

The Situation in the Colombian/Ecuadorian Border

Presentation for CRS-WOLA
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Context: Conflict in Colombia

□ **Social, political and military conflict dating back over 60 years:**

Social: The majority of the people have always been excluded and kept poor, creating the conditions for the rise of guerrilla groups. Insurgency contributes to the expansion of violence.

Political: Geostrategic interests (illegal crops, natural resources, megaprojects) for control of territory, inability of the Colombian state to find structural solutions to the problem of conflict, drug politics and foreign interests.

Military: Strategic participation in the conflict (paramilitary), foreign involvement (military and U. S. advisers), economic dependence of Plan Colombia.

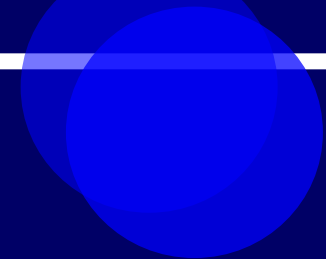
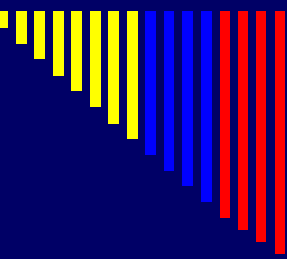
□ **The most serious humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere and one of the three most serious in the world:** nearly 4 million displaced people in the last 4 years; populations in confinement ; over 8,000 kidnappings in the last 3 years; forced recruitment (over 6,000 children in guerrilla or paramilitary groups); over 2,500 trades union members murdered (the highest rate of violence of this type in the world).

□ **Parties involved in conflict:** irregular insurgency forces; paramilitary groups; drug traffickers, organized crime; common criminals; armed forces; government and foreign interests.

- **Plan Colombia:** announced in September of 1999.

Social effects:

- The stigmatization of the people who depend on the coca economy and have no viable options for alternative development to survive. The alternative programs launched by the government of Colombia for them to work as “rangers” or “families in action” require people to become government informers, putting their lives at grave risk as they become targets for the guerrilla war, for a wage of US\$7 per month per child who joins the program.
- Indiscriminate spraying which affects human health, the environment and food security since it eradicates food crops.
- Forced internal and trans-border migration
- Greater need for refuge in countries in South America, Panama, Costa Rica
- (Overall conflict resulting in) indiscriminate killing/displacement of peasant farmer population



Situation on Border with Colombia

- Tense relations between the governments of Uribe and Correa
- Military incursions
- Presence of armed groups
- Military protection on border: 25% of Ecuador's armed forces at a cost of US\$80 million.
- Lack of social investment in border areas due to budget constraints.
- Unconstitutional migration controls (recent legal amendment)
- Traffic in drugs, arms, gasoline, gas.
- Corruption and impunity

The Colombian Population in Ecuador

The Demographic Situation

People who move to Ecuador:

YEARS	Arrivals	Departures
2000-2008	1,599,129	1,010,003

In Ecuador = 589,126

Estimates suggest that at least 15% of this population are children (m/f) and adolescents, while about 35-40% are women. 40% of this population came seeking refuge from violence. 98% of all refugees in Ecuador are Colombian

To December 2007, 54,483 people requested refugee status from the Ecuadorean government. Only 13,878 were recognized.

The UNHCR has declared that some 250,000 people in Ecuador need protection, i.e. that 85.3% of the Colombian population in Ecuador receives no protection, because of lack of recognition or because of fear; they remain invisible in the country, perceived as economic migrants, their situation irregular and with no identity papers.



The Colombian Population in Ecuador

Living conditions:

- 85.3% are in an irregular situation – with no identity papers.

“with no papers we cannot ask for anything, we are no-one.”

Colombian citizen

- Colombians are cheap labor for the large farms and flower industry –
exploitation / services - restaurants / informal market

“An Afro-Colombian woman says she cannot get work in her profession in Ecuador. She is a nurse. To survive, she does domestic work for a wage of \$100 which is hardly enough for her to live on”.

- Stigmatization of Colombians as “violent” or “involved in violence” (drug traffickers, paramilitary, guerrillers, prostitutes, terrorists) is the immediate image the public has of them



The Colombian Population in Ecuador

Living conditions:

“A brothel opened in the neighborhood and the girls who worked there were Colombian.... they were out showing themselves all day, wearing very provocative clothes”.

“Since the Colombians arrived it is normal to see gays.”

(Neighborhood sources)

“The presence of the Colombians has a bad effect, because of security – because theft and crime has increased in general and because they take jobs Ecuadoreans should be doing”.

(Police).

□ A violent and insecure border area

“We practically ran from Colombia, we didn’t get off at the border and when we calmed down a bit, we went to Cuenca to do the procedure to be refugees, but they wouldn’t let us.....”.

