Human Rights Watch

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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COLOMBIA

Human Rights Developments

Even as the administration of President Ernesto Samper took limited steps to curb violence and address impunity, the human rights situation in Colombia deteriorated. Political violence was particularly intense in areas contested by guerrillas and by paramilitaries operating with the acquiescence and in some cases the support of the army. All parties routinely attacked perceived enemies within the civilian population, meaning that noncombatants-among them farmers, elected officials, teachers, banana workers, merchants, and children-remained Colombia's most frequent victims of political violence. Thousands of Colombians fled violence to join the rapidly growing ranks of the forcibly displaced. Meanwhile, poor conditions in Colombia's jails led to a series of protests, several of which became violent and resulted in casualties among guards and prisoners.

Although exact figures remained difficult to confirm and many cases went unreported or uninvestigated, it was clear that political violence increased, especially as October 1997 municipal elections neared. According to our records, there were at least thirty-five massacres in the first eight months of 1997-twenty-seven committed by presumed paramilitaries and eight committed by presumed members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), the country's largest guerrilla group. In all, these massacres claimed 272 lives. More than 450 Colombians also died in targeted assassinations, with the largest identified group being peasants.

Human Rights Watch recorded a reduction in the number of cases attributed to the security forces, either acting alone or with paramilitary groups, while guerrilla violations increased. In the past, the army openly backed paramilitaries. Human rights organizations in Colombia called on the government to take concerted action against paramilitaries to demonstrate that they were not supported or tolerated by the armed forces.It was significant, therefore, that even as the police and military incorporated human rights into their public statements and held meetings with human rights groups, words did not translate into consistent action against paramilitaries, who operated freely in heavily militarized areas and significantly expanded their operations. The state's failure to arrest paramilitary leaders or pursue their units constituted tacit approval for their violations and meant that paramilitaries waged an unhindered campaign of terror throughout most of the country.

According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), a respected human rights organization, 76 percent of the violations recorded were the work of paramilitaries, 17 percent were the work of guerrillas, and 7 percent were the work of state agents. Human Rights Watch recorded twenty-four cases of extrajudicial executions and eight forced disappearances attributable to the army during the first six months of 1997. On January 10, for example, 18th Brigade soldiers apparently executed three youths detained in a Saravena, Arauca, slum, beating and shooting them in front of witnesses. In addition, in regions like the Middle Magdalena and southern Cesar department, army units patrolled openly with groups of armed civilians, killing and threatening supposed guerrilla supporters.

When abuses were investigated, the military continued to use its tribunals to cover them up, most notably in the case involving Gen. (ret.) Farouk Yanine Daz, charged with ordering the 1987 massacre of nineteen men near Puerto Araujo, Santander. On June 23, then-army commander Gen. Manuel Bonett, appointed the investigative judge on the case, announced he would close further investigation of Yanine's involvement. He did so despite solid evidence implicating Yanine. The case had been prepared by the Attorney General's Human Rights Unit, which continued to do credible investigations. Similar evidence collected by the Human Rights Unit had served to convict the civilian paramilitaries accused of carrying out the Puerto Araujo massacre.

In a welcome decision, the Constitutional Court ruled in August that unresolved cases involving extrajudicial executions, torture, forced disappearances, and rape by the security forces must be tried in civilian court, not military tribunals. Writing for the majority, magistrate Eduardo Cifuentes Muoz held that human rights crimes "have absolutely no connection to the role of State agents according to the constitution. [A]ny order to commit such a crime merits no obedience whatsoever."

However, as of this writing, no pending cases, including that of General Yanine, have been transferred to civilian courts for trial. In an effort to ignore the ruling, military tribunals continued to hear cases involving serious human rights violations, including the December 1991 massacre by police and local paramilitaries of twenty Pez Indians, among them five children, near Caloto, Cauca. On September 23, a military tribunal declared that the massacre constituted an act of service meant to "help (the victims) coexist peacefully" and released the anti-narcotics police captain found to have planned and helped carry out the killings. Although the Samper administration presented a bill to congress that would reform the military penal code to reflect the Constitutional Court decision, as of this writing it was unclear what its fate will be.

