

# ECUADOR'S HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY

## The Spillover of Colombia's Conflict

By Abigail Poe and Adam Isacson

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The term “refugee crisis” usually conjures images of Africa, the Balkans and other war-torn regions. It may come as a surprise, then, that one of the world’s most severe refugee crises is taking place in the same time zone as Washington, D.C.

Over the past nine years, an estimated 300,000 Colombian refugees have crossed their country’s border with Ecuador. They have fled persecution, threats, disappearances, murders, deliberate displacement, and recruitment by the parties to Colombia’s long, drug-funded war between government forces, leftist guerrillas, and paramilitary militias, all of which violate human rights with great frequency.

These refugees do not live in camps, but subsist among the Ecuadorian population. 250,000 are “invisible,” with no rights to international protection, education, health, or employment. While Ecuador has the most liberal asylum policy of its South American neighbors, it cannot come close to doing what is needed to provide protection and basic services for the large number of Colombians arriving in Ecuador every day.

Ecuador’s northern border is home to over 85 percent

of all Colombian refugees, asylum seekers and population in need of protection. The region includes five provinces, Esmeraldas, Carchi, Imbabura, Sucumbíos and Orellana, and spans 400 miles. Despite the abundance of natural resources in the region, including oil, economic development has not taken place. As a result, the landscape consists mainly of dense secondary rainforest scattered with small towns and farming communities. The population on the border region is impoverished and lacks access to basic infrastructure like sewage, electricity and potable water.

In November 2008, staff from the Center for International Policy accompanied Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Massachusetts) on a four-day visit to Ecuador’s northeastern borderlands. Despite President Rafael Correa’s development and security plan for the border region, known as Plan Ecuador, which is currently in its initial phase, we found that the resources and infrastructure are not in place to address problems that require immediate attention. We found the humanitarian crisis to be more severe than anticipated, and the need for action – from the U.S. government as well as international humanitarian organizations – more urgent than is generally recognized.



## The Colombian Conflict

Violence in Colombia, Ecuador's much larger neighbor to the north, has been nearly continuous since 1948. A period of mass slaughter between followers of Colombia's two main political parties in the 1950s gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to a conflict between the government and leftist guerrilla groups. Two of these Marxist insurgencies persist today, killing and kidnapping hundreds of civilians each year: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN). Landowners and drug-traffickers, with help from the security forces, responded in the 1980s by arming paramilitary militias or "self-defense groups," which soon became responsible for a majority of killings of civilians.

The violence, much of it directed at civilian non-combatants, has forced nearly 4 million of Colombia's 45 million people to leave their homes in the past twenty years. More than 400,000 Colombians were internally displaced in 2008, making last year one of the worst on record and making Colombia the world's worst case of displacement. Most displaced Colombians do not cross an international border, but relocate elsewhere within the country, often to the slums that ring the cities. The number of those who do cross borders – principally into Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama – is significantly smaller, but appears to be increasing.

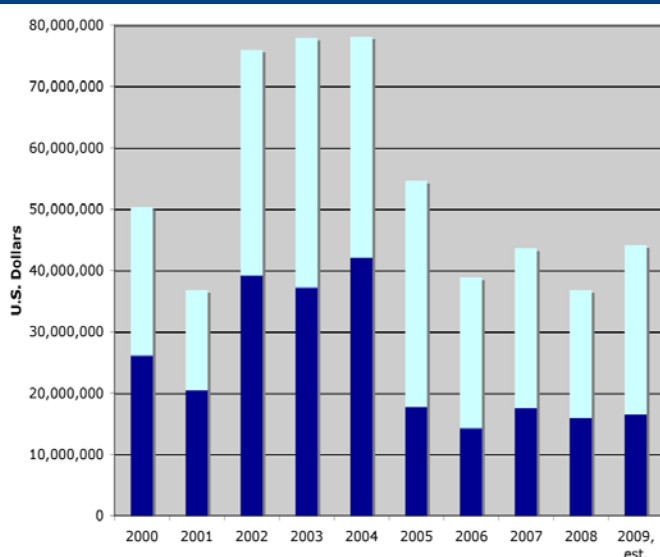
Colombia's rise as a principal exporter of illegal narcotics in the 1980s, and armed groups' increased

involvement in the trade since the 1990s, both worsened the bloodshed and moved it to formerly unpopulated wilderness zones, like much of the Colombia-Ecuador border region. The need for guerrillas and paramilitaries to buy weapons and feed recruits has driven them to compete over control of coca (the plant from which cocaine is derived), cocaine processing, and transshipment via strategic corridors out of Colombia. In the 1990s, as U.S.-funded counter-narcotics programs attacked drug production in more centrally located zones of Colombia, much coca and cocaine production moved to the remote, rural southern departments (provinces) of Putumayo and Nariño, which border Ecuador. Analysts, at the time, began to speak about the conflict's cross-border "spillover." Today, the spillover is a daily fact of life in northern Ecuador.

