

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT)

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2006 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

In 2006 Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), based in Barrancabermeja, Santander, the principal city in the Middle Magdalena region continued a permanent presence in the Ciénaga del Opón with a group of displaced communities that returned to their homes in 2001. Due to CPT's strategic location close to five departments, CPT's work also included participation in verification commissions to various rural communities. The commissions, composed of representatives from human rights organizations, human rights lawyers, officials from various United Nations agencies and the local government, documented human rights violations. Additionally, mobile teams visited other regions of the country in response to specific community invitations.

CPT participated in meetings with governmental organizations and institutions, national and international NGO's, civilian and military authorities and diplomatic representatives in Colombia. At the international level, CPT shared experience and analysis of the Colombian context with Colombian solidarity coalitions including Americas Policy Group (Canada) and Latin America Working Group (USA), as well as with churches and ecumenical initiatives for Colombia. CPT's work in Colombia has led us to report the human rights violations we witness. A summary of those violations in 2006 follows.

In addition to Barrancabermeja and its surrounding areas, CPT visited diverse regions in Colombia: Montes de Maria (Sucre, Bolivar), Nariño (Ricaurte y Barbacoas), Bolivar (San Pablo, Santa Rosa del Sur, Simití, Morales, Arenal, Rio Viejo, Regidor, Barranco de Loba, Tiquisio, and Montecristo), Santander (Landazuri), and Antioquia (Remedios). Communities and social organizations in all these regions largely viewed the demobilization of paramilitary groups that proceeded in 2006 as unsuccessful. We heard and witnessed violations of Human Rights law and International Humanitarian Law by paramilitary groups, the FARC, ELN, and several branches of the Colombian Military. The experience of CPT highlighted the continued activity of paramilitary groups, some anonymously and others identified with new names, including the creation of Las Aguilas or Aguilas Negras – Eagles or Black Eagles- in February and La Mano Negra –The Black Hand- in April. These groups recruited demobilized paramilitaries and continued past paramilitary activity when they began to threaten leaders of the social and human rights organizations and selectively assassinate and promote “social cleansing” in Barrancabermeja. Ex-paramilitaries also began to work as private “security guards,” charging “taxes” for this “work.” Furthermore, the gasoline cartel continued to operate in the Ciénaga del Opón with armed accompaniment.

REPORT**Statistics**

CPT accompanies the Coalition of Human Rights Organizations (Espacio de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Derechos Humanos) in Barrancabermeja. This coalition gathered the following statistics in 2006:

1. More than eighty-seven homicides have been committed in the region; seventy-one of these occurred in Barrancabermeja.
2. Sixty-seven of these homicides were committed with firearms.
3. More than 270 families (or 980 people) have been forced to displace from Barrancabermeja due to violence or threats.
4. Inhabitants registered more than 120 complaints of threats with the Regional Human Rights Ombudsman.

Events

CPT either witnessed or heard first-hand testimony of the following incidents:

SANTANDER

March 3, *Barrancabermeja*. Association of Displaced People of the Municipality of Barrancabermeja (ASODESAMUBA)¹ and the Popular Women's Organization² (OFP) denounced persecution against their members by the reorganized paramilitary groups.

March 24, *Barrancabermeja*. An unknown man shot Henry Murillo several times while he participated in a workshop for teachers. Henry survived, but is paralyzed from the waist down; he and his family displaced from their home as a result of the attempt on his life.

June, *Barrancabermeja*. The "Black Hand" targeted people who identify as gay or transgender, young people and people who use drugs. An activist for an LGTB group shared with CPT that two people killed in June were part of the LGTB community and others were forced to displace.

August 17-21, *Miralindo, Landazuri*. Community leaders spoke of death threats they and their families received, based on rumors that they signed a document requesting that the office of the president eradicate coca in the area.

August 5, *Barrancabermeja*. Paramilitaries kidnapped, tortured and threatened ASODESAMUBA¹ member Vilma Cecilia Salgado Benavides for three days. After releasing her, they continued to send telephone threats until she displaced from the city.

Corregimiento Ciénaga del Opón, Barrancabermeja. Throughout the year, the CPT team observed activity of three armed groups in the region—the Colombian army³, the guerrilla (FARC)⁴ and paramilitaries⁵. The Colombian army conducted intrusive patrols, where the soldiers occupied civilian homes and patios, stole property, used kitchens and cut fences between pastures (April). The gasoline cartel was present in the communities throughout the year with paramilitary accompaniment. The same group set up illegal checkpoints where they stopped and searched the community motor canoe. The FARC guerrilla maintained presence all year and pressured people for food and collaboration.

¹ Asociación de Desplazados del Municipio de Barrancabermeja; Association of Displaced Persons of the Municipality of Barrancabermeja

² Organización Femenina Popular; Popular Women's Organization

³ Batallón Plan Energético y Vial No. 7 "Rodrigo Antonio Arango Quintero" – (V Brigada), and Batallón de Ingenieros No 14 "Batalla de Calibío" (XIV Brigada)

⁴ Compañía "Rafael Rangel", Frente 24, Bloque Magdalena Medio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia

⁵ Paramilitary groups unidentified with a specific name.

