

The New Poor of Contemporary Colombia: Armed Conflict And Impoverishment of Internally Displaced Persons

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Abstract

Today, the Colombian humanitarian crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is one of the main factors contributing to the growing number of people who rapidly become extremely poor, and flood into “belts of misery” in, and around, major cities. This paper examines the impact of the internal armed conflict in contemporary Colombia on the well-being of IDPs, through analysis of causal connections between the internal armed conflict, internal displacement and the process of impoverishment of IDPs.

In this research paper we provide a historical overview of the development of the internal displacement phenomenon in Colombia and evaluate changes in various socio-demographic characteristics of IDPs due to the internal displacement during the 1990s. In order to demonstrate the way in which the armed conflict in Colombia has contributed to the worsening of living conditions of a significant part of the Colombian population, we draw upon statistics that demonstrate who bears the responsibility for forcing people to migrate to the cities, and to figures showing the loss of assets by IDPs. Finally, by analysing the key facets of *Plan Colombia*, a major initiative, with the participation of the United States, to combat the illegal drug industry in the Western hemisphere, introduced at the end of the 1990s, we conclude that the issues of international cooperation, armed conflict and internal displacement in Colombia are very closely interconnected, and that they are of great importance, not only for IDPs themselves, but also for the whole of Colombian society and for the country’s future development.

1. Introduction

“Poverty is to be without voice and without choice.”

Charles Bassett,

Canadian International Development Agency

Approximately three-quarters of the Latin American population live in urban areas and about two-thirds of the poor live in the major cities. Thus, in terms of the number of poor, poverty in Latin America is predominantly an urban phenomenon (Salazar Cruz, 2002). This does not mean, however, that the living conditions of rural populations are much better than those of people living in urban areas. On the contrary, a comparison of characteristics of rural and urban poverty shows that the rural poor have considerably lower indexes for housing, sanitation, water supply and education than those living in the urban areas. According to Oscar Altimir (1994), migration serves as a re-distributive power, which moves poverty across sectors, decreasing the proportion of poverty in the rural sector and raising it in the urban sector. Alain de Janvry and Elizabeth Sadoulet (1999) also prove that the rate of rural-urban migration is fundamental in evaluating poverty and inequality by sector, and that a high rate of rural-urban migration is a contributor to urban poverty. This is because “migration is instrumentalized, as it is an endogenous response to poverty. Rural-urban migration thus displaces poverty from the rural to the urban sector” (Janvry and Sadoulet 1999, 10). But does this explain all the cases of the growth of urban poverty due to migration from rural to urban areas? Does the impoverishment of rural inhabitants always take place before these people decide to move to the city, and is this always the reason why they migrate? While it is true that the level of migration from countryside to cities is high everywhere in Latin America (Korzeniewicz and Smith, 2000), it would be a mistake to give one common explanation for this process. That is because it is necessary to remember that each country has its own specific characteristics with regard to the dynamics of internal migration. In Colombia, the specifics of internal migration are provided by the longstanding internal armed conflict, which force even that part of the rural population that, in other circumstances, would not consider leaving the places of their habitual residence, to migrate to the big cities. Today, this flow of migrants is seen as a major humanitarian crisis in the Americas.

“Colombia: Casualties of War”, the title of an article devoted to “the story of Colombia’s 1.5 million forgotten refugees” in the magazine *Newsweek* in August 1999, was indicative of the growing worldwide attention to the problem of forced migration in Colombia, or internal displacement, as it is called when migration is taking place primarily within the borders of the same country. In this paper, with respect to the displaced persons, we prefer to use the universally accepted abbreviation - IDPs (internally displaced persons). It is important to note that, unlike the *Newsweek* magazine and other mass media, academics are still relatively slow in studying the problem¹. With respect to the internal displacement in Colombia caused by the armed conflict, so far there have been almost no serious attempts to provide a systematic analysis of the internal displacement, even though the process itself has existed in the country for many years. Some otherwise excellent books on internal migrations in Colombia, published in the past, focused almost entirely on the analysis of the economic component as a principal motor for internal migration, and only briefly mentioned violence associated with the armed conflict as a cause of forced migration that constituted an important part of the flow of internal migrants (Cardona et al, 1977; Torales, 1979). On the other hand, the recent inquires into internal displacement in Colombia focus on

the current developments, and usually focus predominantly on the juridical problems associated with the process of displacement, frequently missing opportunities to present the complex picture (see, for ex., Medellín Lozano, 2002). Therefore, although a comprehensive historical examination of Colombian internal displacement is certainly beyond the scope of this paper, before examining the details of the present-day process of impoverishment of IDPs, we would first like to offer a brief historical overview of the process of internal displacement in Colombia.