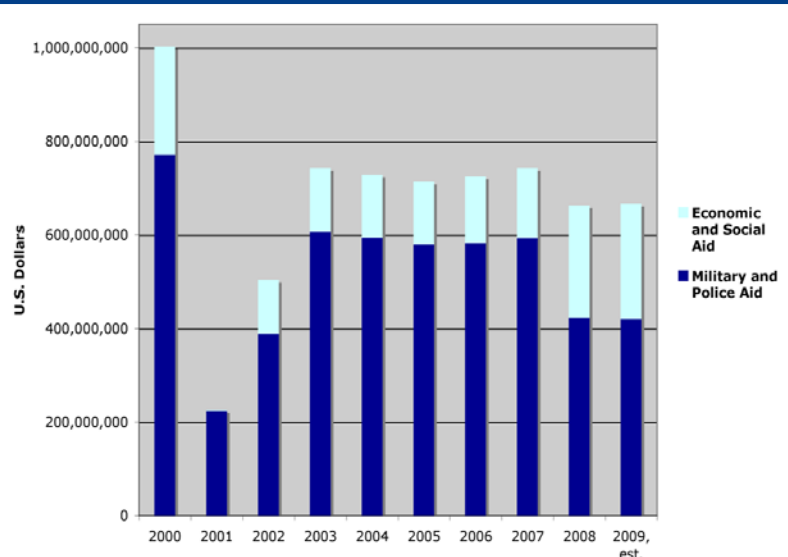
## The Spillover of Colombia's Conflict: Plan Colombia & Democratic Security

Since 2000, the United States has given \$5.3 billion in military and police aid to Colombia as part of Plan Colombia, a counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency aid program designed to help reduce cocaine production and weaken armed groups.<sup>1</sup> This strategy, combined with Colombian President Álvaro Uribe's "Democratic Security" policy, a mostly military effort to regain control of Colombian territory and defeat guerrilla groups, intensified the fighting. The U.S.-funded program of aerially fumigating remote coca-growing zones with herbicides, meanwhile, has failed to affect cocaine production, but has pushed the illegal trade

U.S. AID TO ECUADOR, 2000-2009



U.S. AID TO COLOMBIA, 2000-2009



Source: Just the Facts database, www.justf.org

into new parts of the country.

While “Democratic Security” has brought improved security to Colombia’s larger towns and main roads, it pushed armed groups and the conflict to remote areas like Colombia’s borderlands, where state institutions are almost completely absent and the vast majority of the population lives in crippling poverty. In border zones like the department of Putumayo, which forty years ago was a jungle region populated only by indigenous communities and a handful of settlers, the per capita income is 23 percent below the Colombian national average, and involvement in illegal activity like coca-growing is often the only profitable option.<sup>2</sup> With the government absent, armed groups have historically replaced the state.

These armed groups employ forced displacement as a deliberate strategy. Their brutal depopulation tactics owe to a combination of a violent land grab, a desire to control narco-trafficking routes, and a counter-insurgency strategy that aims to destroy the opponent’s perceived social base.

The policy of aerially eradicating illicit crops in the border region has had deleterious effects on the population. Aid – whether for alternative development or basic food security – is rarely forthcoming for families whose crops are fumigated. Often the only choice that remains for them is to relocate.

In Barranca Bermeja, Ecuador, a border town populated largely by Colombians, we heard refugees



A COLOMBIAN REFUGEE AND HER CHILD IN BARRANCA BERMEJA, ECUADOR

speak about why they left Colombia. From the edge of town, the forests of Putumayo, Colombia could be seen across the San Miguel River. During a town meeting, all who spoke described the effects Plan Colombia has had on their families and the communities.

