



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Colombia – January to June 2024

30 June 2024

29 January 2024

Arrest of the leader of a FARC dissident group in Ecuador

According to police reports issued on 22.01.24, the leader of the Colombian FARC dissident front Oliver Sinisterra, Carlos Arturo Landázuri Cortés, alias El Gringo, has been arrested in Imbabura in northern Ecuador. This splinter group of the Segunda Marquetalia is said to be involved in cross-border drug trafficking, among other things. Landázuri is to be extradited to Colombia.¹

Ceasefire with ELN and Estado Mayor Central extended

According to a statement issued by the High Commissioner for Peace, Otty Patiño, on 23.01.24, the ceasefire with the National Liberation Army (ELN), which was due to expire at the end of January 2024, is to be extended by a further six months. The ceasefire with the FARC dissident group Estado Mayor Central had already been extended by six months on 16.01.2014. The new agreement will now run until 15.07.24.²

12 February 2024

Peace talks with armed groups: Segunda Marquetalia, ELN

According to a joint declaration issued on 09.02.24, the government and the FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia have begun peace talks. So-called peace zones are to be discussed, among other things. The Segunda Marquetalia is particularly active in the border region with Venezuela and, according to government figures, currently has almost 1,700 members, including over 1,000 fighters. Almost simultaneously on 06.02.24, the extension of the ceasefire between the ELN (National Liberation Army) guerrilla group and the government, which is due to last until August 2024, came into force. The High Commissioner for Peace had already announced a scheduled extension of this ceasefire at the end of January 2024 (cf. BN of 29.01.24). However, the negotiations and the corresponding joint declaration were recently delayed. For the extension period, the two parties recently negotiated in Cuba that the ELN would stop abductions to extort ransom money for the time being. As a next step, both parties have also proposed the creation of a fund to continue financing the peace process.³

19 February 2024

Escalation of violence in Tuluá after local gang chief arrested

On 12.02.24, several police units were deployed to Tuluá in the Valle del Cauca department in order to restore public order there. This was preceded by retaliatory acts in the form of (attempted) homicides and several incidents of vehicles being set ablaze following the arrest of a leader of the La Inmaculada local gang, Mauricio Marín alias

Nacho. The offences are said to have been ordered from a local prison by the top boss and brother of the arrested man, Andrés Felipe Marín, alias Pipe. Pipe was then transferred to a high-security prison. Public prosecutors, judges and journalists have also repeatedly received threats from La Inmaculada, as has the newly elected mayor. The latter is currently under the protection of the National Protection Unit UNP.⁴

State of emergency imposed in prisons after several security incidents

A state of emergency was declared in the prison system on 12.02.24 after several attacks were carried out against guards of the prison authorities (Instituto Nacional Penitenciario y Carcelario, Inpec). Most recently, a guard was killed near a prison in Cartagena on 10.02.24, and on the same day an attack was carried out at the prison in Jamundí (Valle del Cauca) that left several people injured. Furthermore, a guard in Cúcuta has already been killed this year and attacks on guards have been recorded in Medellín and Huila, among other places. Several officials have also received threats, including the director of Inpec. According to a spokesperson for the employees' union UTP, more than 80 Inpec officers have been killed in the past five years. Justice Minister Nestor Osuna believes that the recent attacks were triggered by retaliatory measures carried out by armed groups for the previous successes state security measures have had against their leaders. In 2023, the government of President Gustavo Petro announced the so called Dominó plan to combat extortion in prisons and strengthen control, which includes the transfer of leaders to high-security prisons. The current state of emergency allows measures to be taken such as restricting visiting and communication rights for certain prisoners and increasing police and military presence around the country's prisons.⁵

Four killed in attack on the military in Antioquia

According to army sources, four military personnel were killed and seven others were injured in an attack carried out by the paramilitary group Clan del Golfo in the department of Antioquia on 16.02.24.⁶

26 February 2024

Attacks on local politicians and locally elected representatives in January 2024

Attacks have been carried out repeatedly by non-state armed groups on locally elected representatives in Colombia in a bid to assert their own interests or to intimidate politicians in the event of resistance. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded at least 10 such attacks in January 2024 alone, including the kidnapping of a registrar in Chocó, an armed attack on the newly elected mayor of Tumaco in Nariño and several threats against mayors and local councillors in Valle del Cauca. Security incidents and incidents of violence against political actors had already increased significantly in the run-up to the 2023 regional elections. On 31.12.23, a reelected member of parliament was shot dead in Tuluá. The Pacific region has been particularly hard hit by the violence against politicians and public administration officials.⁷

