

Documentation

Dataset C12. Forced Eradication Incidents in Colombia, 2016-2020

Collection of press reporting and videos on confrontations between state forces and rural populations that occurred during forced manual eradication of illicit crops in Colombia. It is based on a database created by the Observatory for the Restitution and Regulation of Agrarian Property Rights in Colombia, and continues to be updated as new events are registered. This version of the database contains 107 incidents registered between November 2016 and July 2020. The collection of videos contains 40 videos of forced eradication carried out by the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) and/or the Armed Forces. Most videos were recorded by peasants for use in formal complaints against the perpetrators, between February 2017 and July 2020.

The online version of the database, which also maps the incidents, is available at <https://www.observatoriodetierras.org/erradicacion-forzada-politica-que-mata/>

This database gives visibility to the impacts of forced eradication in territories where the resources and projects promised as part of the Final Peace Agreement are still far off. The incidents identified are one of the obstacles to an effective transition from war to peace in coca-producing areas.

The database illustrates the lack of coordination between the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) and the policy of forced manual eradication. Some of the events registered show confrontations taking place between the public forces and peasant communities while people were waiting to enrol in the PNIS or had already signed collective agreements and were waiting for the state to fulfil its commitment. It also illustrates the excessive use of force by the public forces, with some incidents resulting in the death of people.

Most of incidents (51) occurred in 2020, in particular in the period since March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown began. The incidents affected 11 of Colombia's 33 administrative departments but the vast majority took place in just four departments: Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Nariño and Antioquia.

Context

Colombia has endured numerous periods of armed conflict. The most recent is often dated as beginning in the 1960s, when various armed insurgent groups were formed, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). In the 1970s and 1980s an illicit drug economy, centred on cocaine exports, emerged. Around the same time, a number of anti-subversive paramilitary groups were proliferating across the country. Coca cultivations expanded across Colombia, especially in southern 'colonisation zones' where people had settled, pushed out of other areas of the country by violence and/or land concentration.

In many of these zones, coca cultivation offered settlers a source of income where conventional commercial crops didn't grow well, there was little state support for farmers and transport costs to regional markets were prohibitively high.

Illicit drug production has helped sustain the armed conflict. Civilians, and especially those in coca-growing regions, have been the primary victims. Beside financing illegal armed groups, the coca economy has led to militarised counter-narcotics operations with devastating consequences for coca-farmers and local inhabitants.

The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC has opened the door to a new chapter in the country's history. However, hundreds of social leaders and community activists have been killed since the signing of the agreement. Coca cultivation has expanded and the illicit crop substitution programme seems to be faltering. ELN guerrillas, paramilitary successor groups and criminal gangs involved in the illicit drugs trade have imposed themselves in many territories vacated by the FARC.

Methodology

Both databases are compiled based on information provided by peasant organizations and human rights defenders such as the Coordinating Committee of Coca, Poppy and Marijuana Growers (COCCAM), as well as from press reporting.

For each event the incidents database records:

- source of information
- department, municipality and village where the incident took place
- date of the incident
- description of the incident
- state actors involved
- social organizations involved
- acts of violence

For each video the video database records:

- source
- department, municipality and community where the incident took place
- date of the incident
- description of the incident

Location

Colombia

Time period

Incidents registered between November 2016 and July 2020.