

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Colombia: The Black Eagles (Águilas Negras), including activities, areas of influence and areas of operation; threat letters, including appearance and content; availability of fraudulent threatening letters (2020–June 2022) [COL201106.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources report that the Black Eagles do not [translation] "exist," [or that "there is no armed group with members" (Senior Analyst 6 June 2022)], but that groups and/or individuals use the name to make threats (Senior Analyst 6 June 2022; Pares 19 Jan. 2021; *El Nuevo Día* 5 June 2021). InSight Crime, a non-profit think tank and media organization that studies organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (InSight Crime n.d.), reports that the Black Eagles are a "defunct paramilitary group" (InSight Crime 24 May 2021).

2. Areas of Influence and Operation

According to Colombia Peace, a website by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a research and advocacy organization for human rights in the Americas (WOLA n.d.), the Black Eagles do "not seem to have visible leadership or hold any territory" (WOLA 31 Jan. 2021). A report by the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, Indepaz), an NGO that promotes peacebuilding in Colombia (Indepaz n.d.), indicates that the Black Eagles are not [translation] "an armed group with permanent structures and known leaders" (Indepaz Aug. 2020, 87). Colombia.com, a Spanish-language news website, states that [translation] "[g]roups using the name of the Black Eagles have appeared in at least 20 of Colombia's 32 departments," including Nariño, Cauca, Casanare, Guajira, Magdalena, Bolívar, Norte de Santander, Santander, Sucre and Córdoba; however, the Black Eagles have "no structure, recognizable leadership, or territorial control" (Colombia.com 27 Jan. 2022).

3. Activities

Information on the activities of the Black Eagles could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following may be of interest:

Indepaz notes that the Black Eagles' [translation] "manner of presence is the circulation of pamphlets to threaten the lives of members of organizations and social leaders, in addition to creating terror for the purpose of political attacks, using the term 'social cleansing', and presenting itself as a counterinsurgent structure" (Indepaz Aug. 2020, 87).

4. Published Threat Letters or Pamphlets

InSight Crime reports that the name of the Black Eagles "is often invoked to make blind threats" (InSight Crime 24 May 2021). LatinAmerican Post, a Spanish and English-language online news source based in Bogotá, notes that while the Police Intelligence Directorate (Dirección de Inteligencia Policial de Colombia, DIPOL) has "guaranteed the non-existence" of the Black Eagles "for years," "thousands of pamphlets" containing threats are signed with this name (LatinAmerican Post 5 May 2020). Indepaz indicates that the name 'Black Eagles' [translation] "is used to cover up threats or assassinations perpetrated by individuals or groups of varying composition" (Indepaz Aug. 2020, 19). *El Nuevo Día*, a Spanish-language newspaper in Colombia, reports that the name of the Black Eagles is used by [translation] "different illegal groups in the country to make threats while hiding their identity" (*El Nuevo Día* 5 June 2021). *El Tiempo*, a Colombian newspaper, notes that according to a representative of the police, [translation] "other criminal networks are using [the brand of the Black Eagles] to commit crimes and avoid being linked to events such as the persecution of social leaders"

(*El Tiempo* 20 Jan. 2020). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior analyst for Colombia at International Crisis Group stated that one of the "most common and likely theories" posits that

[the 'Black Eagles'] name is commonly used as a cover to threaten social leaders and others, by right wing individual business interests, post-paramilitary groups, or even the military. Being threatened in a pamphlet often suggests that someone is willing to pay money to harm or kill that person. In many ways, these threats are sort of a blanket indication that the person in question is running up against powerful and violent political and economic interests. (Senior Analyst 6 June 2022)

El Tiempo reports that the Black Eagles name has been used by different groups throughout the country, including the following: bloque Militar del Pacífico Suroccidente de Nariño de las Águilas Negras (Nariño); bloque Metropolitano de Bucaramanga de las Águilas Negras (Santander); bloque Central Águilas Negras (Tolima); Águilas Negras Bloque Capital DC (Putumayo); Las Águilas Negras Distrito Capital (Cauca); Águilas Negras, Bloque Capital del Huila (Huila); Águilas Negras-Los Rastrojos (Cauca); and Águilas Negras Nueva Generación (Cauca) (*El Tiempo* 20 Jan. 2020).