04 March 2024

Announcement of resumption of airstrikes against camps of armed groups; Clan del Golfo

According to President Gustavo Petro and his Defence Minister Ivan Velasquez, the aerial bombing campaigns of camps run by illegal armed groups will be resumed if it can be ensured that no minors will be affected. Corresponding airstrikes had been suspended since the beginning of the Petro government in order to avoid civilian casualties. Petro had also recently threatened to take tougher action against this group following the killing of four military officers in Antioquia (cf. BN of 19.02.24) by the Clan del Golfo, which had recently let various negotiation offers made by the government as part of the Total Peace (Paz Total) campaign pass by. On 02.03.24, more than 150 members of the Clan del Golfo and Tren de Aragua were arrested for extortion offences and kidnappings, among other things, during security operations carried out in various cities in the country, including Bogotá. The Clan del Golfo, which has an increased presence in the north and northwest of the country, is said to currently consist of around 6,000 members and, in addition to drug trafficking, is also active in illegal mining, extortion of protection money and smuggling activities through the Darien Gap, among other things.⁸

Eight Colombian cities amongst the 50 most dangerous cities in the world outside of war zones

Eight Colombian cities feature on this year's list of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world with more than 300,000 inhabitants. This list is published annually by the Mexican organisation Citizens' Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal AC (CCSPJP)). Buenaventura and Cali in Valle del Cauca and Sincelejo in Sucre are even among the top 30. In this survey, CCSPJP compares the number of homicides in cities per 100,000 inhabitants. In the Colombian port city of Buenaventura in particular, that has a homicide rate of 51 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, crime remains high and, according to media reports published last year, this is largely attributable to disputes between the Los Shottas and Los Esparteros gangs vying for criminal supremacy. Although both gangs had agreed to ceasefires with state security forces at talks held with the government as part of the Comprehensive Peace Initiative (Paz Total), the clashes that erupted between the gangs resulted in the highest murder rate in the country. Sincelejo is on the list for the first time; the number of homicides there rose by more than 70 percent between 2022 and 2023, which is partly due to clashes that erupted between the Clan del Golfo and the dissident group Los Norteños. Cali remains one of the most dangerous cities in the country, strategically located between coca-growing areas and one of the most important transport routes. The list also includes Santa Marta, Cartagena de Indias, Cúcuta, Palmira and Barranquilla.⁹

18 March 2024

Government suspends ceasefire with the EMC in three provinces

The government suspended the ceasefire with the FARC dissident group Estado Mayor Central (EMC) in the provinces of Nariño, Cauca and Valle del Cauca by decree issued on 17.03.24. The same decree orders the re-starting of military and police security operations against the EMC group in these provinces as of 20.03.24. The ceasefire agreement was last extended until July 2024. According to President Gustavo Petro, the reason for the current measure is the unilateral violation of the terms of the agreement by sections of the non-state armed group, whose members injured three people in an attack carried out on indigenous people in the community of Toribío in Cauca on 16.03.24, one of whom later succumbed to her injuries.¹⁰

08 April 2024

Current figures on human and environmental rights activists killed

A report published by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) in March 2024 says that at least 126 human and environmental rights activists were killed in Latin America in 2023, among them 70 in Colombia. Most affected by these offences were the south-western departments of Cauca, Putumayo, Nariño and Valle del Cauca where numerous non-state armed groups are active. These regions are also home to the country's largest coca-growing areas.¹¹

22 April 2024

Homicides of social leaders

According to a count by the NGO Indepaz, the lawyer Jaime Alonso Vásquez was the 43rd social leader to be killed in Cúcuta in Norte de Santander this year on 14.04.24. Vásquez had repeatedly publicly denounced corruption in local, state institutions, and by elected officials. The public prosecutor general's office has informed that the first arrest in this case was made on 19.04.24.¹²

Paz Total: Factions led by Iván Mordisco withdraw from the negotiations

The government has reported new problems in the negotiations with the ex-FARC group Estado Mayor Central (EMC). Parts of the group under the command of Iván Mordisco have withdrawn from the negotiations; the talks are currently frozen. However, El País reports that chief negotiator Camilo González Posso has confirmed the continuation of negotiations with other blocs and fronts involved, which are active in the Catatumbo, Magdalena Medio, Meta, Caquetá and Putumayo areas of operation. Hence, the units that are still negotiating represent around half of the EMC's armed structures.¹³

29 April 2024

Paz Total: Air strikes against Estado Mayor Central, preparation for negotiations with Segunda Marquetalia

The defence ministry has informed that on 25.04.24, military airstrikes in El Plateado, Cauca, killed at least 15 members of the Carlos Patiño Front of the FARC splinter group Estado Mayor Central (EMC). Already in March 2024, the government had ended a ceasefire agreement with various parts of the EMC in the departments of Nariño, Cauca y Valle del Cauca following attacks on civilians (cf. BN of 18.03.24). It has also recently been confirmed that local actors under the command of Iván Mordisco have withdrawn from the peace negotiations with the government (cf. BN of 22.04.24).

