Post-demobilization armed groups pose a growing humanitarian threat

The humanitarian community is concerned about the humanitarian impact and protection risks posed by an increasing number of post-demobilization armed groups (PDAGs), armed groups with different levels of organization and capacity, which emerged following the demobilization process of paramilitary groups that took place in Colombia between 2003 and 2006. In 2014 one out of four people forcibly displaced in mass events, had to leave as a result of the actions of PDAGs. The social control imposed by these groups has also led to increased confinement and movement restrictions. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the humanitarian impact caused by PDAGs’ actions is now sometimes comparable to that by recognized non-state armed groups that are parties to the conflict, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas.

Los Urabeños, also known as Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia or Clan Úsuga, has been identified by the authorities as the PDAG with the greatest military capacity at the national level, with a sustained presence in more than one-third of the country’s departments, which are similar to provinces or regions.

According to the think-tanks InsightCrime and Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, Los Urabeños and other PDAGs are characterized by their criminal networks. PDAGs align themselves with a number of actors and local armed structures with occasionally diverging interests. This explains why, while in some areas a PDAG will have alliances or co-existing relationships with the FARC-EP, such as in Nudo de Paramillo in southern Córdoba, Uribá and Bajo Cauca in Antioquia (Northwest), and in other locations it will compete with the same groups for a share from illicit coca crops, extortion rackets or control of illicit economies such as illegal mining operations.

**PDAG involvement in displacement and violent attacks**

In 2014 so far, confrontations between Los Urabeños and other armed groups have led to at least six mass displacements affecting 3,343 people in the Pacific Coast (Chocó, Buenaventura) and Northwest (Córdoba), where 90 per cent of affected populations are indigenous. This represents 22.5 per cent of all IDPs displaced in mass events (14,908) thus far in 2014. These confrontations also led to movement restrictions and access restrictions on basic services for nearly 4,500 in Chocó and another 4,000 in Valle del Cauca, in the Pacific Coast.

According to OCHA’s monitoring system Monitor, PDAGs have been involved in 10.5 per cent of all attacks against the civilian population thus far in 2014 (see Illustration 1). The PDAG Los Urabeños alone accounts for 20 per cent of these attacks.

Nonetheless, it is estimated that the participation of PDAGs in these events may be larger taking into account events where the perpetrators remain unknown. In 2014, the perpetrators of 19 per cent of armed actions and 64 per cent of attacks on civilians are unknown, although the presumption is that PDAGs are likely involved. The main reason
for this presumption is that Los Urabeños has focused its expansion and geographic consolidation over the past several years through the elimination, and/or co-opting and sub-contracting of local armed structures, which makes a rigorous monitoring of their actions difficult.

The impact of PDAGs on civilians varies between regions, depending on, among other factors, the relationship between different armed groups. In areas where there are confrontations with other armed groups for territorial control, the humanitarian impact tends to be more visible, often leading to mass displacement and/or movement and access restrictions.

In other areas, where the PDAGs are the dominant armed actor or in places where they have established co-existence or alliance with other non-state armed groups, the impact on the local population is reflected in practices of social control, including the use and forced recruitment of children and adolescents using economic and violent incentives, such as homicides, extortion, threats, displacement or movement restrictions.

Social control and other restrictions affect the civilian population

In other locations, the social control exercised by Los Urabeños affects people’s movement and access to basic goods and services, in some cases leading to situations of confinement.1 According to OCHA’s Monitor, PDAGs accounted for 7 per cent of reported movement restrictions and 25 per cent of confinement situations in 2014. The most recent cases occurred in Achi municipality in southern Bolívar department, where the PDAG restricted not only people’s movement but also their access to health care and public services. This in turn affected the community’s food supplies and economic activities, confining more than 3,000 people for over a two-month period. (See Flash Update)

The violence associated with PDAGs, especially Los Urabeños, creates significant risks for populations in the Caribbean, Northwestern and Pacific coast regions. The Early Warning System of the Ombudsman’s Office has issued alerts about these risks and made recommendations to State authorities.

These recommendations represent necessary urgent measures for prevention, protection and assistance to communities affected by these groups, particularly taking into account that there is a likelihood that these actions will persist and/or expand in any scenario where there is a peace agreement with the FARC-EP guerrillas, given the likely power vacuum that will emerge during any demobilization process.

