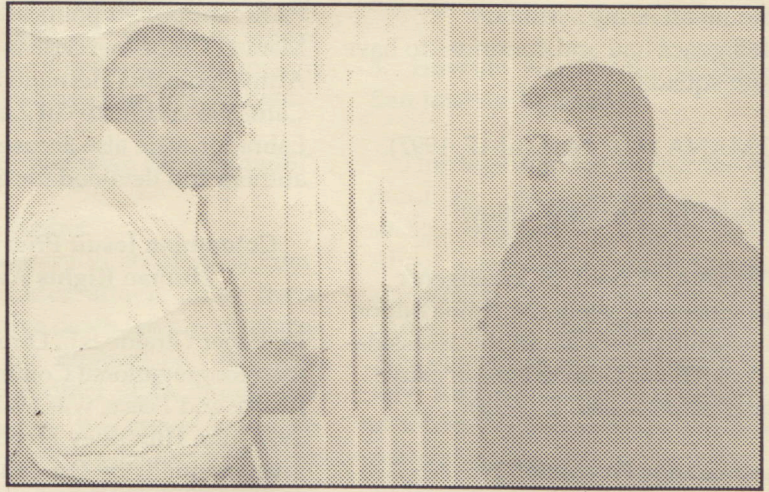
We were greeted by the Mayor of Apartadó, Gloria Cuartas. It was here we determined that no good deed in Colombia will go unpunished.

We were invited to visit a community under paramilitary control. Our guides recommended that we travel in a church vehicle over the dank, dirt, jungle path to San José. The torrid humidity of Urabá surpasses any of my previous experience in the tropics.

A paramilitary death squad was guarding access to the community. I saw a hungry looking couple approach the food storage center with an empty sack. A brief word was spoken to them and they departed sadly with their empty sack.

But where are the guerrillas? They are virtually everywhere. There are over a thousand municipalities in Colombia, over half of them are under rebel control. The rebels are of the FARC

Blase Bonpane is Director of the Los Angeles-based Office of the Americas and was a member of the August '97 delegation.



Blase Bonpane with General Rito Alejo de Rio Rojas

(Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (Army of National Liberation). These forces were created because of the institutionalized violence of Colombia, but it would be futile to romanticize the moral perfection of the rebel forces. Actually there seems to be a deterioration of the rebel ethic. While the rebels are not in the drug business, they do tax growers of food crops and coca.

Paramilitary salaries are said to be \$300 per month. Rebel salaries are placed at about \$100 per month. The net result of these decades of conflict is one million displaced Colombians, a fate second only to death.

African-Colombians from the nearby Department of Chocó were bombed and told by paramilitary forces to leave their homes immediately. They walked for days and finally were settled in the sports stadium of Turbo. We spent an afternoon with these sick, tired and hungry people. A second refugee center in Turbo under the direction of the Church, was better organized and better fed. But everyone wants to return to their beloved Chocó.

After these experiences with refugees, it was time to visit the General in charge of the Colombian Army in Urabá, Rito

Alejo del Rio Rojas. General del Rio welcomed us at a large staff table. His intelligence officer was present as well as his human rights officer.

We introduced ourselves and the general began a long and defensive argument about the role of the Colombian Army. He identified the paramilitary forces as criminals and delinquents operating on the margin of the law. We said that we had just driven to the community of San José and that the paramilitary were running the check-point at the entrance of the town. If we could see the paramilitary, why could the army not see them?

He shrugged his shoulders. Why had the army never confronted the paramilitary squads? No answer.

The workers in the banana plantations had a major problem, according to the General, they drank. He made no reference to the fact that they worked from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM in a heat and humidity of international fame. The massive banana plantations pay no taxes to the municipality of Apartadó. The people, however, gather some of the rejected produce and boil it into a banana stew.

"I am happy that you are here today and I hope you will return to this region.

Life and Death in Urabá

We guarantee you helicopter visits throughout the region so you can talk more openly with the various communities. We would like you to go to Chocó. For us it is a marvelous visit. Welcome, and if you come again we will be very attentive to your presence."

