

Human Rights << and security in the border Colombia-Ecuador*

Colombia's natural barriers not only serve a purpose of international border but have become the safe haven of illegal armed groups. Illegal armed groups have been displaced to less populated areas including forest near international borders creating opportunities for smuggling and the traffic of goods. This article is the result of research by the Human Rights, DICA and Justice at the CEESEDEN regarding the impact of illegal armed groups on the international border between Colombia and Ecuador. In the first part we establish the socio-political context in the two sides of the border. Later we analyze the factors that have led illegal armed groups to be present in these regions, this with the purpose of evaluating the humanitarian conditions of local populations. Finally, we establish some conclusions.

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“A human rights and humanitarian perspective is essential, of course, but political, security, economic, social and development perspectives are also required”

GENERAL ASSEMBLY A/63/677

*“Implementing the responsibility to protect”,
United Nations, 2009.*

La question des droits humains et la sécurité à la frontière colombo- équatorienne

Les frontières colombiennes ont des barrières naturelles dans des régions selvatiques qui se transforment en refuges de groupes armés illégaux. Particulièrement, les frontières facilitent l'interchange de produits ilégaux, l'approvisionnement d'insumes, spécialement quand l'action de la Force Publique a générée leur déplacement du centre vers la périphérie. Cette article est le résultat développé para la ligne de recherche de Droits Humains et Justice de Ceaseden dont l'objectif a été de déterminer l'impact des actions des groupes armés illégaux dans la frontière colombo-équatorienne. Pour accomplir ceci d'abord on fait un exposé du contexte sociopolitique binational. Après, on fait un analyse des facteurs qui expliquent la présence de tels groups dans la frontière, pour ainsi expliquer la situation humanitaire présente. Finalement, on expose de quelques conclusions.

Introduction

Changes in the international system after the end of the Cold War, the emergence of globalization and the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the United States, have challenged a number of concepts and policies on the nature of the state and international relations. The notion of security has particularly evolved to become a multidimensional concept that includes not only military threats but a myriad of actors that are in constant state of interaction.

In this new context the individual has become the center of the international community's concern. Therefore, the respect and guarantee of the rights of the individual is a priority for all nations and is part of the Millennium Development Goals.

As a result, violence in Colombia, which is characterized by the conflictive relations between the state, subversive organizations, self-defense groups, and increasing transnational crimes such as drug-trafficking, smuggling and human trafficking, require the establishment of policies to improve the conditions in all international borders.

On the other hand, strengthening the security conditions in international borders is fundamental for the consolidation of Human Rights; therefore, it is important to analyze the conditions of cross-border populations in order to determine if the government of Colombia is fulfilling its role adequately.

Colombia's borders comprise about 6.342 Kilometers divided among five countries, Venezuela and Brazil to the East; Ecuador and Peru to the South, and Panama to the West. Covering over 2.080.408 km² (1.141.748 Km² of continental border and 938.660 Km² of sea border) Sea borders include

Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Ecuador and Panama¹.

The border between Colombia and Brazil covers 1.645 Km² and about 17.235 Colombians live in this border. 283.273 Colombians live in the border with Ecuador which stretches over 586Km². 54.637 Colombians live in the border with Panama which covers an area of 266 Km². 53.350 Colombians live in the border with Peru which covers an area of 1.626 Km². 1.189.979 Colombians live in the border with Venezuela which covers an area of 2.219Km²².

As it can be seen, regardless of their size, the borders with Venezuela and Ecuador are the most populated. As a result, it is necessary to analyze the Human Rights conditions and the perception of security of these populations.

Although the border with Ecuador is smaller and less populated than the border with Venezuela, its geostrategic relevance and its population have an important impact in the development of policies. Therefore, this study focuses on the population that lives in the municipalities of Valle del Guaméz, San Miguel and Puerto Asís in the department of Putumayo, in the border with Ecuador.

Political conditions between the two countries are analyzed in relation to their perception of cross-border security. Moreover, the relationship between illegal armed groups and the government is analyzed regarding the use of border regions as safe haven; finally, we intend to present the human rights situation of the population in the border between Colombia and Ecuador, more specifically in the municipalities of Valle del Guaméz, San Miguel and Puerto Asís.

> 1. Cross-border socio-political context



Map, Department of Putumayo³

1 TODA COLOMBIA, *Geografía: Fronteras de Colombia - límites y tratados*, Available online: <http://todacolombia.com/geografia/fronteras.html>, [Accessed online 10 February 2011].