---

1 OCHA Colombia defines a situation of confinement when a population suffers mobility restrictions for one week or more, limiting Access to three basic services (e.g. education, water, food security, etc.).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>FARC-EP</th>
<th>PDAG</th>
<th>ELN</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OCHA-Monitor

Violence associated with PDAGs creates significant risks for populations in the Caribbean, Northwestern and Pacific coast regions.
Buenaventura: Brutal Realities

By Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

The port city of Buenaventura, located on Colombia’s Pacific coast, is a territory affected by constant dispute among non-state armed groups, post-demobilization armed groups and other armed structures linked to criminal networks and non-state armed groups.

Human rights violations committed in this area, where most of the population is Afro-Colombian, remain serious and have led to forced displacement of its people within the urban area.

Sexual and gender-based violence is used as a tactic for social control in the city, and has seriously affected children and women living in this Pacific port city. A recent report published by NRC identifies the seriousness of this problem:

“We are all victims, what happens to neighbors happens to me as well, and to all my community. Armed violence in general and sexual violence destroyed traditional family and cultural practices. People no longer sit in their homes to talk, to share, to play bingo, nor do they talk with their neighbors due to fear of reprisals. Sexual violence reduced my security and ability to relate to others; it made me silent, unsure...”

Buenaventura is a territory with natural riches and mining potential. The city is Colombia’s major port, processing 60 percent of Colombia’s shipments (Codhes, 2013). Due to its strategic and commercial importance and easy access to inland river routes, Buenaventura is a major corridor for transporting contraband goods and trafficking weapons and drugs.

The limited efficacy of state authorities has facilitated the proliferation of illegal activities, making the people who live there extremely vulnerable. Homicide rates have increased and so have human rights violations such as forced disappearances, death threats, recruitment and use of children and adolescents, extortion, kidnapping and humanitarian access limitations.

A growing concern is the use of sexual gender-based violence, particularly against women, youths and girls, which is designed to destabilize and control the local population. Sexual violence is characterized by its invisibility because of the fear it instills in the victims, the impact of the aggression and the lack of denunciation.

The collection of data on these cases is inadequate and fails to document sexual violence linked to the armed conflict beyond cases of domestic violence or gender violence. Combined with this is a lack of credibility among institutions at the local level, and a poor judicial system that fails to punish aggressors. Another quote from the NRC report illustrates people’s helplessness:

“One high-school student suffered 14 cuts on her face and 27 stab wounds on her body, and all because she refused to fall in love with the local paramilitary chief. She dropped out of school for the year and her family was forced into silence because if they shared the information it would be worse for them; the group also wanted her sister to become a prostitute and youth are forced to pass through their ranks because if they don’t, then they’re the enemy”, said one community member.

Forced displacement and sexual violence impact the physical and emotional integrity of women. The evident psychological trauma is aggravated because of a lack of professional assistance. The physical wounds are also kept quiet or treated with traditional medicine. Despite the existence of a legal framework to help victims of armed conflict, local institutions fail to respond adequately. The situation is aggravated by a lack of coordination between territorial entities.

In this context the work of civil society networks to provide support for the victims is significant. The NRC calls for a strengthening of state response in order to halt these practices and guarantee the protection of lives and the integrity of women and their families. At the same time, NRC reaffirms that it is important to strengthen and protect voluntary support groups of civil society committed to aid, and promote the self-care of, survivors.

To read the full report, visit the following link: http://www.salahanitaria.co/es/news/nrc-publica-informe-sobre-desplazamiento-y-violencia-sexual-en-buenaventura

Urban violence: a challenge to peace

People living in 39 cities in 14 departments identified in Colombia are subject to extreme forms of violence at the hands of non-state armed groups, says an alert by the Protection Cluster.

The alert published in the document, “Violence exercised by non-state armed groups in urban settings in Colombia from the perspective of citizen security,” says people in these urban settings have been facing human rights violations because of non-state armed groups — particularly armed groups that have emerged following the demobilization of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), known as the paramilitaries.

These violations, which are widespread, include murders, extreme physical violence, threats and sexual violence, and particularly affect children, adolescents and women. For example, the Ombudsman’s office writes that 94 per cent of Buenaventura’s population is currently at risk.