Many had worked to build a home and create a life along the “agricultural frontier” where farming ends and jungle begins in southern Colombia, despite the persistent presence of guerrilla groups and narco-traffickers. That became impossible after paramilitaries first appeared in the southern region in 1999 and Plan Colombia began in 2000. Some said they tried to stay in Colombia, but after being displaced by threats and violence multiple times, they had no other option but to cross the San Miguel River into Ecuador. One Colombian refugee in Barranca Bermeja put it well in a note she passed to us as we were leaving. It read:

I ask the favor that you tell the new government of the United States that it should change that Plan Colombia. That it not send us any more weapons, airplanes or helicopters, and that the money it invests in such things be invested in agricultural projects. And that together with the Colombian government, that it give security to the small farmers so that they may return to their farms and their productive projects like cattle-raising, fish-farming and crops that we can export. But these crops must be profitable in order to combat coca and narco-trafficking. Thank you.<sup>3</sup>

REP. JIM MCGOVERN LOOKS ACROSS THE SAN MIGUEL RIVER TO COLOMBIA



## Refugees in Ecuador

Since 2000, the refugee population in Ecuador has skyrocketed - a result of the combination of push forces in Colombia, Ecuador's open asylum policy, and the Ecuadorian government's own weakness or absence in remote, sparsely populated border regions. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 709 Colombian refugees registered in Ecuador between 1996 and 2000. Since 2001, the number of Colombian refugees has increased exponentially, reaching 14,903 formally recognized refugees, 27,414 asylum seekers and 250,000 "invisible" refugees in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Ecuador's refugee crisis is less visible than similarly serious challenges elsewhere in the world because the Colombian arrivals are not concentrated in camps or similar facilities. They live among the population in economic conditions resembling those of southern Colombia, in which they must compete with poor Ecuadorians for scarce resources.

### *The Asylum Process & Causes of Invisibility*

In order to receive protection and assistance from both the Ecuadorian government and UNHCR, Colombians fleeing the violence must first register as asylum seekers and pass through several hurdles before receiving legal refugee status. The lack of a dependable application process results in a large population in need of protection and without the necessary official documents to legalize their stay in Ecuador. Most asylum seekers have little knowledge about the application process. They enter Ecuador

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through "blind spots" on the border and never receive information about their rights. Others know they have rights, but are afraid they will be deported if they apply, due to their lack of proper documentation or because they fear they will be unable to back up their claim to refugee status. Others are unwilling to register for fear of being found by the illegal armed groups from which they fled – also a common reason internally displaced people within Colombia resist identifying themselves. And finally, there are some refugees who would wish to register, but cannot afford to make the trip to submit an application from their village of residence to the closest UNHCR office, much less the Ecuadorian General Directorate on Refugees (GDR) offices in Quito, Cuenca and Lago Agrio. (In June 2008, the GDR opened a new office in Lago Agrio, the largest town in the eastern half of Ecuador's border region.)

Not only is the asylum process cumbersome and inaccessible to many Colombian refugees, but the process is overloaded and the GDR, tasked with overseeing the asylum process, does not have the administrative capacity to deal with the high number of applications it receives each year, which in 2007 reached almost 40 applications per day.

According to a functionary at the GDR, the office is "always four or five months behind" in processing applications.<sup>5</sup> As a result, asylum seekers who cannot make the trip to one of the three GDR offices to submit their application in person are often forced to wait up to ten months before they even receive their asylum seeker card – a delay that translates into insecurity and sometimes even deportation.

### *Reasons for Refusal*

Of more concern is the GDR's increasing tendency to deny refugee status to applicants. Since 2003, the GDR has denied a larger portion of applications than it has



Source: UNHCR

accepted, leading to accusations of bias. A lack of understanding of the dynamics of the Colombian conflict can lead to erroneous conclusions about a refugee's right to asylum, which include:

- The complexity of Colombia's multi-party conflict, which makes it difficult for a refugee to explain why he or she deserves asylum.
- Asylum seekers' requirement to demonstrate that the conflict has affected them in a serious manner or put their lives in danger. Authorities often define the threat from armed groups as within the limits of private disputes between individuals.
- GDR officials' tendency to place asylum seekers on the side of "supporting" armed groups, even if that support is given under duress, such as being forced to provide food to an armed group.
- The GDR's broad application of exclusion clauses especially apply if the asylum seeker is suspected of being associated with coca cultivation or processing in Colombia. Even if they were landless coca-pickers or small landholders, the GDR can reject them on grounds of being "connected with the international drug trade."<sup>6</sup>

A "National Consultation" process, recently concluded by Ecuador's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR, determined that "best practices of the Eligibility Commission are not uniformly applied among GDR staff," with the result that many asylum seekers do not receive proper attention.<sup>7</sup> This problem is exacerbated by the large application backlog that the GDR is currently experiencing, as some employees try to get quickly through the pile without taking time out to understand an asylum seeker's claim.