2 SOCIEDAD GEOGRÁFICA DE COLOMBIA. *Población en Zona de Frontera*. [En línea] Consultado en http://www.sogeocol.edu.co/Ova/fronteras_colombia/fronteras/poblacion/zona.html. [Citado el 15 de marzo de 2011].

3 Source: rgs.gov.co

Colombia has built close ties with neighboring countries based on direct dialogue on areas like commerce, democracy, economic integration and the protection of Human Rights. Nonetheless, cross-border tension has raised as a result of security conditions, drug-trafficking, migration, smuggling, and the presence of illegal armed organizations.

In the last decade Colombia's neighboring relations have been somewhat antagonistic; particularly with Venezuela and Ecuador with whom diplomatic and economic relations have been very tense over different aspects⁴.

Tarnishing diplomatic relations between the two countries can be attributed to the security conditions in the border, human rights violations and infringement of International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law.

The conflict in Colombia has a greater impact on the border with Ecuador than with any other country in the region. In regions like Carchi and Sucumbios (Ecuador) it is common to find illegal Colombian groups extorting money from local populations. Similarly, guaranteeing the security of the pipelines has become a major challenge⁵.

Despite having been suspended in 2007 and 2009, the Binational Border Commission (COMBIFROM) between Colombia and Ecuador, was created in 1996 in order to strengthen bilateral exchanges and fighting crime along their shared border. The COMBIFROM is also in charge of coordinating, evaluating and supervising military and police missions along the borders as well as preparing mechanisms directed

at the prompt solution of problems related to cross-border relations.

Throughout most of the 20th century Colombia and Ecuador maintained good relations. Nevertheless, the beginning of the 21st century has been marked by a progressive distancing between the two countries mainly due to the negative effects of the Colombian conflict on Ecuadorian territory.

1989 Ecuador and Peru concluded a comprehensive peace agreement, ending the longest-standing boundary dispute in the Americas. The treaty also meant a redesigning of Ecuador's security and defense policy. Ever since, Ecuador has considered the conflict in Colombia as the main threat to its national security. This was reinforced by the signing of Plan Colombian between the United States and Colombia in 1999 and failed peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2002.

Back then former Ecuadorian president Gustavo Noboa argued that the conflict in Colombia had serious negative implications for Ecuador for three fundamental reasons⁶: (1) the constant transit of guerrilla groups across the border into Ecuador turning the country into the "rearguard" of the guerrillas in their fight against the Colombian government and paramilitary groups; (2) Anti-coca herbicide spray over the border which has a negative impact on local populations on both sides of the border; (3) the constant flux of Colombian refugees into Ecuador and the subsequent violation of human rights.

In spite of President Noboa's beliefs, cross-border relations between the two countries remained good. Solidarity, cooperation and economic exchanges were favored over disputes regarding border issues.

However, relations grew tense after the election of Rafael Correa as President of Ecuador in 2007. In Colombia, President Alvaro Uribe embarked on a militarist campaign against terrorism and drug-trafficking, joined forces with the United States and implemented neoliberal and capitalist economic policies. On the other hand, President

4 On March 2008, the Colombian government launched a military operation in Ecuadorian territory directed at capturing FARC commander Raul Reyes. Despite the operation's successful results, diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken. The government of Ecuador immediately and loudly protested and cut relations with Colombia. Venezuela's reaction to the attack on Ecuador was also immediate and included the mobilization of troops to the borders and aggressive declarations against the government of Colombia. Ecuador filed a suit against Colombia at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in November 2010 for Human Rights violations against an Ecuadorian citizen (Frankling Aisalla) who was also killed in the attack. Ecuador files a lawsuit against Colombia before the International Court of Justice in the Hague to Stop Anti-Coca Herbicide Spray over the border which has been happening for more than 8 years.

5 Andrade, Pablo. La Seguridad en las Fronteras Ecuador – Colombia. Available online: <http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/1889/1/CI-04-TC-Andrade.pdf>. Accessed online 10 May 2011.

6 Patiño, Carlos. Mirar a Ecuador: Los medios de comunicación en las relaciones Colombo-ecuatorianas (2004-2006). Bogotá: Unimédios, 2007, p. 24.