On 25.04.24, the attorney general's office informed that in connection with peace negotiations, arrest warrants have been cancelled for nine leading members of the FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia. In February 2024, an agreement had been reached with the government to initiate a process to that effect.¹⁴

13 May 2024

Paz Total: ELN announces resumption of kidnappings for economic purposes

On 06.05.24, the ELN announced that it would resume kidnappings for financial purposes, as the government had failed to fulfil agreements made at a negotiation meeting in Mexico in December 2023 to create a peace financing fund within three months. Petro's government has denied this and criticised the guerrillas' unilateral decision. Negotiations with the ELN are currently in crisis. The central ELN command recently criticised the fact that government representatives were also holding separate, unauthorised regional peace talks with a recently split-off front of the ELN (Comuneros del Sur) operating in Nariño. The cycle of talks between the ELN central command and the government, originally scheduled for April 2024, was therefore initially cancelled. On 27.04.24, the ELN called on the government to decide whether to hold talks with the Central Command or the Comuneros del Sur. Talks with the ELN Central Command are currently scheduled for the week between 20.05 and 25.05.24 in Caracas. However, it is unclear what influence the current events will have on their organisation.¹⁵

27 May 2024

Security situation: EMC attacks in south-west Colombia

At least four people were killed and at least seven injured in bombings and attacks on 20.05.24, including in Jamundí and at a police station in Morales. These acts, and more recent attacks on police and military in south-west Colombia were apparently carried out by members of a faction of the FARC dissident group Estado Mayor Central (EMC). In March 2024, the government had cancelled the ceasefire agreement with the EMC in Cauca and elsewhere due to acts of violence. The International Crisis Group, among others, has recently warned of a further fragmentation of the conflict and increased violence following internal tensions and the separation of a faction from the EMC. According to a security report seen by Reuters, the membership numbers of the four largest and most important non-state armed groups (Clan del Golfo, ELN, EMC and Segunda Marquetalia) have increased in 2023. Members of the last three groups are also apparently based in neighbouring Venezuela.¹⁶

Situation in prisons

On 16.05.24, Élmer Fernández, who had been appointed director of La Modelo prison in Bogotá in April 2024, was killed. He had previously received death threats from an alleged prisoner in connection with random searches and prison transfers. The Petro government had already declared a prison emergency in February 2024 due to riots, murders, and numerous threats against prison staff. Media reports say that five prison staff have already been killed this year and, according to the national prison authority INPEC, Fernández was not receiving any protection at the time of his death.¹⁷

Two victims of female genital mutilation in Bogotá

Two girls, a 23-day-old baby and a 13-year-old girl, were victims of FGM in Bogotá. According to the health ministry, both cases came to light due to health complications that required urgent treatment. The ministry estimates around 90 cases in 2023 in Colombia, but there are no verifiable figures. Activists working on behalf of the indigenous Emberá group accuse the government of passivity and inadequate registration. FGM is a rare but existing practice in Colombia, mainly among the Emberá indigenous community and in some Afro-American peoples. The Colombian government and NGOs are working to eradicate these traditions by awareness-raising campaigns and thus improve the protection of the girls concerned.¹⁸

Pension reform

On 15.06.24, the Colombian congress approved a pension reform that includes several key measures to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the pension system. A key element of the reform is the introduction of a system that includes both state and private pension funds. Accordingly, people who earn two to three times the minimum monthly wage must pay into the pay-as-you-go state solidarity system, Colpensiones. This removes the option of choosing between the private and state system regardless of income level. In addition, the retirement age will be gradually increased to 65 to adjust it to rising life expectancy, and a minimum pension amount will be introduced to ensure that all pensioners receive a basic pension. The reform also provides for a redistribution of pension contributions, with higher incomes being charged more in order to subsidise the pensions of lower income groups. This is intended to promote social justice and reduce poverty in old age.¹⁹

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Briefing Notes
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