

Repression and Human Rights Violations in Colombia

The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCOFTA), implemented in 2011, resolved to “protect, enhance and enforce basic workers' rights” and affirmed a commitment to the “protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

Yet careful monitoring by credible, independent human rights groups shows on-going and widespread human rights abuses against political activists, journalists, civil servants, community leaders, trade unionists, grassroots communities and human rights defenders. Moreover, the internal armed conflict has generated more than six million victims since 1984, including 90,000 forced disappearances, 95,000 murders, 130,000 threats, 4,000 cases of sexual violence and 5,712,506 forcibly displaced.

KEY ISSUES

- In 2014, armed action by military forces or illegal criminal gangs was on the rise despite growing calls for peace from civil society in support of on-going peace talks in Cuba between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).
- Forced recruitment threats, massacres and land mines also continue to generate population displacement.
- Colombia’s Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples have been the main victims of human rights abuses and face threats to their physical and cultural survival.

QUICK FACTS

- In 2014, 62 community leaders working to defend human rights or land rights were assassinated; 10 more have been murdered since the beginning of 2015.
- Attacks against human rights defenders grew by 20% in 2014. Paramilitary groups were believed to be responsible for half of these attacks.
- Between 2009 and 2013, 219 human rights defenders were murdered. Guilty verdicts were attained in only 6 cases. This high degree of impunity and Colombia’s weak judicial system are important factors in the high number of human rights violations.

- In 2013, peasants and small farmers declared a massive strike to demand an end to displacement, the exploitation of labour, land and resource expropriation, and international free trade agreements. Workers in the petroleum, small-scale mining, potato, milk and coffee sectors supported this strike through mobilizations in 22 departments (provinces) across the country which resulted in 19 deaths, 600 people injured and hundreds of people detained.
- Colombia's Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples are disproportionately affected by human rights violations such as displacement, murder and forced army conscription. Malnutrition and poverty are most common in the departments of Chocó, Meta, Cauca, Guaviare, Guajira and Córdoba, areas which have also seen growth in extractive industries including mining, oil and gas, hydro-electric, agro-industrial and logging.
- Colombia's Indigenous population faces severe threats to its existence. 35 of the country's 87 officially recognized Indigenous groups are currently in danger of physical and cultural extinction.
- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has received reports that commercial concessions had been granted in 80% of the legally constituted Indigenous reserves without adequate consultation or consent, and without informing the affected communities.
- According to ONIC, indigenous victims of displacement increased by 87% between 2013 and 2014.
- Afro-descendant people make up 22.5% of the displaced population, and 30% of Afro-descendants are illiterate, double the national average. Areas with high densities of Afro-descendant populations are often also areas of extreme poverty.
- The Constitutional Court ruled that forcible conscription into armed groups is illegal, but the practice continues. Army General Jorge Suarez declared that forcing young men into the military is legal because the army cannot survive without them.

TAKE ACTION!

Demand that your Member of Parliament engage in an open and transparent debate on the human rights situation in Colombia and Canada's role in it. Ask that the Canadian government fulfill its legal obligation to conduct a thorough and meaningful human rights impact assessment of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, including an analysis of the impact of investment.

For more information, fact sheets and the *Colombia in the Shadow of Human Rights Abuses* report, go to: www.pasc.ca