Correa promoted socialist reforms of the state and the economy supported by Venezuela's Bolivarian initiatives. Correa became a critic of US policies and publicly declared that his country did not share a border with Colombia but with the FARC⁷. Moreover, Ecuador's neutrality tradition⁸ was ratified by that government's decision not to recognize the FARC as a terrorist organization.

In the meantime, Uribe's Democratic Security Policy started to produce concrete positive results in its fight against illegal armed organizations. Military campaigns against illegal armed organizations forced the guerrillas into marginal regions in the country where the conflict hadn't been as important. Regions that had been untouched by the conflict became the center of military operations and a safe haven for guerrillas and other criminal organizations. As a result the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC) started crossing the border with Ecuador violating Ecuadorian sovereignty and compromising security conditions in the two countries.

It is worth noting that the Ecuadorian border is better developed than that of Colombia. This border is an important commercial port and the center of the oil industry in Ecuador especially the region of Sucumbios⁹. Nevertheless, the infrastructure is still quite poor. In contrast Colombia's side of the border is highly underdeveloped despite efforts to modernize the region and increase the number of Colombian troops in Putumayo and Nariño.

It can be implied, therefore, that rough political relations between Colombia and Ecuador and the lack of effective governmental and military presence in the border have resulted in the isolation and marginalization of humanitarian concerns and goals to security and political objectives.

> 2. Illegal armed groups and the Colombia-Ecuador border

Sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population.

Michael Focault
Security, Territory and Population

The presence of illegal armed groups in the border is not recent. In fact, it is believed that the FARC first arrived in Putumayo in the 1970s looking for new sources to finance their activities and to create a communication bridge in the border with Ecuador. Coca-leave plantations started in the 1980s and the link between the guerrillas and drug-trafficking developed in the 1990s when the guerrillas controlled an important part of the countryside and the production of cocaine¹⁰. Today, FARC's 48th front operates in the region and is in charge of nearly 41% of the coca plantations in the department of Putumayo¹¹.

Although the ELN's presence has been more important in Santander, Norte de Santander, Cauca and Arauca, this group has also some influence in the departments of Putumayo and Nariño¹².

Currently, ten thousand men are said to be part of FARC and ELN troops in the border region. The Ecuadorian border is used a place to rest, recover and gather supplies. They are present in three fourths

7 On March 5th 2008 in a meeting with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Rafael Correa stated that: "If Uribe did not mobilize any troops to the border is not because he doesn't want to, it's because he can't. The border is controlled by the FARC, not by Uribe, not by the Colombian Army; they would be massacred, that is clear. If you want we can go to the border and you will see that it is empty, the FARC are hiding in the jungle. Ecuador borders on the FARC, not on Colombia, not on Colombia's armed forces." (Video) Ecuador sabrá responder la agresión si no hay condena contundente al ultraje del gobierno de Uribe, Available online: <http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/n110293.html>

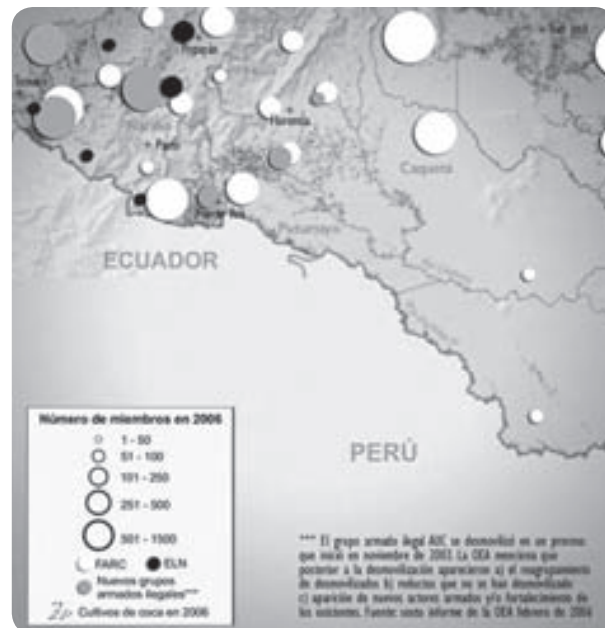
8 EL ESPECTADOR. Ecuador se mantendrá "neutral" frente al conflicto colombiano. Bogotá: diciembre 10 de 2007.

9 Ibíd.

10 Moreano, Hernán. Ecuador-Colombia: entendiendo el problema fronterizo. Serie de Documentos Electrónicos N° 1, FLACSO Chile, p. 3.