June 27, *La Colorada and La Florida, Ciénaga del Opón, Barrancabermeja*. Armed paramilitaries killed Orlando Manuel Navarro while he was working on his farm. This assassination together with increasing threats against other members of the community led to the temporary displacement of four families and the permanent displacement of another.

December 24, *Los Ñeques, Ciénaga del Opón, Barrancabermeja*. Members of the Calibío Battalion detained two young men of the community, pressured them for use of their canoe, and harassed them to give information about the guerrilla location in the zone. The soldiers took pictures of them and fingerprints of a twelve-year-old boy.

BOLIVAR

February 18, *Micoahumado, Morales*. Members of CPT were stopped by a group of unidentified paramilitaries on their trip to Micoahumado while they were using a European Union car. The armed men asked for money in exchange for the use of the road.

May 18, *Pueblito Mejía, Barranco de Loba*. Townspeople reported that some demobilized paramilitaries continued to commit crimes together with active paramilitaries. A group of demobilized and active paramilitaries kidnapped four members of the community. The group later released the four due to the community's strong response to this act. The paramilitaries threatened the communities with violence if they continued asking for support and protection from different national and international organizations and government institutions. The CPT team visited one of several mass graves dug by the paramilitaries. Despite the presence of the government representative and a member of the MAPP-OEA⁶ on this commission, the mass graves have yet to be excavated.

June 7-17, *Micoahumado, Morales*. Soldiers of the Batallón de Artillería de Defensa Aérea No.2 "Nueva Granada" - V Brigada (BAGRA) used schools for shelter, stole coca paste and accused members of the community of being guerrillas.

August 9-10, *Olivares, Río Viejo*. Community members reported a series of threats, forced displacements, and house burnings in the area. CPTers saw the burnt homes and death threats written in charcoal on walls. There is no clarity as to the group responsible.

August 26, *Honda Alta, Corcovado, Morales*. Soldiers of the BAGRA killed two unarmed and out-of-uniform guerrilla combatants—killing one as he fled and executing the other after he surrendered. In addition, the soldiers shot a child in the leg when they fired indiscriminately on the community. As both killings occurred outside combat, they constitute violations of international humanitarian law, as does firing on a civilian population.

September 19, *Mina Gallo, Santa Rosa*. Soldiers of the BAGRA assassinated community leader Alejandro Uribe. In response to the killing, 1300 miners from sixteen communities, their families and other residents converged on the regional seat of government, Santa Rosa. They demanded that the government investigate Uribe's death and respond to ongoing military abuses against civilians in the area. The authorities refused to honor the community's request to meet with them with no military personnel present, so the two groups did not meet. Community members reported to CPT that members of the BAGRA threatened them: "This will not be the only death that you will have, there will be more deaths of leaders."

December 3, *Corcovado, Morales*. CPT documented damaged legal crops due to aerial fumigations to eradicate coca plantations. Community members told CPT about a terrible odor during the fumigations and that many people became ill in the days afterward with headaches, stomach problems and "the flu".

⁶ Mission in Support of the Peace Process/Organization of American States

ANTIOQUIA

April 3-11, *Lejanias, Remedios*. Community members testified during an assembly. Their testimony included seventy denouncements against people previously identified as paramilitaries but who had supposedly “demobilized.” Twenty-five families had received death threats and at least two assassinations had occurred and one person had been disappeared. In addition, people had been arbitrarily detained; they often were hooded and tortured.

SUCRE AND BOLIVAR

February 24-28, *Montes de Maria*. CPT witnessed the situation of several families displaced by armed groups.

July 21-26, *Montes de Maria*. Rural communities complained of military⁷ blockades of roads that prevent free movement and transport of food and medical supplies, massive and arbitrary detentions of community members without due process, fumigations of avocado trees, the main agricultural product of the region, and the lack of basic services such as electricity, clean water, health clinics, schools and road repair. Civic and military officials denied the allegations.

NARIÑO

June and July, *Rural areas of Ricaurte*. CPT received testimony of communities who displaced as a result of indiscriminant bombing by the military, including a school.

November 27, *Ricaurte*. CPT heard about fumigations in the area and illnesses that Awá Community members have suffered since the fumigations started. The nurse there described birth defects, bad skin rashes, breathing problems, diarrhea, and other symptoms.

December 10, *Altaquer*. The army⁸ executed a young man already in their custody. Ten minutes before he was killed, the eyewitness saw him dressed in a white tee shirt and jeans and unarmed. The article in the December 17th edition of “El Diario del Sur” reported that he was killed in armed combat.

December 15 and 17, *Altaquer, Ricaurte*. An Awá Community leader told CPT that she was tense and fearful for her life because of threats. Hers was the 6th name on the death list of an Aug 9th massacre. CPT visited the site of the massacre. The five victims were all taken from their homes and executed in the same place at the same time. The army was based less than 500 meters away.⁹

⁷ Segunda Brigada del Ejercito, Fuerza Naval del Caribe –Primera Brigada de Infantería de Marina-, Policía de Sucre

⁸ Grupo de Caballería Mecanizado No. 3 Gr. José María Cabal. Brigada No. 29 de Tercera División del Ejército de Colombia

⁹ Grupo de Caballería Mecanizado No. 3 Gr. José María Cabal. Brigada No. 29 de Tercera División del Ejército de Colombia