Overall, the paramilitary group known as the Peasant Self-Defense Group of Crdoba and Urab (Autodefensas Campesinas de Crdoba and Urab, ACCU) amassed the worst record, committing at least twenty-two of the massacres reported in the first eight months of 1997. In July, over one hundred ACCU members arrived in Mapiripn, Meta, by air, then killed and beheaded at least seven men in the local slaughterhouse. Part of the group's much-publicized plan to form a national alliance of paramilitary groups and reach areas formerly considered guerrilla strongholds, the Mapiripn attack lasted for five days without any reaction by police or military forces based in the area, despite pleas from the local judge. Residents told journalists that as many as thirty more people may have been killed, beheaded, and thrown into the Guaviare river. Most of the residents fled after the attack. In a press interview published after the massacre, ACCU leader Carlos Castao vowed that in the future, there would be "many more cases like Mapiripn."

Elsewhere, the ACCU expanded its influence, moving south from the Caribbean coast into the departments of Bolvar, Magdalena, Santander, Sucre, and Cesar, with massacres, killings, death threats, and forced displacement marking its advance. Since October 1996, the ACCU has repeatedly entered Panama, where it has killed and threatened local villagers it accuses of providing guerrillas with food and medicine.

Despite the announcement of a U.S. $1 million reward for information leading to the capture of ACCU leader Castao, nothing was done to capture him or his forces. After highly decorated army Col. Carlos Velsquez reported in 1996 that his superiors at Urab's 17th Brigade had failed to pursue the ACCU, rather than investigate his information fully, the military cashiered him. Near San Jos de Apartad, for instance, a combined force of paramilitaries and army soldiers reportedly executed Jos Macario David Gez, a mentally retarded man, on March 27. Afterward, soldiers apparently dressed David's body in a military uniform and presented him to the press as a guerrilla killed in combat.

Other paramilitaries also operated in Colombia virtually unimpeded by the authorities, among them the Northeast Self-Defense Group (Grupo de Autodefensa del Nordeste, GAN) around Segovia and Remedios in Antioquia. Since the 1980s, when paramilitaries allied with the army's Bombon Battalion carried out a series of massacres, this region has been tormented with political killings. After the killings of three human rights workers in March (*see* The Right to Monitor, below), authorities convened a "security meeting" to discuss ways to prevent further attacks. Nevertheless, on August 2, the GAN reportedly took seven people from their homes in Remedios, including former mayor and Patriotic Union member Carlos Rojo Uribe, then executed five of them on the road to Segovia. Rojo and teacher Luis Alberto Munera, also a member of the Segovia Human Rights Committee, were taken to Segovia, where they were shot. In September, some alleged GAN members were arrested.

During the year, several peace initiatives were begun, but, as was obvious from behavior of the parties to the conflict, there was no real commitment to negotiating an end to the fighting. As October 26 elections neared, elected officials and candidates throughout Colombia came under increasing attack. Both the National Liberation Army (Ejrcito de Liberacin Nacional, ELN) and FARC vowed to stop elections in a dozen departments. The ACCU and its allies in the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) coalition announced in May that they would prevent pro-guerrilla "proselytizing" in areas of conflict, which candidates considered a threat against those who failed to embrace their views.

Within a month after aspirants had to submit their names to the National Electoral Registry, authorities reported that over 900 had cancelled their candidacies due to threats. While similar elections in 1994 were suspended in nine municipalities, as of mid-September, there were fifteen municipalities without mayoral candidates. In the words of one candidate who withdrew, "to be a candidate for mayor or even town council in many rural areas. . .is to search out a death foretold."

In the first eight months of 1997, government authorities reported that ten mayors had been murdered, representing towns in eight departments. In addition, thirty-six town council members were killed. Even candidates' family members were the frequent targets of death threats and kidnaping. Colombia remained the world's leader in reported kidnappings, close to half of which were carried out by rebels. According to government authorities, between November 1996 and August 1997, forty-one mayors were kidnaped.

Both paramilitaries and guerrillas also threatened journalists. Among them was Alfredo Molano, who reported that in August he received a paramilitary threat suggesting that he was a "subversive encysted" in the government because of his work for the government's High Commissioner for Peace. In turn, the FARC announced in June that it would consider journalists who wrote what they considered "apology for militarism" legitimate military targets.