11 Ibíd.

12 Moreno, Giovanni. La guerra en el 2010, ¿qué caminos tomará el conflicto?, Bogotá: Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, 2010. Available online at: <http://www.nuevoarcoiris.org.co/sac/?q=node/908>, [Accessed online 2 November 2010].



Map Illegal Armed Groups in the border. Year 2006¹³

of the towns near the border and recruit Ecuadorian citizens. Moreover, they support radical leftist organizations in Ecuador like the Alfarista Liberation Army (ELA) and the Group of Popular Combatants (GCP) and train them in the use of explosives, weapons, intelligence and urban operations¹⁴.

As a result the Ecuadorian Government has sent troops to the region in order to strengthen military cooperation and implement effective operations¹⁵ in its territory despite its economic and military limitations.

Self-defense groups are also present in the area. Between 1997 and 2003 the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) embarked on a campaign against guerrilla groups in north and southeast Antioquia, south Guajira, Cesar, Bolivar and Putumayo

which resulted in the killing, torturing and displacing of local populations¹⁶.

Once AUC members demobilized, Emerging Criminal Gangs (BACRIM) emerged as criminal organizations seeking to control drug-trafficking. The National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR)¹⁷ has identified the BACRIM as organizations that resulted from the demobilization of self-defense groups¹⁸ operating throughout the country including the border with Ecuador.

The most important criminal gangs in the border area are: The Black Eagles, the Rastrojos and Organization New Generation (ONG)¹⁹. Many other

13 Fuente: Colombia, la frontera sur y la guerra. Available online at: <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/183-edicion-144/4103-colombia-la-frontera-sur-y-la-guerra.html> Accessed Online 10 December 2010].

14 Departamento de Estado en su informe anual 2005 sobre lucha contra el terrorismo en el mundo Available Online. Accessed online 10 November 2010.

15 FUNDACIÓN SEGURIDAD Y DEMOCRACIA. Colombia y Ecuador: Dos Visiones de Seguridad, Una Frontera. Available online at: <http://elecua.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/colombia-y-ecuadoer.pdf>. [Accessed online 4 May 2011].

16 VERDAD ABIERTA. Masacres: la ofensiva paramilitar. Available online at: <http://www.verdadabierta.com/nunca-mas/masacres/202-masacres-el-modelo-colombiano-impuesto-por-los-paramilitares->. [Accessed online 8 November 2010].

17 The CNRR is a governmental organization in charge of the process of reconciliation and reparation between criminal organizations and the victims.

18 The CNRR has categorized BACRIM organizations as: Emerging: refers to armed organizations or the strengthening of old ones in the area of influence of demobilized self-defense groups. Rearmed: regrouping of demobilized criminal organizations that control specific communities.

19 COMISIÓN NACIONAL DE REPARACIÓN Y RECONCILIACIÓN. Informe # 1 Disidentes, Rearmados y Emergentes : ¿Bandas Criminales o tercera generación paramilitar? Bogotá. CNRR. Mayo 2007.

organizations are associated with crimes committed in the region and are believed to be linked to the FARC and/or the ELN:

(...) after having to withdraw from several regions as a result of the Democratic Security Policy after 2003, the FARC reallocated their drug-trafficking activities to border regions in the southwest (Ecuador) and north-east (Venezuela). In addition, the FARC joined forces with criminal gangs (BACRIM) including “Los Rastrojos” and other demobilized groups from illegal self-defense groups²⁰.

As a result, several de-facto alliances have developed among illegal armed groups active in these regions²¹. Such alliances are the result of pragmatic cooperative criminal activities in the southwestern corridor as the border with Ecuador becomes an important passage point for drug-trafficking and the smuggling of goods and weapons, as well as safe rearguard for guerrilla organizations.

But the presence of illegal armed organizations in border regions is not only the result of the criminal interests of these organizations; it is also the result of weak security policies on the part of the Colombian and Ecuadorian governments. Although the border covers over 600km of forests and difficult and harsh separated lands, the Colombian departments of Putumayo and Nariño and the Ecuadorian provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios have, for long, received little attention from the central governments. This has resulted in the occupation of border areas by illegal armed organizations²².

It is important to note that, in spite of the military operations carried out by the two governments criminal networks are well organized and developed

and have a proven capability to adapt quickly to changing policy and military efforts; intimidation and coercion on local populations being an important part of their criminal strategies. General Fabian Narvaez has pointed out that:

There is, undoubtedly, an important criminal network active in the border. I cannot confirm that all the population in the border is involved in criminal activities, however, whether forced or not, local populations are involved in criminal activities.