4.1 Examples of Incidents

Sources describe the following incidents involving threat letters or pamphlets attributed to the Black Eagles in Colombia:

- Colombia Reports, a non-profit news website based in Colombia (Colombia Reports n.d.), states that a pamphlet released in September 2019 identifying nine journalists in southwestern Colombia as "'military objectives'" was signed by the Black Eagles (Colombia Reports 26 Sept. 2019).
- Colombia Reports indicates that in March 2020, the Black Eagles "sent out a death threat to so many people it barely fits on one paper," including the Mayor of Bogotá, "victims[]" organization[s]," "countless social leaders," and the "country's ombudsman," "alleg[ing]" that they are all "'camouflaged guerrillas and militia members doing counterintelligence'" (Colombia Reports 12 Mar. 2020).
- The New Humanitarian, an online news source that reports on humanitarian crises (The New Humanitarian n.d.), reports that the Black Eagles have distributed pamphlets throughout Colombia "threatening 'social cleansing' of Venezuelans" (The New Humanitarian 13 Feb. 2020).
- According to the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint program of la Fédération internationale pour les droits humains (FIDH) and the World Organization Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT), a pamphlet [translation] "allegedly signed by the Bloque Capital D.C." of the Black Eagles, "and written with several spelling mistakes, was disseminated on social networks" in January 2020 (Observatory 23 Jan. 2020).
- *Semana*, a Spanish-language magazine in Colombia, reports that in 2021, the [translation] "'Black Eagles'" sent "[s]everal pamphlets" to 15 professors and staff at a university in Medellín (*Semana* 18 June 2021).
- Infobae, a news source from Argentina (*The Washington Post* 8 June 2016), notes that in April 2022, the Black Eagles released a pamphlet threatening social leaders, "signatories of the peace agreement with the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC)]," and senators (Infobae 16 Apr. 2022).

4.2 Content and Appearance

The Senior Analyst provided the following information:

Because the source of pamphlets [signed with the Black Eagles name] is not uniform, they vary significantly between region of the country and from case to case. They will always include the insignia of the supposed organization. Often, they use swear words and harsh language. They often include derisions of left-leaning people or organizations. Grammar varies dramatically—sometimes it is good, other times it is horrible. Spelling mistakes are common. None of this should have a bearing on whether the pamphlet is considered authentic. (Senior Analyst 6 June 2022)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Office of the Ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo) indicated that pamphlets issued by armed groups in Colombia [translation] "have the appearance of a communiqué" in which the following information is "usually" found:

- Logo, symbols, or images that evoke the representation of the armed group in question.
- Name of the armed group issuing the pamphlet.
- Date of issue of the pamphlet.

- Threatening text with the names of persons, organizations, or communities targeted by the intimidation or threat. In some cases, a time limit is established for the targets to leave the territory.
- Signature of the group issuing the threat (if it is an organization with national capacity, the signature determines if it is on behalf of the group at the local level such as a front, bloc or company).
- In other cases, the pamphlets lack these elements and may be anonymous as to who is issuing the threat.
- Sometimes images/photographs of explicit violence (such as shootings, beheadings, etc.) or images of weapons and others are also included.
- Usually, when the pamphlets are directed at women or the LGBTQI+ population, explicit reference is made to sexual violence, gender identity and sexual orientation in the threats. (Colombia 12 Jan. 2022)

In previous correspondence with the Senior Analyst, the source indicated that pamphlets also "generally" contain the following:

a brief reference to the context of a specific situation and then [a statement of] the armed group's position. This position could include specific threats to named individuals or categories of people. They might spell out potential consequences (e.g., either these persons forcibly displace or they will be killed). It can also instate rules — for example, curfews or movement restrictions. Pamphlets are often targeted at specific groups, but they send a message to the broader community about the rules of the road, who is in charge, [and] what sorts of things are tolerated or not. Pamphlets may also reference other rival armed groups or the military. (Senior Analyst 10 Jan. 2022)

According to Indepaz,

[translation]

[o]ne of the main characteristics of the type of threat of those who use the name of the Black Eagles is that they never call attention to the violent actions to be committed and rather seek to relate murders with threats of new ones, generating fear in the communities or among individuals about certain events without any link [truly existing between such murders]. (Indepaz Aug. 2020, 87)

4.3 Availability of Fraudulent Threat Letters or Pamphlets

Information on the availability of fraudulent threat letters or pamphlets was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Senior Analyst provided the following information:

Pamphlets are often falsified. But the rule for understanding their impact is that ALL pamphlets should be taken seriously, because they instil fear and terror in the population — and their stigmatizing effect for any persons named is real and lasting, whether they come from the signing group or a nefarious third party. In Colombia, the threats delineated in pamphlets very often come to fruition, so they are not something to take lightly. (Senior Analyst 10 Jan. 2022, emphasis in original)

According to the representative of the Office of the Ombudsman,

[translation]

in order to prevent possible negative effects on the civilian population, the [Office of the Ombudsman] accepts that such pamphlets, even though they may be fraudulent or fake, must be investigated by the competent authorities and that while the veracity [of each pamphlet] is being investigated, the State must provide the necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of those who appear in this type of intimidation mechanism. (Colombia 12 Jan. 2022)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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ecoi.net summary:



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