The nature and dynamic of urban violence vary from place to place. Urban centres such as Buenaventura suffer such a high intensity of armed confrontations that its problems are well known locally and internationally. However, the problems faced by most of the urban centres that suffer from multiple forms of violence caused by non-state armed groups are not often raised in the public domain.

Urban violence poses one of the biggest threats to efforts to build peace in Colombia. It causes an increasing number of intra-urban and inter-urban displacements, and also forces people to flee to other countries. In the period between January 2012 and June 2014, there were 41 mass displacements registered in urban settings affecting around 15,000 people. In addition, around half of the 5.6 million IDPs in Colombia arrived in 27 urban centers, with urban violence making their local integration more difficult.

Based on a concept of citizen security defined by the national authorities, and complementary to humanitarian actors, it is important to respond to the protection needs of the victims of violence. Both the authorities and the humanitarian actors must increase their presence in urban contexts and improve their knowledge of urban problems. Taking into account the multidimensional causes of violence, coordination should be deepened between development, human rights and humanitarian actors in order to create an integrated response.

Increase and concentration of mass displacement on the Pacific coast

According to OCHA’s monitoring, in September 2014 there were 11 mass displacement events effecting 2,426 people, a 46 per cent increase over the monthly average thus far in 2014. During this year, 83 per cent of all IDPs in Colombia were found in the departments in the country’s Pacific coast, where most of the mass displacements were recorded. In line with this trend, in September the Pacific coast recorded most of the mass displacements hosting 97 per cent of all IDPs - 63 per cent of these being indigenous and Afro-Colombian people.

The Pacific coast departments were also the site of over 40 per cent of the armed actions recorded in September, according to OCHA’s Monitor (see Map 1). The humanitarian impact of violence in Buenaventura continues to be a key concern, which has one-third of all IDPs and more than 13 per cent of all IDPs since the start of the year.
In most of cases, the main cause of displacement was reported to be confrontations between the FARC-EP guerrillas and public forces. The PDAGs, for their part, were involved in 9 per cent of mass displacement cases (see Illustration 2). According to OCHA Monitor, 43 per cent of those displaced in September returned to their place of origin.

Illustration 2: % IDPs in mass events by alleged perpetrator. Sept. 2014

Source: OCHA-Monitor

According to OCHA’s and LHT’s monitoring, about 15,000 people have been forcibly displaced in mass events since the beginning of 2014. However, this data represent only a part of the total of displacement; official figures of the UARIV/RNI national registry report 61,500 people forcibly displaced between January and September 2014. Considering the timeframe established by the Law; the process of receiving and analysing declarations; and official reports from the first semester of 2014, OCHA estimates that the total of people forcibly displaced between January and September 2014 could reach 121,500.

Victims of displacement can submit their declaration to the Public Ministry up to two years after the occurrence of displacement. Once the declaration is submitted, the UARIV has 60 working days to evaluate and decide about the inclusion of a case into the official Victims Registry.

Illustration 3: # IDPs in mass events. Jan.-Sept. 2013/2014

Source: OCHA-Monitor

---

2 This estimate is based on the difference between the number of people registered between January and June of 2014, added to the monthly average of the period July to September, compared to the number of people displaced and registered between January and June 2013.
Cauca, the most affected by mass displacements

Cauca, a department in south-western Colombia, has witnessed intense conflict accounting for 22 per cent of mass displacement events in 2014. The ongoing conflict has forced the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the rural areas of Guapi, a town in Cauca’s Pacific Coast, to move repeatedly to the urban centre as a protection measure. In order to attend to the needs of these communities, the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) Technical Review Board recommended the approval of a project to build a mobile shelter to benefit those who suffer from these types of emergencies.

At the same time, in September, based on OCHA Monitor, 6,943 people faced mobility restrictions, which affected their access to goods and services (see Map 2). In 36 percent of these cases, the restrictions lasted for more than a week. Four such confinement situations were reported in the departments of Cauca in Valle del Cauca, Chocó and Nariño (see Map 3).

Threats by unidentified armed groups, which comprised 54 per cent of the cases reported by OCHA Monitor, and confrontations between the FARC-EP and public forces, which comprised 46 per cent of the cases, were the causes of confinement for September. These access restrictions affected access to education for more than 4,200 children and adolescents.