The logistics for drug-trafficking, intelligence and counter-intelligence, smuggling, recruiting and any other type of criminal activity are under constant change and construction²³.

Therefore, it can be argued that the disarticulation and dismantling of criminal organizations in border areas face serious difficulties. Criminal networks ought to be fought against with strong and integral governmental policies that include intense military operations, institutional presence and the protection and guarantee of civilian, political, and social rights for local populations.

The establishment of criminal organizations in border regions has caused a humanitarian crisis. It is important to outline the conditions and vulnerabilities of local populations in relation to violations to human rights and security conditions in the border.

> 3. Humanitarian situation of border populations

Up to this point we have dealt primarily with security conditions in the Colombian departments of Putumayo and Nariño in the border with Ecuador, where nearly 53.596 people live including native populations like the Cofàn, Cuaquier, Inga, Koreguaje, Pasto-Quillasinga, Siona and Witoto²⁴.

20 Mackenzie, Eduardo. FARC y las BACRIM: un frente común. Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos. GEES. Análisis 7814. 24 de Mayo de 2010.

21 Cuesta, Salomón. La Frontera de Fronteras Putumayo. Available online at <http://repository.unm.edu/bitstream/handle/1928/10780/La%20frontera%20de%20fronteras%20Putumayo.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed online 20 April 2011.

22 González, Fernán. BOLÍVAR. Ingrid. VÁZQUEZ. Teófilo. Violencia política en Colombia: De la nación fragmentada a la construcción del Estado. Bogotá. CINEP. Marzo 2006.

23 Grupos armados de Colombia tienen redes de apoyo en la frontera ecuatoriana. Available online at: <http://www.hoy.com.ec/noticias-ecuador/director-de-inteligencia-admite-redes-de-apoyo-al-narcotrafico-en-frontera-con-ecuador-395401.html>. Accessed online 31 October 2010.

24 SOCIEDAD GEOGRÁFICA DE COLOMBIA. Población en Zona de Frontera. Available online at: http://www.sogeocol.edu.co/Ova/fronteras_colombia/fronteras/poblacion/zona.html. Accessed online 15 October 2010.

Although local crops productions include rice, coffee, sugar cane, beans, corn, African palm, potato and fruits among others, the concentration of coca plantations is very high in comparison to other regions. In 2006 nearly 12.254 hectares were used for coca cultivation, in 2007 that number increased to 14.813 hectares, in 2008 it decreased to 9.658 and in 2009 it was 5.316 hectares. Although coca plantations in the region have considerably decreased in recent years, 45% between 2008 and 2009, they represent 8% of total coca plantations in the country²⁵.

This can be better understood through a pyramidal explanatory structure: weak governmental institutions which cause porous borders are at the base of the structure; this facilitates the actions of illegal armed organizations linked to drug-trafficking; the establishment of such organizations in border regions leads to confrontation with the armed forces; illegal crops are fumigated with anti-coca herbicide; all these elements together result in forced displacements of local populations, illegal recruiting, terrorism, homicide, torture and kidnapping.

According to reports by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) several Ecuadorian children have been recruited by the FARC in border regions:

Since 2002, the UNHCR claims that according to reports out of the border, the FARC and other Colombian criminal organizations now recruit young people to enlist in their struggle. Border areas include General Farfán –also known as “La Punta”– which report recruiting controls for potential recruits and paid recruitment²⁶.

Moreover, poor living conditions on both sides of the border force local populations to accept being recruited by the FARC. Health services, social welfare and a reliable legal system are almost totally absent. Spraying has caused and continues to cause damage

to the health of entire families who live near the plantations. It pollutes the water sources and reduces the quality of agriculture. This has resulted in young people accepting to work in coca plantations²⁷.

Forced displacement is also a dreadful result of criminal activities in border regions:

According to the UNHCR between 2.5 and 3 million people have been displaced and 250.000 Ecuadorians need to be protected. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2000 and 2007 about 45.231 asylum applications were considered by the Ecuadorian government, 14.300 were accepted²⁸.

This puts, off course, great humanitarian pressure on both countries to build better health, education and employment services for local populations.