The situation became still more complicated in December 2008, when Ecuador, citing concerns that many arriving Colombians were in fact criminals or armed-group members, announced that it would require every Colombian crossing the border to present a *pasado judicial* or a certification of a clean criminal record. This concerns many humanitarian workers and NGOs working with the Colombian refugee popu-

lation in the border region, as most asylum seekers come from rural areas where stopping by a police station to get a certified criminal record is impossible or even dangerous. While this new policy, according to the Government of Ecuador, does not apply to Colombians seeking asylum in Ecuador, there is concern that neither Colombian applicants nor Ecuadorian border officials will be aware of this right. The policy, therefore, could lead to an even larger "invisible" population in need of protection, as ever more Colombians cross into Ecuador illegally – which, in Sucumbíos, can be done with a 60-second boat ride – without registering for asylum with the Ecuadorian government.



BARRANCA BERMEJA, ECUADOR

## Life as a Colombian Refugee

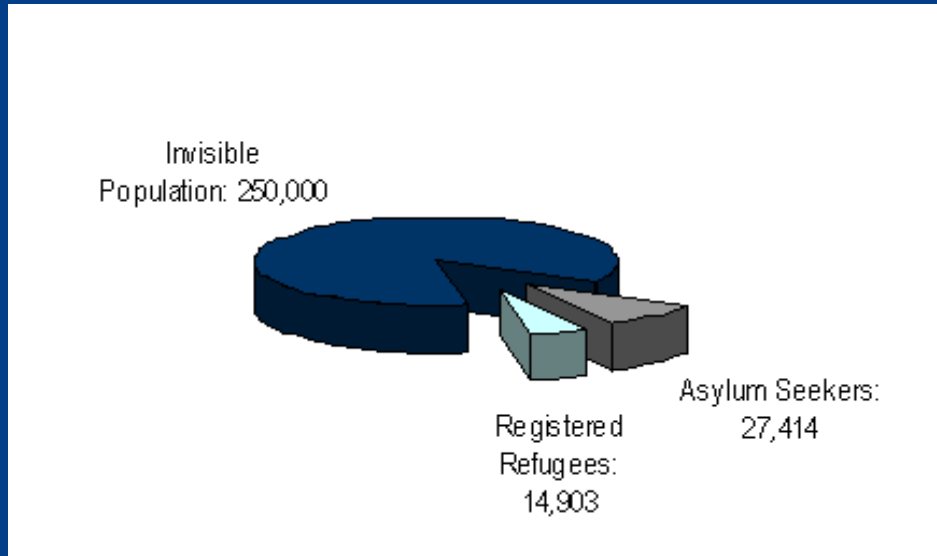
Many Colombians who cross into Ecuador choose to remain in the border region. About 87 percent of all registered asylum seekers live near the northern border.<sup>8</sup> Like the Colombian side, Ecuador's border region suffers from high levels of poverty and state neglect. Secondary roads are in disrepair, and most towns lack clean water or electricity. Health infrastructure is virtually nonexistent and many communities lack schools. As more Colombian refugees arrive with only what they can carry, these few basic services are rapidly over-burdened, and Ecuadorian