Map 2: # People affected by access / mobility constraints and confinement. Sept. 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th># People affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Córdoba</td>
<td>2,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauca</td>
<td>1,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valle del Cauca</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putumayo</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocó</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,943</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OCHA-Monitor
First National Victims Survey: Developing the baseline for monitoring the Victims Law

In 2004, the Colombian Constitutional Court declared a "state of unconstitutionality" based on the serious violations of human rights of people forcibly displaced in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. Some of the main factors taken into account by the Court for its statement include: 1) the massive, prolonged and repeated violations of human rights of internally displaced people; 2) the inability of the authorities to provide protection and assistance to victims; and 3) the lack of resources, and the lack of a public policy to address these issues, both at national and regional level.

On the tenth anniversary of this statement, and in the midst of the national debate on whether to lift the "state of unconstitutionality" given the issuance of the Victims and Land Restitution Law, the National Comptroller's Office issues the results of the First National Victims Survey – 2013. The survey aims to: characterize the dynamics of forced displacement in Colombia; describe the socioeconomic situation of the victims of forced displacement; build a baseline for assessing the achievements and progress of public policies for assistance, response, and reparation; contribute to measure indicators of effective enjoyment of rights guaranteed by the Constitutional Court; and assess the magnitude of the challenges that both the Colombian government and society have on land restitution and victim's reparation.

The survey pointed out that the magnitude of forced displacement in Colombia amounts to 11.9 percent of Colombia's total population by 2013. According to the survey results, about 5.6 million people have been victim of forced displacement, equivalent to more than 1.3 million households, of which about 15 per cent are not registered in the official victim's registry (RUV, Registro Único de Víctimas). The underreporting issue directly results in excluding these households from access to plans, programs and projects for assistance, response and reparation available for the victims.

The causes of underreporting are many, among them should be highlighted: 1) the institutional and financial weakness of the Municipal Ombudsman's Offices -main declarations recipients- whose capabilities are overwhelmed causing waiting periods of months to successfully carry out this procedure; 2) delays in the process of evaluating the statements by the National Victims Unit (UARIV); 3) confusion regarding the status of victims -clarified by the Constitutional Court in 2013-, especially with regard to the victims of the post-demobilization armed groups; 4) pressure from armed groups to prevent victims to report and declare; 5) the mechanisms of resilience of communities against the threats posed by armed actors, reflected in situations of confinement and short-term displacement that are not reported because the community intends to stay in the territory.

The survey results also indicate that 78% of families victims of forced displacement not registered in the RUV, indicated that they had not made the declaration because of poor information: they did not know how or to whom submit their declaration (30 per cent), others did not know that they had to do so (25 per cent), and 21 percent didn't report because of fear (see Illustration 4). The remaining 22 percent of families that were not registered in the RUV, despite having made a declaration, said they were not included due to problems during the assessment conducted by the UARIV (Illustration 5).

---

3 The National Comptroller’s Office group (Contraloría General de la República) dedicated to this issue is composed by Luis Alberto Higuera Malaver, Deputy Comptroller for the Agricultural Sector; Juan Carlos Villamizar, General Project Coordinator; Juan Pablo Sandoval, Claudia Murcia, and Oscar Villamizar, professionals from the Deputy Comptroller for the agricultural sector.


5 Corte Constitucional, Auto 119 June 2013.
In summary, the results of the First National Victims Survey conclude that the provisions contained in the judgments and relevant laws\(^6\) seem not to have been able to contain the upward trend in the number of victims of forced displacement in the country from 1985 to 2013. Despite the declaration of an unconstitutional state of affairs and the formulation and implementation of a set of public policies, financing plans and delegation of authorities responsible for restitution of the full enjoyment of the rights to the victims, it is unquestionable that forced displacement is a phenomenon that has been growing steadily for 30 years.

The National Comptroller Office will shortly share more results of the survey on the current situation of the victims of the conflict in Colombia.

**Stories from the field**

“I had the courage to wait”

*By Fundación Valle de Pubenza*

It was mid-day, 5 March, 2014. Three members of a family and two officials from the government agency, INCODER, the Colombian Institute for Rural Development, were measuring the size of a ranch up for sale, when an antipersonnel mine exploded. In the explosion, one member of the family, Luis Hernán, lost a leg.

This happened in the rural area of Comedulce in Suárez municipality, Cauca, one of the areas most affected by antipersonnel mines and unexploded ordnance in Colombia.