Although Ecuador offers better safety conditions for thousands of Colombians, the increasing number of criminal organizations on both sides of the border threatens the stability of the Ecuadorian provinces of Esmeraldas, Carchi and Sucumbios. Moreover, increasing asylum applications and growing numbers of Colombians in Ecuador have caused the displacement of Ecuadorians within their own country. Humanitarian support on the Ecuadorian border is very limited, although it is higher than in Venezuela and Panama²⁹.

Increasing kidnapping and homicide have also resulted from the activities of illegal criminal organizations. In Putumayo 92.2 homicides were committed in 2006³⁰. Homicide has also proven to be

25 OFICINA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS CONTRA LA DROGA Y EL DELITO. Monitoreo de Cultivos de Coca 2009. Bogotá: Gobierno de Colombia, 2010.

26 COALICIÓN CONTRA LA VINCULACIÓN DE NIÑOS, NIÑAS Y JÓVENES AL CONFLICTO ARMADO EN COLOMBIA. Informe conflicto Armado en Colombia. Fronteras: la infancia en el límite. Febrero 2007. Available online at: www.coalico.com Accessed online 31 October 2010.

27 *Ibíd.*

28 Bermeo, Dolores y Pabón. Nathalie. Las relaciones de seguridad entre Colombia y Ecuador: una nueva construcción de confianza. RESDAL. 2008. Available online at: <http://www.resdal.org/jovenes/investigacion-pabon-bermeo.pdf>. Accessed online 31 October 2010.

29 INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT MONITORING CENTRE. Un conflicto que traspasa fronteras: el impacto humanitario del conflicto colombiano en Ecuador. Octubre 2009.

30 OBSERVATORIO DE DERECHOS HUMANOS DE LA PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA. Diagnóstico del Departamento del Putumayo. Available online at http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co/observatorio_de_DDHH/departamentos/diagnosticos/2007/putumayo.pdf. Accessed online 3 November 2010.

selective for example, in September 2008 a school teacher was dragged out of the school by FARC guerrillas and killed in El Sande near Samaniego³¹. 2800 people have been kidnapped between 1996 and 2009, 28 in the department of Putumayo³².

Illegal armed organizations in the border are closely linked to International Humanitarian Law violations including the production, use and trafficking of landmines. Between 2003 and 2006 187 people were injured by landmines in Putumayo³³ including military personnel and civilians³⁴.

Colombian military forces have, for long, been working on the detection and elimination of landmines in regions where the re-building of stable, democratic government is a necessity. As a result, in recent years, military operations in border regions have intensified resulting in the withdrawal of FARC and ELN guerrillas to marginal areas:

Military operations in the Ecuadorian border helped diminish the operative capacity of the FARC –Raul Reyes second in command was killed in a raid near Teteyè Putumayo, and ELN guerrillas have almost disappeared from the region. The government has been able to recover control over an important part of the territory. However, drug-trafficking remains a serious threat to the future of the border, contributing to widespread public corruption, damaging legitimate economic growth and fueling violence and insurgency. Moreover, the border has become a safe haven for terrorist organizations³⁵.

FARC's 48th front influence has diminished as a result of increasing drug seizures in the border and the killing of guerrillas by the military forces:

In a meeting with President Juan Manuel Santos, the Minister of Defense, Rodrigo Rivera, indicated that at least 22 FARC guerrillas died in combat against the Army in the Colombian municipality of San Migule in the border with Ecuador³⁶.

Emerging criminal gangs continue to operate in the border. As result drug-trafficking associated to these organizations remains high. However, military operations have help improve the situation in the border especially after 2010. Similarly, the government of Ecuador has increased border controls and stationed 7.000 soldiers in the border according to Miguel Carvajal, Ecuadorian Minister of Security³⁷.

It is important to understand that the presence of illegal armed groups in the border has diverse and profound political and social implications including the auto-perpetuation of violence³⁸. The Military Forces and the government are focusing on stopping these threats. It is necessary to join efforts and strengths in order to overcome the threats posed by criminal organizations in border regions.

Despite actions and policies implemented by the Military Forces, the negative effects of illegal armed groups in border regions are noticeable in the local populations. Several FARC camps exist inside Ecuador where the Colombian insurgents stock up on supplies and rest and local populations are forced to cooperate:

31 EL TIEMPO. "Nariño, En La Encrucijada". Available online at: <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-3091528>. Accessed online 8 May 2011.

32 FONDELIBERTAD. Realidad de las Víctimas del Secuestro en Colombia. Bogotá: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Marzo de 2010, p. 21.