Far from protecting threatened mayors, the security forces appeared largely powerless or unwilling to pursue their attackers. To the contrary, mayors themselves became the targets of army investigations for supposed ties to guerrillas. An army intelligence report leaked to the newsweekly *Semana* in May alleged that 650 municipal governments-more than half of those in Colombia-had either direct ties with guerrillasor collaborated with them. Dozens of mayors protested, saying the information was tantamount "to putting a gravestone over our heads." The mayor of Sogamoso, Boyac, a Catholic priest, filed formal charges against the government for defamation, and the army later disavowed its report.

Instead of moving aggressively to protect the civilian population and ensure its neutral status, the government promoted Rural Watch Cooperatives Cooperativas de Vigilancia y Seguridad Rural, CONVIVIR), made up of civilians authorized to gather intelligence for the security forces, join maneuvers, and use weapons banned for private ownership, including machine guns, mortars, grenades, and assault rifles. Although CONVIVIRs receive a government license, the identities of their members remain anonymous even to local authorities.

In 1997, we received credible reports that CONVIVIRs in the Middle Magdalena and southern Cesar regions were led by known paramilitaries and had threatened and killed Colombians deemed sympathetic to guerrillas or who refused to join. On February 3, a CONVIVIR patrolling with the army's Fourteenth Brigade near the village of San Francisco, in Santander, apparently executed Norberto Galeano, Reynaldo Ros, and a seventy-year-old man, then dismembered their bodies. Two months earlier, the same group had been linked to the massacre of at least seven people in the nearby villages of La Congoja and Puerto Nuevo, prompting the mass displacement of over 700 villagers.

Along with the CCJ, fourteen human rights groups filed a suit with the Constitutional Court calling for Decree 356, which regulates CONVIVIR, to be declared unconstitutional. In its brief, the CCJ argued that through CONVIVIR, the Samper administration was arming civilians in violation of the constitution. Given Colombia's tragic history of paramilitary violence, executive director Gustavo Galln noted in an August 26 hearing before the court, a decree that "permits the organization and development of paramilitary groups. . .is contrary to the essence of the State's rule of law."

Dozens of government officials, mayors, and religious leaders also objected to CONVIVIR, among them Attorney General Alfonso Gmez Mndez, who argued that CONVIVIR involved civilians in the armed conflict, thus excluding them from the humanitarian protections granted by Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

"With the organization of CONVIVIR," Gmez noted, "the Colombian state once again has fallen into the error of promoting the creation of `armed individuals,' who intensify problems of illegal repression and war without quarter."

In August, even President Samper admitted that some CONVIVIRs "have transgressed their legal boundaries to assume combat roles." Subsequently, the government announced that it would suspend the creation of new CONVIVIRs.

Guerrillas also committed serious abuses during 1997, among them massacres. On March 9, presumed members of the FARC's 34th Front opened fire on an ice cream parlor in Currulao, Antioquia, killing nine people, including parlor owner Danilo Valencia Naranjo.

The FARC was believed to have sent the April book bomb that killed Pedro Agudelo, the seventeen-year-old son of Hope, Peace and Liberty party (Esperanza, Paz y Libertad) leader Mario Agudelo.

The FARC made a practice of attacking civilian targets, putting the lives of noncombatants at serious risk. In January, guerrillas apparently activated a bomb in front of a Medelln skyscraper, killing four passersby and wounding forty-one others.

In September, one of Colombia's largest hydroelectric plants was the target, causing the government to recommend that families begin limiting their use of electricity. The ELN also committed serious violations, among them targeted killings. According to press reports and information gathered by human rights groups, the ELN was responsible for at least forty-nine political killings in the first nine months of 1997. Among the victims were farmers, mayors, an employee of the attorney general's office, and children. In addition, the ELN apparently killed several security force agents *hors de combat*, among them three soldiers captured and executed on August 3 near El Playn, Santander.

The ELN stepped up its use of car bombs, registering dozens of attacks in the first six months of 1997. In an attack on March 17, a car bomb in Ccuta, Norte de Santander, apparently detonated by the "Resistencia Yarigues" Front of the ELN, killed eighteen-month-old Martha Liliana Riveros and left several others wounded.

Kidnapping remained a common tactic of paramilitaries and guerrillas, who routinely took family members of combatants as hostages. Since 1996, the ACCU kidnapped over a dozen family members of guerrillas, seven of whom were released on March 26 under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Several political kidnappings led to deaths. On May 5, the FARC announced that Congressman Rodrigo Turbay Cote, kidnapped in 1995, had died while being transported along the Cagun river in his native department of Caquet, apparently after falling from a canoe. In retaliation, paramilitaries who had kidnapped two family members of an ELN commander announced that they were executed in May.