Although his brother was seriously injured, José Julián, a Caucan farmer, had the courage to wait and save the lives of his neighbors. Three hours after the accident, several people arrived to help them. At that moment, José Julián says, he remembered the recommendation that saved his life and those of his neighbors: “Where there is one mine, there are more mines”. During the rescue, he waited calmly and told the rescuers the best path to avoid more victims.

José Julián had learned this recommendation in one of the Mine Risk Education workshops.

---

Humanitarian Local Teams are conducting MIRA assessments in urban areas to identify humanitarian needs in cities affected by armed violence.

Needs assessment in urban context

The consequence of armed conflict in urban context is one of the primary concerns of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) members in Colombia. Humanitarian needs linked to intra-urban displacement, restrictions on movement affecting access to basic services, violence and the impact of social controls imposed by various armed groups have been identified in various cities in Colombia.

However, most of the analysis related to this has had a protection focus. There is a growing need to deepen understanding of the humanitarian impact on other sectors.

Within this context, since mid-2014, OCHA has been promoting the implementation of the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) in urban areas to identify and raise awareness about humanitarian needs of people in urban areas affected by armed violence.

During 2013, the HCT began to conduct MIRAs in rural areas to identify the key sectoral needs in sudden emergencies – during armed violence events and/or natural disasters – as well as in chronic situations.

In urban areas, assessments have been conducted in Medellín (Antioquia department) and Cali (Valle del Cauca department), in coordination with local authorities, civil-society members, local NGOs and community leaders.

Local humanitarian team members from the departments of Antioquia and Valle planned and participated in these missions, including UNHCR, FAO, Handicap International, OCHA, UNDSS, Save the Children, HelpAge, UNHCHR and PAHO-WHO.

Preliminary findings show that besides prioritizing protection, attention must be paid to education needs during emergencies, livelihoods, mental health and food security (see Medellín Flash MIRA Report, Cali Flash MIRA Report).

MIRAs will be conducted in other cities such as Buenaventura in Valle del Cauca and Tumaco in Nariño, affected by conflicts in order to arrive at a comparative analysis.

Pooled funds allocated approved

During September, the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) approved three projects for approximately US$750,000. The projects will benefit communities in Bajo Cauca, Antioquia, La Guajira and Guapi, Cauca.

The ERF also closed its second round of project financing to respond to chronic or prolonged emergencies. On this occasion, OCHA, as Fund administrator, received eight applications, which sought to provide humanitarian funding through four projects in Guapi (Cauca), Tierradentro (Córdoba), El Tarra (Norte de Santander), Alto Baudó (Chocó) and Cáceres (Antioquia). Following a review process taking into account criteria of quality,
pertinence and project coherence, and in coordination with local and national NGOs to provide cost-benefit analysis, approval was recommended to the Humanitarian Coordinator for a project proposed by Handicap International. This project will be implemented jointly with the indigenous organization Organización Indígena de Antioquia (OIA) in ten indigenous communities of Cáceres, Antioquia in the Food Security and Nutrition, Shelter, Protection and WASH Clusters.

In addition, the ERF approved two projects to respond to sudden emergencies. One of these will be implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in the shelter cluster through the construction of a mobile shelter in Guapi, Cauca, designed to assist communities frequently displaced to the municipal seat due to armed conflict. A second project was approved for OXFAM GB, which will carry out WASH activities to respond to the situation in La Guajira due to drought conditions from the past several months.

Project financing has been possible due to the support of regular donors to the ERF Colombia, who guarantee the functioning of the Fund. Norway provided a donation of US$478,000 and Sweden, US$580,000.

An ERF quarterly report and infographic has been published with information on the financial status of the fund, contributions by donors, recently approved projects, and progress on ERF allocation strategy. Follow this link for the full report: http://www.salahumanitaria.co/es/news/el-erf-se-posiciona-como-un-fondo-de-respuesta-rapida-y-efectiva

**At least 67,000 people benefited from CERF funds in 2013**

During 2013, the Humanitarian Country Team in Colombia received US$3.5 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to respond to humanitarian needs in the departments of Córdoba, Nariño, Putumayo, Chocó and Cauca.

The funds have helped at least 67,000 people, more than the 8,000 originally planned.

Fifty-two per cent of the funding received was used for projects implemented through national and international NGOs. Colombia's indigenous communities were among those who benefitted the most from the response.