33 OBSERVATORIO DE DERECHOS HUMANOS DE LA PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA. Óp., cit.

34 EL TIEMPO. "Luto Indígena En Nariño Por Muerte De 3 Niños Por Mina". Available online at <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2997436>. Accessed online 10 May 2011.

35 Seguridad y Defensa en la frontera Colombia-Ecuador. Available online at: <http://www.elpartidodelau.com/files/informeEspecial22-1.pdf>. Accessed online 31 October 2010.

36 El Universal. Abatidos 22 rebeldes de FARC en la frontera con Ecuador. Available online at: http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/09/19/int_ava_abatidos-22-rebeldes_19A4490891.shtml. Accessed online 1 November 2010.

37 Diario el Espectador. Ecuador blindará fronteras. Available online at: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-224105-ecuador-blindara-frontera-colombia-tras-ataque-de-farc>. Online access 1 November 2010.

38 The auto-perpetuation of violence is a concept coined by Armando Borrero Mansilla, an expert on security and defense issues. The concept refers to social phenomena that encourage violence beyond a form of peace governed by the rule of weapons, in other words, forms of violence that outlast social reorganizing processes not necessarily related to armed groups. As a result, armed struggles that were considered finished may reappear. Emerging Criminal Gangs are an example of this phenomenon.

The presence of illegal armed groups in the border is undeniable. These organizations have for many years used the territory as a retreat zone where they can go out to bars and take time to stock up on supplies and food. Now it appears as though the FARC infiltrate the neighboring countries on more substantive operations. They are also operating vast coca plantations on foreign sovereign territory. Sucumbios and San Lorenzo (two zones in Ecuadorian territory) are constantly patrolled by unidentified criminal groups that can be either guerrillas, paramilitaries or drug-traffickers³⁹.

It is estimated that a large percentage of local populations on both sides of the border is involved in regular commerce with the criminal organizations. The people have been forced to coexist with illegal armed groups. Political, social, and economic instability has resulted in weak national institutions and the violation of human rights.

According to a series of reports published by the CINEP between 2006 and 2010, over 26 crimes have been committed against border populations (61.53% by the FARC and 38.46% by Emerging Criminal Gangs like the “Black Eagles” and “Los Rastrojos”⁴⁰).

19.23% were homicides, 19.23% were forced appropriation or destruction of private property, 15.35% were forced displacement, 15.35% were kidnappings, 15.35% were crimes associated to terrorism and 11.53% were associated to the production, use and traffic of landmines. Social groups affected include indigenous populations, union-workers and demobilized people⁴¹.

Similarly, the National Army has denounced human rights violations including the use of torture, kidnapping and the use of landmines. Human rights violations and infringement of International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law are rampant.

Conclusions

The border between Colombia and Ecuador covers an area of 586 kilometers. Most of the border is covered by thick vegetation and a difficult topography which makes it difficult for both governments to establish plans for its occupation. These factors facilitate illegal activities in the border which has resulted in increasing levels of violence affecting local populations.

Health services, social welfare and a reliable legal system are almost totally absent in both regions. Weak governmental participation in the border has contributed to increasing violence and worsening social and economic conditions.

Although the Ecuadorian border is better developed it is also true that income redistribution and social opportunities remain far too weak to provide the necessary means for operational prevention and protection of vulnerable populations by national policies. The influence of criminal organizations in border communities has extended to recruitment of poor indigenous populations and settlers to work in coca-leaf harvesting as well as for other jobs associated to criminal activities.

The presence of illegal armed groups (FARC, ELN, AUC and BACRIM) in the border has caused social, economic and political destabilization. The Colombian departments of Nariño and Putumayo and the Ecuadorian provinces of Esmeraldas, Sucumbios and San Lorenzo have been deeply affected by criminal organizations. Increasing forced displacements of local populations, illegal recruiting, terrorism, homicide, torture and kidnapping are an important political concern for both Countries.

Finally, a binational agreement between Colombia and Ecuador aimed at increasing security and promoting better conditions for local populations is necessary. The military forces of both countries play an important role in safeguarding national borders and responding to criminal activities, they increasingly share these tasks. Joint policies aiming at the protection of local populations and the construction of better social, economic and security conditions on both sides of the border are being currently developed.

39 Bermeo, Dolores. Óp., cit.

40 Observatory of Peace of the research integrated system of CEESEDEN. War College Colombia, January, 2011.

41. Ibid

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