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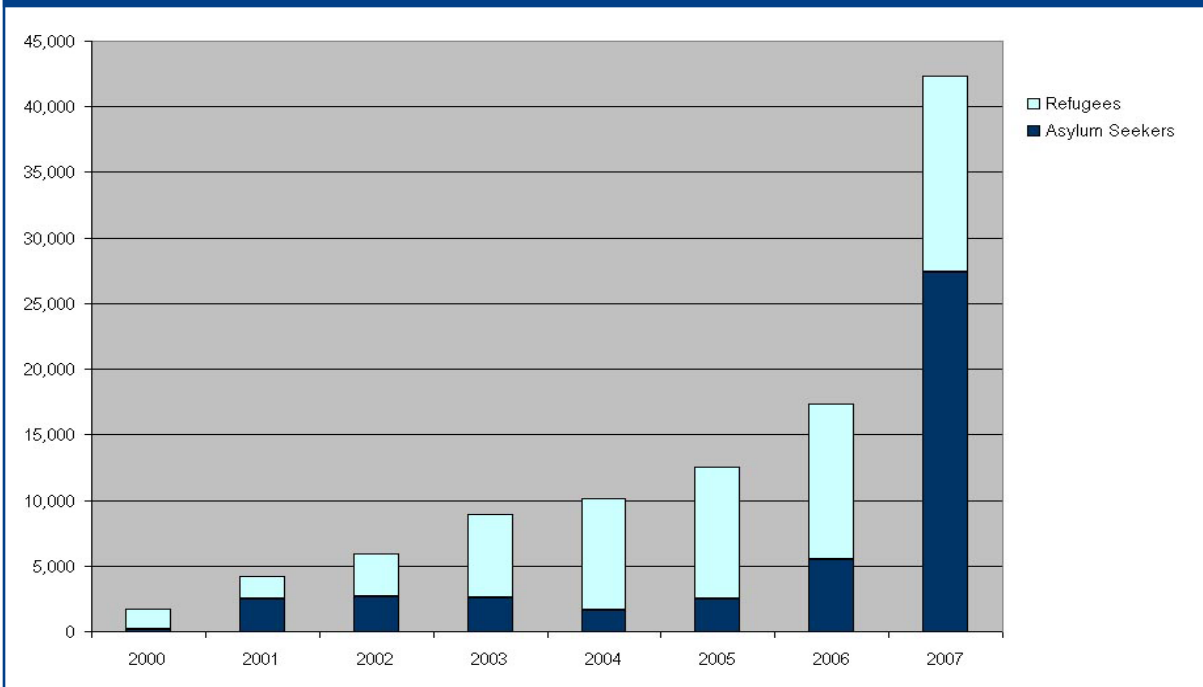
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## COLOMBIAN REFUGEE POPULATION IN ECUADOR, 2007



## COLOMBIAN REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ECUADOR, 2000 - 2007



Source: UNHCR Statistical Database

citizens' initial hospitality dwindles. It is in the border region's urban centers that Colombians are subject to the widest array of prejudices and negative perceptions, making life as a Colombian refugee in Ecuador very difficult.

### *Fear of Spillover*

While most Colombian refugees live in miserable economic conditions, they come to Ecuador principally for safety. This benefit is eroding, however. Despite Ecuador's attempts to secure its border from Colombia's conflict and drug trade, violence has increased. According to the Ecuadorian government, in the past few years "Ecuador has suffered a progressive deterioration of security and social and economic conditions on the northern border."<sup>9</sup>

While Ecuador occasionally confronts armed groups operating within its territory, the nature of the border area makes it difficult to patrol. For years, both guerrillas and paramilitaries have used jungles and secluded border towns as rest and relaxation sites. Border-zone residents often speak of a "gentlemen's agreement" in place for years between the Ecuadorian security forces and guerrillas: the army would not confront them as long as they did not disrupt public order, and especially as long as they abstained from interfering with oil infrastructure in the eastern border region, the country's main oil-producing zone and the origin of a trans-Andean pipeline.

This situation began to break down after paramilitary groups moved into Colombia's side of the border zone and began to cross into Ecuador as well. As the Colombian departments of Putumayo and Nariño became contested territory and centers of drug production, Ecuadorian territory has become a significant route for cocaine trafficking, bringing with it violent competition for control of the trade. Violence, much of it between Colombians, spiked in Sucumbíos in 2002-2004 before easing somewhat and moving west, toward the Pacific coastal province of Esmeraldas. The westward migration of the worst violence mirrors coca-growing patterns in Colombia: Putumayo, across from Sucumbíos, was the country's coca epicenter until Plan Colombia's massive spray effort displaced the crop into Nariño, across from Esmeraldas.