Rodas Susana, *Research in the Situation of Human Mobility in the South*



The Colombian Population in Ecuador

Living conditions:

- **Sexual trade and human trafficking especially in the Sucumbíos – Putumayo area (northern border).**
 - “A Colombian girl cleaned the floors, ironed the clothes and cleaned the bathrooms. Whenever she did something wrong, her employer told her off and hit her. She ran away and went to the police. She told them that she was abused and exploited. That was a year ago and she still hasn’t been paid a cent” (CMR, *Shadow Report 2008*).
 - In Sucumbíos, most Colombian women who are sexual workers are adolescents with children and no partner. The age of the girls who work in the bars in the city is estimated at between 14 and 22 (UNDP-UNIFEM, 2007:38).
- **Grave human rights violations: discriminatory treatment, no social or labor rights, labor exploitation, police persecution, sexual harassment (CMR, Shadow Report 2008).**

Situation of the Response of Key Parties

International Community:

Response focused only on Colombia, limited understanding of the effects of the conflict, the region and the countries which border on Colombia. Little investment in border area or humanitarian aid for Colombian refugees and the displaced.

Ecuadorian Government:

SENAMI: Major progress in understanding and view of emigration compared with a reversal and a security-focused view of immigration (e.g. recent legal amendment; procedures for establishing regular status which are slow, not operational and low impact).

REFUGEE DEPARTMENT: Cannot cope with needs of target population. Only 13% of demand covered.

OMBUDSMAN: Important role for reporting, defending and protecting the rights of people in movement. Good liaison and coordination with state organisations and civil society. Clear position independent of government.

UNHCR:

Its mandate is to provide international protection to people in refugee situations, enabling them to return to their country of origin when conditions permit, or to integrate into their countries of asylum and/or refuge.

- Expanded Register
- Support for the National Department for Refugees, for it to open offices in the provinces
- Emergency humanitarian aid
- Small integration projects
- U\$ 3,800,000 budget

Others Involved in Response

□ CATHOLIC CHURCH:

Ecuadorean Bishops' Conference Office for Human Mobility (coordination with the Border Offices on the Colombian side)

Ecuador Diocese: Tulcán, Ibarra, Esmeraldas, Sucumbíos, Santo Domingo, Guayaquil and Quito

□ AUTHORITIES:

Ecuadorean government: Foreign Affairs Office, Migration Police, Civil Records, Minors Courts, Civil Courts, Public Notaries.

* security-conscious, controlling attitudes

□ International and National NGOs – Local Networks

CRS, Norwegian Council, Hope Foundation, SJRM, CAFOD, APDH, INREDH, HIAS, CODHES and others.

□ INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS, ILO, IOM, UNHCR

□ Social networks and coalitions for the defense of the rights of refugees and people in a situation of mobility.



Response of Catholic Church to Date

- ❑ The Catholic Church is an important point of reference for the migration and refugee issue
- ❑ It is extending and strengthening joint actions in many communities nationwide, mainly on the border
- ❑ It takes part in the technical aspects of proposed regulations for refugees, migration and human trafficking
- ❑ It has strengthened inter-institutional channels for defending and promoting the rights of migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking
- ❑ It is training pastoral workers
- ❑ It is mobilizing and strengthening cooperation and global solidarity with the most vulnerable on the Colombian-Ecuadorean border



Latest Events

- ❑ Breakdown in relations between Colombia and Ecuador, attack in Angostura in April 2008. Rising xenophobia
- ❑ Recent legal amendment in response to public “perception”
- ❑ Achievements in incorporating migrants’ rights into the Ecuadorean Constitution
- ❑ Registration process extended with slow and inappropriate response
- ❑ More cases of human trafficking, trafficking of illegal substances and hired assassins working in Ecuador
- ❑ Ministerial agreements on access to education (migration/human trafficking)



Proposal of Catholic Church and Civil Society Organizations

- ❑ Need to show more clearly the humanitarian crisis in the border area
- ❑ Urgency and priority of humanitarian aid and development proposals, especially for the most vulnerable populations such as the indigenous, people of African descent, women, children and older adults, affected by the expansion of the conflict in the border area
- ❑ Need for agreement between the region's governments and the US to give priority to response to the grave humanitarian situation
- ❑ Co-responsibility of the Ecuadorean and Colombian governments for aiding the victims of the crisis in the conflict and for not intervening in affairs outside their mandate
- ❑ (limited) Budgets
- ❑ Change in the messages of the media which establish xenophobia and discrimination
- ❑ Laws and public policies in Ecuador which reinforce the protection of the rights of people in a situation of mobility, and those who are invisible due to their irregular situation
- ❑ Aid and monitoring by community organizations, participation in Migration Regulations and institutional reform following the Constituent Assembly



Proposal to the International Community

- Visits, reports and recommendations to make the treatment and response to the humanitarian situation across the region more visible.
- Advocacy with the US government to make the refugee resettlement criteria less restrictive.
- Financial support for civil society to continue providing a response.