Questions and observations from the delegation:

Delegation: We spoke with the displaced people in Turbo and the group in the gymnasium has an empty storage room. There was no food. They are sick. I have this written request for the things they need.

General: I spoke to Dr. César García regarding the necessary purchases. We have obtained everything they need. But now I would like to say something that should not go out of this room. We have some communications of

the guerrillas talking to each other. They don't care if they kill children, paraplegics, the sick or whatever.

Delegation: Who are the paramilitary? Why does the Army protect them? Why have their violations not been investigated?

General: The paramilitary are at the margin of the law. They are delinquents just as the FARC is delinquent.

Delegation: But who are the paramilitary? Who runs them? If you know so much about the FARC why don't you know so much about the paramilitary?

General: We are speaking about delinquents financed by the people of the region. They are drug-traffickers.

Delegation: Are you spending as much energy protecting people from the paramilitary as you are spending pro-

tecting people from the FARC?

General: You can see we have pursued them, we have captured them.

Question: Have you visited the people in San José and Turbo?

Delegation: Have you received their testimony?

General: Yes. I visited Rio Sucio. I have spoken to them individually. They are welcome to come here. Because of the reduction in homicides and massacres, the people are coming back to Urabá. This includes businessmen.

"We are speaking about delinquents financed by the people of the region. They are drug-traffickers."

General Rito, talking about paramilitary organizations

includes hundreds of square miles.

Delegation: We listened to the people of Chocó. Planes and helicopters came in and bombed them. Where did the helicopters come from? Do the paramilitary have helicopters?

General: No. But they could have rented them. We have no proof. In those operations, however, some of the helicopters were damaged, pilots were injured, soldiers were killed and injured.

Our delegation departed after viewing photos of elderly couples dancing, presented to us by the human rights officer. A video camera panned all of the delegates as we approached our vehicle.

Back at the airport the military guards engaged us in an endless stare as we awaited our Otter aircraft. It is hard to be pleasant with people who can take your life with impunity.

Delegation: But the people in Turbo said they want to go back to Chocó and they want guarantees.

General: It is physically impossible to guarantee them complete safety. Chocó

Colombia In Perspective

Human Rights and Labor

- In 1996 253 unionized workers were assassinated in Colombia, including 26 union leaders.
- Eighty percent of murders were committed in Antioquia, the state where Dane County's sister community is located.
- Murdered unionized workers in Colombia come mainly from the agricultural plantation sector and from social services (54 of the murder victims were teachers.)
- Between January and March of 1997, statistics show that homicide was more common than firings in response to union activity: 25 murders occurred vs. 11 firings.
- The number of murders of unionists increases 21% from the previous year.
- Forty-two assaults and 52 cases of detention for political reasons were also documented in 1996.

Source: Por La Vida, a publication of the Popular Institute for Training and the National Union School. For More information, visit the CSN web page.

CSN Outreach News

1. Pax Cristi National Assembly

CSN had a booth at the National Assembly in Washington D.C. in August. Quite a few people picked up literature, many of whom were unaware of the civil war in Colombia. CSN reported that a number of people were drawn to the table by the large poster displaying statistics comparing the number of political killings in Colombia from 1988-1995 to more well-known statistics on the violence during Latin American military dictatorships: 28, 332 political killings in Colombia compared to 12,254 for Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Bolivia, and Uruguay combined. Photos from Apartadó, including one of the mayor Gloria Cuartas also attracted much attention. The photo, taken by a Madison journalist on a CSN delegation in August of 1996, was published along with an article in the National Catholic Reporter.

