

## Colombia: Justice Denied Campaign Document

(Last Updated on December 10, 2002)

Since Luis Camilo Osorio became Colombia's Attorney General on July 31, 2001, the ability of his office to investigate and prosecute serious human rights abuses has deteriorated significantly. Virtually every ongoing investigation involving senior military officers or paramilitary leaders has been blocked. Experienced prosecutors working on those cases (most of whom received training from the United States) have been fired or forced to resign. Colombia's struggle against the paramilitaries, who are responsible for most of the country's massacres and a substantial portion of its narcotics exports, has been undermined.

Violation	Persons Implicated	Response of Colombian Government	Result
<p><b>Massacres in the Urabá region:</b> Between 1995 and 1997, a series of attacks and executions were committed by paramilitary groups as part of their campaign to force guerrillas out of the region.</p>	<p><b>General Rito Alejo Del Río</b>, head of the army's Seventeenth Brigade, allegedly ordered his troops to support the paramilitaries and was in contact with paramilitary fighters.</p>	<p>In July 2001, Gen. Del Río was ordered arrested by a prosecutor with the Human Rights Unit. Attorney General Osorio publicly criticized the action, leading to the resignation of Deputy Attorney General Pablo Elías González. Soon after, Pedro Díaz, the Director of Colombia's Human Rights Unit, and Virgilio Hernández, the former director of the Human Rights Unit, resigned under duress. In meetings, Osorio said that he had thrown out evidence collected by the unit and was inviting only the general's subordinates to testify.</p>	<p>Gen. Del Río has been released from detention and in November 2002 Osorio closed the case. Prosecutor Díaz has fled Colombia out of fear for his safety. Two other investigators working on the case left Colombia after receiving "invitations" to their own funerals. Lucia Luna, the prosecutor who signed Del Río's arrest warrant, has also fled the country.</p>
<p><b>Massacre at the village of Chengue, Dept. of Sucre:</b> In early 2001, at least twenty-six villagers were killed by paramilitary forces armed with, among other things, sledgehammers.</p>	<p><b>Navy General Rodrigo Quiñones</b> and other navy officers have been credibly alleged to have helped arrange the massacre in government investigations.</p>	<p>The prosecutor with the Human Rights Unit handling the case informed Attorney General Osorio upon his taking office that she had uncovered credible evidence concerning Quiñones' involvement in the massacre. The case was reassigned to another prosecutor, who petitioned to have it reassigned back to the original prosecutor. It was, but the original prosecutor was accused by the new Director of the Human Rights Unit of committing errors after announcing her intention to open a formal investigation, and was removed from the case again.</p>	<p>The case has remained stalled. The prosecutor has fled Colombia due to death threats. Another prosecutor working on the case has received political asylum in the United States. Three judicial investigators investigating the massacre were murdered, along with another prosecutor. Meanwhile, the U.S. has canceled Quiñones' visa due to his alleged involvement with drug trafficking, which led to his resignation from the prestigious</p>

			position of military attaché to the Colombian embassy in Israel.
<p><b>Attempted assassination of Wilson Borja</b>, a prominent trade unionist and president of the State Workers' Union, in December 2000.</p>	<p><b>Army Major César Maldonado</b> has been linked through cell phone records and other evidence to the paramilitary forces thought responsible for the attack, part of a series of attempts on the lives of trade unionists believed by paramilitaries to be sympathetic to guerrillas.</p>	<p>Luis Augusto Sepúlveda, a prosecutor with the Human Rights Unit, ordered the arrest of Maldonado and opened an investigation concerning his involvement in the assassination attempt. Attorney General Osorio fired Sepúlveda while he was drafting the indictment. Another prosecutor took over the case, but was not able to process the evidence before the detention time period had expired.</p>	<p>Major Maldonado was released from prison, but was re-indicted and rearrested by the new prosecutor in May 2002. Prosecutor Sepúlveda, in the meantime, appeared on paramilitary "death lists," and was forced to seek protective measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. He has since fled Colombia.</p>
<p><b>Massacre at the Bella Cruz Ranch:</b> In 1996, paramilitaries forcibly expelled peasants from their land. At least thirty people were murdered or "disappeared" and 170 families were forcibly displaced.</p>	<p><b>Carlos Arturo Marulanda</b>, Colombia's Ambassador to the European Union, allegedly ordered the paramilitaries to attack the peasants to prevent them from laying claim to land belonging to a company owned by his family.</p>	<p>Under the previous Attorney General, a prosecutor indicted Marulanda on the charges of terrorism and formation of illegal paramilitary groups. Marulanda was extradited to Colombia in October 2002 after spending several months in a Spanish jail. On November 1, Osorio announced that his office was dropping charges against him of collaborating with the paramilitaries and ordered Marulanda released.</p>	<p>Marulanda still faces charges relating to the destruction of the peasants' homes. Lawyers representing the evicted peasants objected to the dropping of the paramilitarism charges and fear that the subsequent death threats, killings and "disappearances" of peasants at Bella Cruz will never be investigated or brought to justice.</p>