Three Americans kidnapped by the FARC in 1993 remained missing as of this writing-Richard Tenenhoff, David Mankins, and Mark Rich. The FARC was also implicated in the execution-style slaying of two kidnap victims, Austrian Johan Kehrer and German Alexander Scheurer, in the Choc jungle in March.

The forced displacement of civilians continued to be part of the strategy of war used by all sides, particularly paramilitaries. In March, the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (Consultora para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, CODHES), nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimated that between 1985 and 1996, 920,000 people had been displaced by violence, an average of one in every forty Colombians. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Colombia, 72 percent of the displaced were children.

The year was marked by forced displacements on a massive scale not seen previously. In March, more than 13,000 people, most from black minority communities, fled their homes along the Riosucio river in the northwest department of Choc after paramilitaries took control in December 1996 and the army carried out indiscriminate air attacks two months later. After a difficult journey through the jungle during which several people reportedly died, the army blocked the passage of peasants fleeting to the town of Mutat. The refugees were prohibited from making the journey. There were credible reports that a soldier fired on a group of the displaced attempting to reach Mutat in April and seriously injured two people, including a girl. A court later found the government, specifically the army, responsible for causing the forced displacement, and ordered authorities to ensure the families' safe return to their homes.

Nevertheless, as of this writing, thousands of displaced from Riosucio continue to live in crowded camps at Pavarand Grande, without sufficient food, water, or health care. Paramilitaries threatened to enter the camp to kill displaced, and reportedly assassinated several people in nearby towns.

The Samper administration responded to mass displacement by creating the post of "presidential counselor for the "displaced" in April, adopting a revised national plan on displacement in May, and promulgating Law 387 in July, which dealt specifically with assistance, protection, and prevention issues. Advocates criticized the government for promoting the return of the displaced to their homes without guaranteeing their safety, highlighting mandatory registration requirements and lack of funds as serious flaws in the new law. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened an office in June by invitation of the Colombian government, but no formal agreement about the scope of the agency's activities had been reached at the time of this writing.

Doubts about the government's ability to effectively address the problem of forced displacement were deepened by the case of 280 families violently evicted by paramilitaries from the Bellacruz Ranch in the department of Cesar in February 1996. With twenty-six of at least twenty-eight arrest warrants against the implicated paramilitaries still outstanding, the families were unable to return, and most were resettled on unirrigated land that allowed only a precarious existence. In May, the Constitutional Court issued an injunction protecting the rights of the Bellacruz peasants after the governor of Cundinamarca refused to allow the families, whom she accused of being subversives, to resettle in her jurisdiction.

In April, some 300 Colombians were forcibly repatriated from Panama to Baha Cupica, Choc, after the UNHCR was denied access to interview them in Panama. Safe conditions for their return did not exist, and the repatriated families were evacuated from Baha Cupica on an emergency basis in September after paramilitaries circulated a list of twelve people they intended to kill or kidnap.

In Colombia's jails, prisoners cited severe overcrowding, lack of medical care, and isolation as the reasons behind a series of coordinated protests that began in January and continued through June. A census by the National Penitentiary Institute, responsible for administering Colombia's prisons, showed that although Colombia has the capacity to house 30,000 prisoners, as of April 1997, it reported holding 42,000 inmates, half of whom were still awaiting trial for common crimes and rebellion. In the Valledupar prison, in Cesar, armed inmates and imprisoned members of the ELN killed four prison guards and took sixteen other people hostage, including a fourteen-year-old girl, in April before agreeing to surrender to authorities and releasing the hostages unharmed.

Given the serious problems of internal displacement, hostage-taking, and violence, the ICRC took an increasingly important role in Colombia, boosting its in-country staff to forty-three people and maintaining nine offices. The organization brokered prisoner exchanges, visited prisoners and hostages, aided the wounded and displaced, and assisted threatened Colombians to flee the country. According to ICRC estimates, their office assisted in the release of forty hostages between August 1996 and March 1997. The ICRC also gave presentations on international humanitarian law to ACCU members and guerrillas.

