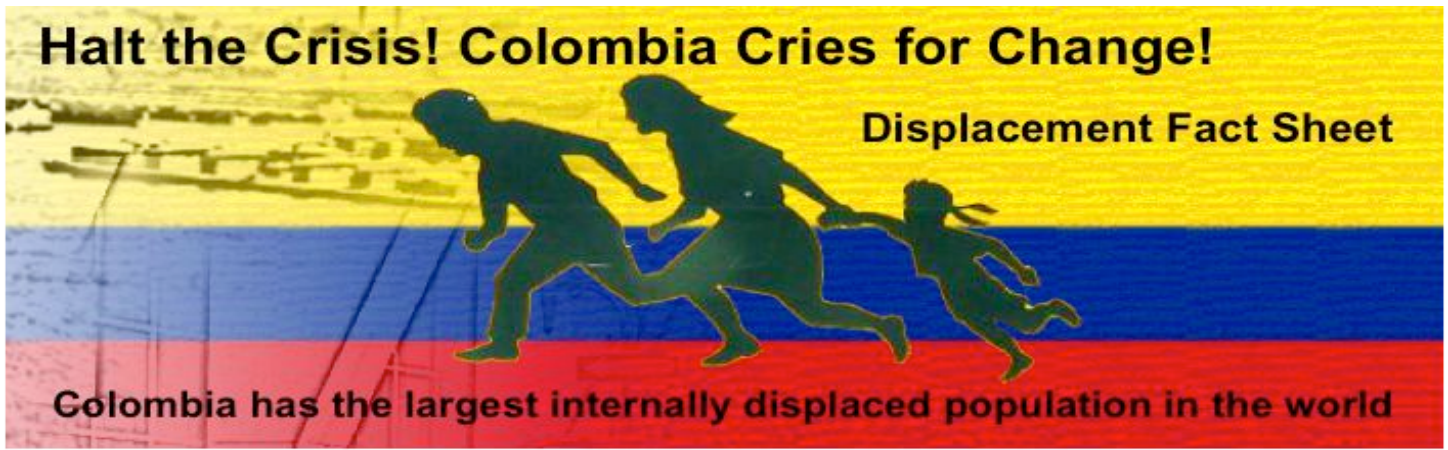


# Halt the Crisis! Colombia Cries for Change!

## Displacement Fact Sheet



### Your Tax Dollars At Work

Since 2000, the US has spent over \$6 billion on mostly military aid to Colombia in support of the war on drugs and the war on terrorism. 2.5 million Colombians have been displaced during that time. US military aid has been used to buy helicopters and weaponry, to fumigate coca plantations and to train Colombian soldiers who have, in turn, killed innocent civilians and then presented them as guerrillas killed in combat. While it is impossible to estimate exactly how many people have been displaced as a direct result of US military aid, we do know that fumigations and assassinations are reasons enough to make civilians leave their homes and search for safety elsewhere.

**Aerial Fumigations:** The U.S. has been funding the forced eradication of coca—the raw material in cocaine—in Colombia since the 1990's and intensified fumigations with the implementation of Plan Colombia in 2000. Fumigations are carried out with planes that fly over large swaths of land and spray the herbicide glyphosate (a high powered version of Monsanto's Roundup) and other unknown chemicals onto the crops below. However, it is a failed strategy: the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) recently found that despite \$5.4 billion in Plan Colombia aid, nearly twice as much coca was planted in 2007 as in 2000, the year Plan Colombia began. While not cutting down the acres of coca planted, aerial fumigations have contributed to the displacement of many civilians – once crops have been sprayed and die, farmers leave their lands in search of other areas to cultivate. For example, in the first half of 2008, 13,134 people were displaced due to fumigations and manual eradication campaigns.



photo courtesy of Jutta Meier-Wiedenbach

*"What [rich people] say is that we come to search for payment; to search for a better life in the cities, as if we lived poorly in our communities. Lies. They are wrong. No campesino gets used to the city, because in the city we don't know how to do anything. In the countryside we have everything. After having been people who had food through our own efforts, now we have to receive a few crumbs. After all this displacement, we seem like beggars because the government is the one who says that we are beggars, because the little bit that they give us they always throw it in our faces, saying, why don't we work? But we ask ourselves, who displaced us?"*  
– Member of CAVIDA, Afro-Colombian displaced community