2. Call to Action Conference

CSN had a booth at the Call to Action Conference in Detroit in November. Bishop Gumbleton introduced the CSN representatives in one of his talks and as a result many people stopped at our booth to pick up reading material; 67

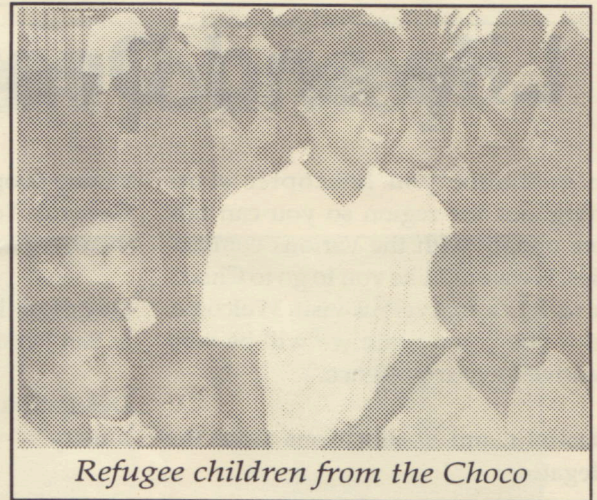
persons also signed their names for our data base. We found people especially interested from Lincoln, Buffalo, Detroit, and Ann Arbor. The National Catholic Reporter gave CSN a beautiful poster as a gift to be used in our many public events. CSN was asked to inquire about the biography of a female Colombian theologian (CSN suggested Carmina Navia) for the keynote speech at Call to Action next year.

3. Trip to Los Angeles

CSN visited with Representative Maxine Waters who was very interested in collecting information on the money given by the U.S. in the name of the "War on Drugs".

4. San Jose de Apartadó

A CSN representative from our Oregon chapter, will be going to San Jose on January 21 for a year long stay. CSN put her in contact with Justicia y Paz. She needs all of our permanent support and backing.



Refugee children from the Choco

5. New CSN Chapters!

CSN has its first official chapter in Eugene, Oregon. New chapters are in the process of being formed in several different states.

6. Delegations

May seems like the best month for a delegation to Colombia since many interested persons are associated with universities. Many people are interested in traveling simultaneously to different places. A Sister Cities delegation is in the works for May 17-24. A religious community delegation is also planned for early June. If interested in an itinerary, please contact CSN-Madison for more information.

Organization of American States: Report Summary

The Interamerican Commission of Human Rights of the OAS reported, on December 8, 1997, their observations on the situation in Colombia.

The present visit of the seven member commission is the third that ICHR has carried out in Colombia. In assessing the situation the commission interviewed President Samper, the Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Relations, Interior Minister, the Presidential Counselor for Human Rights, and the commander in Chief of the Armed Forces - General Manuel Bonnett, among other government and military officials.

In relation to the human rights situation, the Commission is particularly concerned with the following themes:

- The violence committed by the Public Forces, by armed dissident groups, by paramilitary organizations, by those called CONVIVIR (special services of private vigilance);
- The impunity and grave consequences for the state of law;
- The deplorable prison conditions;
- The situation of the internally displaced;
- The situation of ethnic minorities, women and children; and
- The situation of the defenders of human rights and journalists

The commission was very critical of the Colombian Army for its complicity, and the paramilitaries, some civilian groups, and the vigilantes (CONVIVIR) for perpetuating human rights abuses in Colombia. It mentions 3,000 deaths a year linked directly to political violence and 150,000 displaced persons.

Soon after the report was released, General Bonett, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces resigned. There is only speculation about the connection between these two events.

CSN received a lengthy and informative report, in Spanish, detailing the commissions investigations and findings. This report will soon be available in English at our web site: <www.igc.apc.org/csn>

Join Apartadó's "Comunidad de Paz"!

The distinguished linguist and human rights advocate, Noam Chomsky, recently declared himself a member of Apartadó's "Comunidad de Paz".

Caught in the middle of the violent territorial disputes between guerrillas on one side and the Military and their paramilitary allies on the other, San José de Apartadó, a small town near our sister city, asserted its right to be treated as a neutral, civilian population--a dangerous assertion in Colombia.

On Palm Sunday, the rural community of 700 people declared itself a "Peace Community." Each member of the town made the following commitments:

- Not to participate in the war directly or indirectly.
- Not to carry arms
- Not to provide information to any groups involved in the armed conflict.
- Not to ask any of the armed parties to resolve conflicts.

- To search for a peaceful solution to the country's conflicts.