The Right to Monitor

Human rights defenders continued to be the targets of attack and threats. On May 19, Mario Caldern, an employee of the Center for Research and Popular Education (Centro de Investigacin y Educacin Popular, CINEP), Elsa Alvarado, his wife and a former CINEP employee, and Carlos Alvarado, Elsa's father, were killed by masked gunmen in their Bogot apartment, apparently in retaliation for their human rights work. Although Alvarado's mother was seriously wounded, the couple's eighteen-month-old son was unharmed. On September 28, authorities in Medelln arrested five people who may have taken part in the killing.

In Segovia, Antioquia, GAN continued to work in close coordination with the army's Bombon Battalion, an alliance considered complicit in the March 9 murder of Nazareno de Jess Rivera, a Segovia Human Rights Committee member. The same day, colleague Jaime Ortiz Londoo was forcibly disappeared. On March 12, the Army's Fourteenth Brigade falsely displayed Rivera's body to the press as "a guerrilla killed in action" and showed reporters Ortiz's identity documents. On March 23, a former member of the same group, Margarita Guzmn, was killed in her office, apparently for her work for the authorities investigating Rivera's death and Ortiz's "disappearance."

Also on March 7, Vctor Julio Garzn, the secretary-general of an agrarian association and a well-known human rights defender, was killed by unidentified gunmen in his Bogot office. Garzn was a member of the Meta Civic Committee for Human Rights, all but extinguished after its members have been systematically killed. Although international outrage followed the 1996 murder of Josu Giraldo, president of the Meta Civic Committee for Human Rights, at this writing, no arrests have been made in his case, which remained in preliminary investigation along with most other investigations into past killings of human rights monitors.

Community leaders who spoke out about human rights continued to be targets. On October 6, FARC members, apparently angered by the decision of San Jos de Apartad residents not to supply food, abducted and killed Luis Hernando Goes, Luis Fernando Aguirre, and Ramiro Correa. The three were members of a civic group working to make the town neutral territory in the battle among guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the army. Another civic leader, Francisco Tabarquino, had been killed by paramilitaries on May 17.

Government workers who investigated cases involving links between the security forces and paramilitaries were also killed or forced to leave the country for their safety. Among them, former Yond, Antioquia, ombudsman Gustavo Nez was pulled from a public bus by paramilitaries near Barrancabermeja and killed on August 8.

Other human rights defenders were the targets of threats and surveillance by members of the security forces. Wilson Patio, a human rights activist from Remedios, Antioquia, was forced to leave the area after armed men came to his home on March 20, apparently to kill him. On May 24, Neftal Vanegas Perea, a human rights defender in Ocaa, Norte de Santander, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by armed men believed to be working in league with the security forces.

The offices of the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (Asociacin de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos, ASFADDES) were the target of a June 24 bombing that destroyed the group's archives. Subsequently, organization members in Medelln and Riosucio, Choc, received several threats, including that of a telephone caller who claimed that "the bomb was only a warning, so it would be better if you left the office." Two branch offices were later closed for fear of attacks, and the group's president and her family were forced to leave the country for their safety.

Other human rights workers reported receiving threats related to their work. After a series of massacres in the Middle Magdalena region, five human rights workers associated with the Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (Corporacin Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, CREDHOS) were informed

that their names appeared on death lists being circulated by paramilitaries. In September, members of the Association for the Promotion of Social Alternatives (Asociacin para la Promocin Social Alternativa, MINGA) said that suspicious men were watching their offices and were following the MINGA and ASFADDES members working there.

In response to the killings of human rights defenders, thirty-six human rights groups, unions, religious groups, and indigenous groups petitioned the government in May and again in June for investigations into attacks, the punishment of those responsible, an end to the military's verbal attacks on their work, and guarantees of protection. A key demand was for an aggressive and immediate law enforcement effort to identify, track down, and arrest members of paramilitary groups and their security force patrons, an effort, the groups noted, that should be given equal status with punishing drug traffickers and guerrillas.

In a partial acknowledgment of the seriousness of the situation, President Samper issued a directive honoring the work of human rights defenders and explicitly barring government officials, including the army, from making statements that "falsely accuse or belittle the right to a defense, due process and the honor [of human rights defenders]" on July 16. Subsequently, groups met with the government, and on September 9, Colombia's Human Rights Day, President Samper announced the creation of a Human Rights Council to coordinate actions among the government's multiple human rights offices.