### Big Numbers

- With more than 4 million internally displaced people, Colombia has the largest displaced population in the world
- A half a million refugees have spilled over Colombia's borders into neighboring countries.
- In the first semester of 2008 270,675 Colombians were forced to flee their homes, the largest number of displaced people since 1985. That breaks down to:
  - over 10,410 every week
  - 1,487 people every day
- The 4,000 paper dolls we are making represent a total of 4 million displaced people in Colombia. It is also the actual number of people who fled their homes in the first *three* days of 2008.

### **What is the definition of an internally displaced person?**

A person who is forced to leave his/her home due to threats, intimidation, assassinations or massacres, but who does not cross an international border. Those who cross international borders are defined as "refugees."

### **Why Are People Being Displaced?**

Land and who controls it, is a big part of Colombia's conflict. Often times displacement is framed as a byproduct of the conflict. However the guerrillas, paramilitaries and the state want to control certain areas of Colombia's countryside for economic and strategic reasons. Resource-rich areas, be it minerals, agro-industrial or otherwise, are of interest to all parties. Drug trafficking also plays a part in this – all the groups want to control trafficking routes and work to make sure they can. Since 30,000 paramilitary fighters demobilized, the land they illegally appropriated through assassinations and massacres, has not been returned to its rightful owners. The Colombian government Comptroller's Office estimates that 2.9 million hectares have been stolen from forcibly displaced Colombians during the past twenty years.

### **The Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**

It is unclear when Congress might consider the FTA with Colombia. If it were to pass it will severely impact rural farmers and communities and increase the numbers of internally displaced. Here are some ways how:

- With the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, subsidized US grains flooded the Mexican market, provoking a 70% drop in corn farmers' income. In the first ten years of NAFTA, two million small-scale Mexican farmers were displaced.
- Colombian farmers cannot compete with heavily-subsidized US agribusiness. For every dollar that the Colombian government spends on agriculture, the US spends \$222.
- If the Colombia FTA passes, US agricultural exports to Colombia would jump by an estimated 70% in the first year to 4.6 million tons, dwarfing the estimated 93,000 tons Colombia would export to the US.
- Colombian farmers and indigenous people, fearing increased displacement from the FTA, have resolutely condemned the agreement. In a series of opinion polls, 98% of wheat farmers, 98% of highland farmers, 99.6% of rice farmers, and 98% of indigenous people stated opposition to the FTA.

*"To abandon one's regional roots, the labour accumulated during years, one's family and throw oneself into the abyss, is one of the most difficult torments and uncertainties that a human being can live through."*

*- Alfredo Molano*

### **Who is responsible for the displacement of so many people?**

All of Colombia's legal and illegal armed groups. The army, paramilitaries and guerrillas, often backed by powerful economic interests, all contribute to the displacement of Colombians.

### **Where do they go?**

Almost 40% of the internally displaced have settled in and around the ten largest cities of Colombia. But there is also inter-urban displacement, meaning that people from one neighborhood displace to another part of the city.

### **Does displacement disproportionately affect certain populations?**

- Afro-Colombians represent over 25% of the overall population, and 40% of the displaced population.
- 75% of the internally displaced are women and children.
- 52,000 indigenous people have been displaced since 2002. Although indigenous people represent only 2-3% of Colombia's total inhabitants, they make up as much as 8% of the county's internally displaced population.

### **Displaced individuals and communities are more vulnerable**

**Work:** once displaced, people lose their livelihoods. Many farmers who made their living off the land, cannot find work once they have been displaced to the city because they don't have the necessary skills to find work that is offered in an urban context.

**Youth:** it has been estimated that only one in eight internally displaced pupils have returned to school after having been displaced. Also, young people are at a greater risk of being recruited into an illegal armed group once displaced.

**Gender:** displaced girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and pregnancy than other teenagers.

**Income:** the average income for a displaced person is only 61% of the statutory minimum wage, while the displaced suffer an unemployment rate that is three times higher than for the urban poor in general.