Since the declaration on March 23, 35 members of the community have been killed--33 by paramilitaries and 6 by FARC guerrillas. Much of the repression has centered on the BALSAMAR cooperative. The coop was formed to provide small farmers with a means to process and market their own cacao crops in order to keep more of the profits within the community. Leaders of the Cooperative were the first killed by paramilitaries, the coop has not been allowed to function, leaving farmers without a means to make a living.

CSN is asking the international community to support San José's groundbreaking, grassroots effort for peace by becoming international members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

To participate, individuals in the U.S. make the same commitments to non-violence as the people of San José, and

additionally agree to support San José by contacting U.S. and Colombian Officials and demanding an end to the paramilitary repression that has been condoned and encouraged by the Colombian military.

Send faxes expressing your commitment to:

- Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State: (202) 647-1533
- The U.S. Embassy in Bogotá: 011 57-1-315-2209
- The Ministry of Defense, Bogotá: 011 57 4-381-1342
- Gov. Alvaro Uribe Velez: 011 57 4-381-1342
- Brig. Gen. Rito Alejo del Rio: 011 57 1 338-1511
- The Mayor of Apartadó: 011 57 48 280 175.

For more information see CSN's web page or contact our office.

CSN Membership Form

Yes! I want to help stop the violence in Colombia.

Here is my annual membership contribution to the Colombia Support Network:

- New Member Renewal
- \$10 (low income contribution)
- \$25 (receive CSN newsletter "Action on Colombia")
- \$50 (choice of "Peace & Justice in Colombia t-shirt [S,M,L,XL] or Fr. Javier Giraldo's book)
- \$100 (includes t-shirt plus any book in our bookstore)

Subscriptions to the **Colombia Bulletin**, a 48-page human rights English language quarterly are also available for \$25 a year (\$12.50 low income). Free sample copies are available upon request.

- I want to subscribe and enclose _____ Please send me a sample copy.
- Please send a copy of Fr. Javier Giraldo's book *Genocidal Democracy*. I enclose \$15 (includes postage)

Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____ ZIP _____ Phone _____
 Fax _____ E-mail _____

I am interested in:

- going on a delegation to Colombia assisting in fundraising (e.g. phone-a-thon)
- stuffing and labeling envelopes for mailing translating/interpreting
- working on the CSN newsletter sitting at CSN Farmers Market table
- starting a sister community/school/union/church project with Colombia

Mail to: Colombia Support Network, P.O. Box 1505, Madison WI 53701 (608) 257-8753
 Checks made out to WICOLA-CSN are tax-deductible.

Become a Member of Urgent Action Response Team!

At this time of increasing violence and bloodshed in Colombia it is critical that there be an immediate and powerful outcry to human rights violations.

Since the mass media does not cover most of these stories, we need to network with each other in order to save the lives of those working for peace and justice in our sister community of Apartadó and throughout Colombia.

Our Emergency Response program is operated by Bill Ramsey, who has worked to promote human rights and peace for the American Friends Service Committee for 20 years.

For an annual subscription fee of \$50, The Human Rights Action Service, will send a personalized letter or fax each month to a Colombian governmental or military official in response to a human rights abuse. (Subscribers may choose to preview their letters.)

Each month you will receive a copy of

your letter or fax, plus a Buyer's Guide to Human Rights featuring updates on boycotts, and a Human Rights Media Watch analyzing coverage of human rights.

For more information, or to mail a check, contact: The Human Right Action Service, 438 North Skinker Boulevard, St. Louis, MO - 63130 - (314) 721-2977

Subscription Form

Name(s) as it (they) should appear on responses:

Address:

Phone: (wk) _____
(hm) _____

Please identify me in the opening sentence of responses as (occupation, affiliation, or position):

Signature(s) on line below may be copied and attached to responses:

I would like to review each response before it is sent.

Send responses by

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fax _____
e-mail _____

It is not necessary to send me a copy for review, but send me a copy of each response sent in my name.

Enclosed is my \$50 Subscription fee (payable to HRAS)

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