The Role of the

International Community

United Nations

April 7 marked the official opening of the Bogot office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, led by Amb. Almudena Mazarrasa and staffed by five experts and a deputy director. At this writing, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the office, but at least one of the objectives in establishing it was achieved: the office pressed the government on issues of concern to the commission, including reforms to the military penal code and CONVIVIR. Experts traveled throughout the country and held regular meetings with government officials, representatives of human rights groups, and Colombians wishing to deliver complaints.

Nevertheless, the Human Rights Committee continued to lament Colombia's failure to implement its repeated recommendations, and noted that "gross and massive human rights violations continue to occur in Colombia." The Committee expressed its "deep concern" over evidence that paramilitary groups "receive support from members of the military" and that "impunity continues to be a widespread phenomenon."

European Union

Some European embassies and diplomats took high-profile roles in attempting to lessen political violence and the suffering it caused. In April, Netherlands Amb. Gysbert Bos made a three-day visit to the Middle Magdalena region, in part to draw attention to a rise in paramilitary activity and displacement. The visit was seen as especially important given that the Netherlands occupied the presidency of the EU.

For its part, the EU continued to pressure Colombia to improve its human rights record, and announced in September its full support for a negotiated settlement to political conflict.

The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) donated U.S. $5 million dollars in emergency aid to international NGOs to assist the thousands of people forcibly displaced earlier in the year in Urab.

Organization of American States

The Organization of American States agreed to send a team to Colombia to monitor municipal elections in areas where guerrillas and paramilitaries had threatened candidates. Two monitors, a Guatemalan and a Chilean, were kidnapped by the ELN and held for more than a week before being released. For its part, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission continued to hear Colombian cases and took part in several efforts to resolve cases through so-called "friendly negotiation" between victims and the government. However, in several high-profile cases, including the 1990 Trujillo massacre and the 1994 Villatina massacre, this effort had not, at this writing, borne tangible fruit.

In October, two Colombian human rights groups formally presented to the commission the case involving Navy Intelligence Network No. 7 and its involvement in the killings of at least sixty-eight people from 1991 to 1993 in and around Barrancabermeja, Santander. The case was detailed in *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States*, published by Human Rights Watch in November 1996.

United States

The United States pursued a contradictory policy in Colombia. On the one hand, the Clinton administration for the first time made human rights an important part of U.S.-Colombia relations. In 1997, the State Department issued its most detailed and critical human rights report ever, concluding that "the [Colombian] armed forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses." In addition, the report noted, "the Samper administration has not taken action to curb increased abuses committed by paramilitary groups, verging on a policy of tacit acquiescence."

This report was followed by an April letter from Secretary of State Madeline Albright to Sen. Patrick Leahy, co-sponsor of a 1996 amendment that placed human rights conditions on some antinarcotics aid. In the letter, Secretary Albright announced that the spirit of the amendment would be applied to all anti-narcotics aid, including monies suspended after Colombia was "decertified" a second time in a row for failing to meet U.S. goals in fighting drugs. In an unusual move, the U.S. embassy publicly expressed its concern over the tone used by military authorities to attack civilian investigators who linked General Yanine to the Puerto Araujo massacre, the first time it had spoken publicly on a human rights case.

For its principled stand, the administration was harshly criticized by some Republicans in the U.S. Congress, who argued that human rights concerns hampered the drug war. Led by the International Relations Committee and its chair, Rep. Benjamin Gilman, Republicans attempted to remove the Leahy amendment from the 1998 Foreign Operations bill, an initiative that failed.

Although the Clinton administration acknowledged that Colombia's human rights situation continued to be serious, it also pushed hard for aid to the military to fight drugs, arguing that funds would be channeled to units without bad records. After months of tense negotiations, the Colombian and U.S. governments signed an end-use monitoring agreement on August 1, freeing $70 million of the $100 million slated to reach Colombia in 1997, much of it for the army and navy. Among the items sent were communications equipment, night vision scopes, and parts for helicopters and river patrol boats. Police continued to receive aid throughout the year, including munitions and weapons. However, the agreement on military aid left monitoring to the Colombian Defense Ministry, not U.S. officials, who were severely limited in their ability to verify any reports.