Fear of the Colombian conflict spilling over into Ecuador has also spawned a notion among some Ecuadorians that all refugees are armed-group members

or drug traffickers, and that they are taking advantage of the Ecuadorian asylum system to evade the Colombian government and take a break from or expand the conflict. That Colombians are somehow inclined toward criminality is a common stereotype. This not only leads to a negative perception of Colombians, but also continues to have a negative impact on the institution of asylum.<sup>10</sup>

Eighty percent of Colombian refugees in Ecuador say they fear persecution by Colombian armed groups.<sup>11</sup> The guerrillas and paramilitaries are now so active on the Ecuadorian side of the border that some refugees have even become a sort of "internally displaced refugee" within Ecuador, forced to uproot themselves by the same threats and violence they were attempting to flee when they left Colombia. This fear and insecurity is a strong disincentive to refugees' registering themselves or becoming "visible."

Both the Colombian and Ecuadorian governments have played a role in spreading fear among Ecuadorian citizens that refugees are members of the FARC. On March 1, 2008 the Colombian military bombed a FARC encampment about a mile inside Ecuadorian territory, killing Raúl Reyes, a member of the FARC's seven-person Secretariat. While the Ecuadorian government accused the Colombian military of violating its sovereignty, the Colombian government accused Ecuador of being complicit with the FARC. This episode has heightened tensions between the two countries – diplomatic relations remain cut off as of early 2009 – and deepened the perception among some Ecuadorians that "all Colombian refugees are FARC sympathizers."<sup>12</sup>

### *Police Discrimination*

Discrimination against Colombian refugees often begins at the border. Due to insufficient training of the National Police and other authorities, the rights of those in need of international protection are unrecognized.<sup>13</sup> As a result, refugees are often turned away at the border in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Police discrimination, unfortunately, does not stop at the border. "Asylum seekers and refugees have also reported that they have been subject to harassment and excessive use of force by police officers," creating a situation where the police are violating the rights of those who they are supposed to be protecting, according to conclusions of a 2006 Georgetown

University Law School report.<sup>14</sup> This discrimination includes being forced to pay bribes or offer sexual favors to avoid deportation. Refugee women are most susceptible to sexual exploitation by police, often related to a perception that Colombian women are sexually promiscuous.<sup>15</sup>

### *Right to Employment*

Legally recognized refugees, according to Ecuadorian law, have the right to work, while asylum-seekers and “invisible” refugees have no legal way to earn a living. Most refugees, recognized or not, tend to find work illegally or in the informal economy, as recognized refugees are required to purchase a \$60 work permit, an expense that most cannot afford. As a result, the majority of refugees survive in abject poverty. Almost 50 percent of refugees in the border region make less than \$1.00 per day (extreme poverty) and 25.2 percent earn between \$1 and \$2.00 per day (relative poverty).<sup>16</sup>

At a community meeting at the Jesuit Refugee Service office in Lago Agrio, multiple Colombian refugees told of not being able to obtain jobs even with the work permit. Some said that having a refugee identification card was worse than being illegal, as people then knew the applicants were Colombian and subjected them to discrimination.

### *Right to Education*

Refugees in Ecuador also report that local school districts bar their children from matriculation. UNHCR estimates show that only twenty-five percent of school-aged refugee children have access to education. Refugee children are seen as a burden on the school system, and many principals and schoolteachers discourage their attendance. Refugee children who do attend school often face hostility from gangs of Ecuadorian students, who start fights, steal their few supplies, or threaten them. The lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms results in refugee children being sent away from school by a teacher or principal for not paying a fee, purchasing a school uniform or providing official academic certificates, all requirements that the Ecuadorian government has in fact waived for refugee children.<sup>17</sup>

### *Right to Health*

Ecuadorian law grants refugees and asylum seekers access to health services, yet doctors often refuse to treat them. Ecuador’s health infrastructure is unable to deal with the Ecuadorian population’s current demand for medical treatment, let alone increased demand by Colombian refugees. As a result, in emergencies, refugees are often forced to go to private clinics that they cannot afford.<sup>18</sup> Some doctors have even resorted to misdiagnosing refugee patients, so that the clinic does not have to “waste” resources treating the refugee.

Refugees living on the border rarely have access to these institutions, since they often do not exist even for local Ecuadorians. The denial or lack of access to important institutions, such as health, education, and employment, often results in refugees crossing back over the border during the day to Colombia to find work, send their children to school or gain access to health, and returning to Ecuador to sleep. This not only puts the refugee in a situation where she is forced to put herself in danger by returning to Colombia, but also creates the impression in Ecuador that the refugees are only there to take advantage of the benefits provided to them.

Further exacerbating the situation is a lack of community-based or NGO-supported programs aimed at addressing the stigmatization of Colombian refugees in the northern border region. Ecuador’s Catholic Church and the Ecuadorian government’s Defensoría (Human Rights Ombudsman) have undertaken some

USAID AND PLAN ECUADOR BRIDGE PROJECT IN A BORDER COMMUNITY





leadership in this area, yet a much stronger anti-discrimination campaign, which is commonplace in similar situations worldwide, is necessary.

## UNHCR and the Ecuadorian Government

When significant numbers of Colombians started to flee to the border regions of neighboring countries in the mid-1990s, Panama and Venezuela militarized their borders and denied asylum to Colombians fleeing the conflict. In contrast, as analyst Martin Gottwald observes, Ecuador “acknowledged that refugees from Colombia were fleeing violations to human rights and humanitarian law and it guaranteed their admission and protection in accordance with the 1951 Convention [and] the 1984 Cartagena Declaration.”<sup>19</sup>

This liberal stance towards refugees has led Ecuador to the situation in which it finds itself today: a very high number of refugees residing within its territory combined with a lack of infrastructure necessary to meet the population’s basic needs. The Ecuadorian government has announced many important policies and strategies to effectively deal with the large refugee population, and is working with UNHCR to implement important improvements to the current refugee system. These policies, however, have yet to be fully implemented and the majority is on hold until sufficient funding and institutional capacity exist.

### *National Consultation Process*

In 2004, twenty Latin American countries, including Ecuador, endorsed the “Mexico Plan of Action,” which aims to assist refugee-receiving countries with the technical cooperation of the United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations and the international community’s financial support.<sup>20</sup> In July 2008 Ecuador’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with UNHCR, completed the required National Consultation process and developed a plan of action to improve the current situation for refugees in Ecuador. These improvements include implementing a mass information campaign in the northern border region to improve public attitudes and to educate about the registration process; strengthening authorities’ protection of refugees; implementing a program of rapid, “enhanced registration” of Colombians in need of protection; providing support for authorities issuing documentation; supporting fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures; and strengthening

the GDR’s operational capacity.<sup>21</sup>

In February 2007, President Rafael Correa announced his willingness to carry out an enhanced registration process with the goal of regularizing the status of around 50,000 Colombians and processing over 25,000 asylum applications.<sup>22</sup> The program finally entered its pilot phase on December 12, 2008, when mobile units traveled to the border village of Barranca Bermeja, Sucumbíos, to register many “invisible” refugees.<sup>23</sup> On March 23, 2009 the official “enhanced registration” process began and over 200 refugees received visas in the first three days of operation.

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“Colombia’s war is literally bleeding  
– violently – into Ecuador”

- Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA)  
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### *Plan Ecuador*

In response to increasing security concerns on the border, the Ecuadorian government has introduced “Plan Ecuador.” Covering the entire northern border region, this program aims to increase security, strengthen international and regional relationships and promote sustainable development in order to “oppose war with peace.”<sup>24</sup>

The policy consists of seven strategic components, which aim to strengthen the economy of the five border provinces, improve the population’s quality of life, increase state institutions’ presence and coordination, and broaden the management capacity of government and local organizations. While the policy focuses on the security and development of the border region for Ecuadorians, it also aims to include the local, national, refugee and immigrant populations. Though President Correa announced Plan Ecuador on April 24, 2007, most of it remains on the drawing board, due to the attention given to the drafting of a new Constitution during the first two years of Correa’s presidency, as well as a lack of resources.

The National Consultation and Plan Ecuador offer many promising steps to improve the situation of refugees on the border. However, the majority of these changes have yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, government neglect and incapacity on the border region is the norm. Beyond the largest towns, it is hard to find evidence of the Ecuadorian state’s presence. Rural residents, as well as urban slum-dwellers, are

abandoned. Without the proper resources and institutional support, Ecuador will have an impressive asylum policy on paper and a humanitarian crisis on the border.

## Other actors' roles

### *International Humanitarian Organizations and NGOs*

International humanitarian assistance is lacking. While several organizations are providing for refugees, they do so with few resources and little infrastructure. In addition to the assistance provided by UNHCR, a few other international organizations are working with the refugee population. Coordination of projects and responsibilities among the various organizations has been difficult, with overlapping efforts a frequent result. Together, these organizations' funding does not even come close to what is needed to reach the entire refugee population, and they are forced to focus on only a small percentage of the population.

### *Government of Colombia*

First and foremost, as with any refugee crisis, the true solution to the problem is peace and stability in the country from which people are fleeing. President Uribe's military strategy and both parties' refusal to pursue negotiations, however, mean that a peaceful outcome is unlikely in the medium term. At present, the Uribe administration even denies that Colombia is experiencing an internal conflict. Until the government of Colombia recognizes the conflict, and therefore addresses many of the underlying factors behind its perpetuation, all sides will continue to pursue a violent strategy. For Ecuador, the result will be a war of attrition that is fought quite intensely along the common border, with spillover expected to continue.

### *The United States*

Compared to its heavy investment in military activity and fumigation on the Colombian side of the border, the United States has contributed only modestly to efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Ecuador. USAID has provided funds to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for some road-building and water development projects within the "Plan Ecuador" framework, though communities complained about a lack of consultation about their most urgent needs. The State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration has begun to increase assistance to Ecuador through its Latin America Re-

gional account, but this amount should be increased substantially.

## What must be done

"Colombia's war is literally bleeding – violently – into Ecuador," Congressman McGovern told his colleagues on the floor of the House of Representatives after returning from the November 2008 visit. Ecuador has developed an excellent framework for work on the border zone's problems, including development projects, guaranteeing human rights, and protecting the refugee population. However, the strategy currently lacks the resources and capacity to implement it.

The solution to the Colombian refugee crisis, however, must not be the Ecuadorian government's sole responsibility. The international donor community must be aware of this humanitarian crisis and step up to help Ecuador provide protection for each refugee and ensure that his or her rights are being guaranteed, not violated.

### *Short-Term*

- **Provide immediate emergency humanitarian assistance to refugee populations** to guarantee shelter and food security, improve registration and documentation, and provide better protection and violence prevention. UNHCR's Global Needs Assessment for 2009 estimates a \$22 million shortfall for assistance to Ecuador. While the Ecuadorian government and UNHCR may take the lead, they need more help from the international community, including humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies and foreign governments, including the United States.

### *Medium-Term*

- **Colombia must address the needs of communities being displaced by violence within its territory.** One solution that many refugees addressed during our visit was the implementation of what they called "integral reparations." This means that the government recognizes that this conflict has victims who need urgent assistance and that development plans are in line with the community's plans and ideas. Colombia's Constitutional Court has already ruled in some detail on the conditions for attending to displaced populations. The Government of Colombia must fully

comply with the guidelines set out in decision T-025.

- Instead of exclusively targeting refugees in communities where poverty is generalized, **social and development assistance must be provided to entire communities that receive refugees in order to cover the urgent need, among refugees and residents alike, for basic infrastructure, health, education, and a state presence in general.** This assistance should place priority on initiatives whose design results from extensive consultation with communities, rather than decisions made in offices in Washington or Quito.
- **The United States should increase its commitment to Plan Ecuador and similar governmental efforts** through Economic Support Funds (ESF) and Development Assistance (DA) to provide the basic services addressed above.
- **U.S. contributions for Fiscal Year 2010 through the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) program of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), and through the contribution to UNHCR for the Western Hemisphere, should at least double over 2009 levels.**
- **Assistance to protect populations from armed groups and crime, strictly conditioned on human rights performance, should be provided to the border region.** Past U.S. assistance to Ecuador's security forces in the northern border region has focused on the construction of bases, the provision of vehicles and weapons, and pursuit of armed groups and suspected collaborators. Emphasis should shift toward responding quickly to threats against the population and providing protection to those guaranteeing effective civilian governance and provision of basic services.



## Endnotes

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- 11 Bilsborrow *Living Conditions of Refugees*
- 12 Community Meeting at Jesuit Refugee Services office, Lago Agrio, Ecuador.
- 13 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR, "Short Analysis on the Protection of Refugees in Ecuador," *Strengthening Refugee Protection in Ecuador* Annex 2, National Consultations (Quito, Ecuador, July 3-4, 2008), 3.
- 14 Mark Fleming et al, *Unintended Consequences: Refugee Victims of the War on Terror*, Washington, Georgetown University Law Center, Human Rights Institute, May 2006, 37-38.
- 15 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR, "Short Analysis"
- 16 Bilsborrow *Living Conditions of Refugees*
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