2. History of Internal Displacement in Colombia

Based on changes in the dynamics of the growth in the number of IDPs in Colombia, we have divided the period 1950s-2000s into four distinct phases. The chronological period of the first phase of the internal displacement falls within the 1950s. During this period, an estimated two million people were displaced from their traditional homelands². This period is known in Colombian history as *La Violencia*, a name associated with a heavy partisan conflict in the rural areas of the country, with at least 300.000 people killed (Torales, 1979). The conflict started as a violent demonstration of opposition between the Conservative and Liberal parties. However, very soon *La Violencia* became a battle for the distribution of land in the Andean rural coffee-producing areas. As shown in a comparative analysis of the political economy of poverty, equity and growth of Colombia and Peru, the most important difference between Colombia and Peru in the 1950s was the structure of ownership of natural resources (Urdinola, 1992). Coffee in Colombia had been produced by numerous small-scale peasant farmers, with a wide territorial distribution. On the contrary, in Peru, sugar and cotton were cultivated on coastal plantations owned by an oligarchy. The Colombian undeclared civil war of the 1950s forced hundreds of thousands of Colombian peasants to abandon their homes and usual economic activity and seek shelter and a new life in the cities. The growing difference between rural and urban salaries generated by the policy of import-substitution industrialisation was also one of the driving forces in the process of internal migration in Colombia in the 1950s-1960s. With regard to regional income distribution, in 1950 the GDP per capita in Bogotá was ten times higher than that in the department of Chocó. In addition, although in 1950, in both Colombia and Peru a similar number of the population lived in rural areas (approximately 60 percent), the growth rate of the Colombian urban population in the 1950s-1960s was much higher than that in Peru. According to DANE (1993), in 1951 Colombia had a total population of 11.548 million people. According to the 1951 census, 61.3 percent of the population, or 7.079 million people, corresponded to the rural sector and 38.7 percent, or 4.469 million people, corresponded to the urban sector. The census of 1964 shows that the population in Colombia increased dramatically (17.484 million people) and the growth rate of urban population was very high. To the middle of the 1960s, the distribution of population by sectors had changed dramatically: the rural population had fallen by 13.3 percent and constituted 48.0 percent (8.392 million people), whereas the urban areas accounted for 52.0 percent (9.092 million people). Thus, it is clear that, at that time, internally displaced people were among the principal actors in the growing urban population in the country.

Despite the end of *La Violencia* in 1965, the violence itself did not disappear from the daily lives of the Colombians. The growing guerrilla movements, on one side, paramilitary groups, on the other side, and, later, narco-terrorism, had brought about the phenomenon of all-encompassing violence³, and marked the beginning of the second phase of the internal displacement (middle of the 1960s - beginning of the 1990s). At the same time, the economic development of Colombia was very impressive, thanks to

the coffee bonanza and illegal drug trade: during this period, annual economic growth reached eight percent of GDP⁴. However, unlike in some other Latin-American countries, the rural poor in Colombia were unable to take advantage of economic growth due to the absence of security in the rural areas during the period of the economic heyday. Moreover, the development of illegal drug trafficking was conducive to the entanglement of poor peasants in the production chain of the illegal drugs industry. Meanwhile, the process of internal displacement continued, although the dynamics of internal displacement were rather slow: the estimated number of IDPs during this phase, which lasted approximately two and a half decades, is equal to the number of IDPs during the next period of only a few years; approximately 600.000 people (CODHES, 1999). That is because, with respect to the internal armed conflict in the country, this period in Colombian history can be characterised as being comparatively peaceful, witnessing a number of peace agreements between the government and various insurgent groups: during the 1970s, at the end of the 1980s and during the first part of the 1990s, the government effectively conducted a series of peace negotiations with the rebels.

The most important agreements were reached in March of 1990, with the Movement of April 19 (M-19) and the People's Liberation Army (EPL), in April of 1991 with the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), and, in May of the same year, with the indigenous movement, "Quintín Lame". The demobilisation of the rebels permitted many of them to participate in the Constitutional Assembly, which adopted a new Colombian constitution.

The third phase of internal displacement began with the escalation of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, in the middle to second part of the last decade of the 20th century. The fact is that, despite the success of peace negotiations between the government and a number of insurgent groups during the previous decade, for the major anti-government force - the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) - the breakdown of a ceasefire agreement on December 9, 1990, symbolizes the beginning of a new era in its armed opposition to the government⁵. Other actors in this bloody scenario, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and National People's Army (EPN), also became much more active during this period.

The escalation of the armed conflict brought with it the whole spectrum of related violence. Paramilitary groups were very active, and their number was growing during the 1990s⁶. Violent crimes and threats of violence became the norm for the rural populace. Numerous gangs and weak law enforcement brought a crime wave to the Colombian countryside. Thus, it is not surprising that internal displacement increased, and the number of IDPs grew dramatically fast: in 1995 the estimated number of people forced to leave their homes was 89.000, while just three years later, in 1998, the number of new IDPs reached more than 300.000, i.e. more than a threefold increase (CODHES, 1999a).

During the third phase, the process of internal displacement affected almost half of the country. In Colombia, there are 1070 municipal areas. During the period of 1995-1998, 427 of them, or approximately 40 percent of the total number, suffered internal displacement at least once. Moreover, 73 of these 427 municipal areas were constantly affected by the displacement process during the above-mentioned period.

However, as the government of Andres Pastrana revived the peace process with the FARC at the end of 1998, the magnitude of internal displacement diminished, and the number of new IDPs started to decrease (CODHES, 2000).

The new, fourth and current phase of the internal displacement in Colombia, can be traced from the time when the government re-established control over a zone in southern Colombia previously ceded to

the FARC (January 2002), and the implementation of a new government policy, the so-called “policy of democratic security”, intended to end the large-scale negative influence of insurgency in the country. This policy, launched by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez during the second part of 2002, came together with the active realisation of the proverbially famous Plan Colombia, which is discussed in more detail later in this paper. Both the policy of democratic security and Plan Colombia have greatly affected the situation of IDPs in the country. This is because, in many areas that formerly experienced relatively low-intensity and episodic armed clashes at the end of the previous phase of the internal displacement, the combat has intensified significantly since President Uribe came to power⁷. In this paper, however, we will limit the bulk of our analysis to the chronological framework of the third phase, since it is still too early to fully evaluate the results of Uribe’s presidency, which ends in 2006 and, in the case of the first two phases, there is not enough data available to perform the kind of analysis we have in mind.

3. The Exodus: Geography and the Mechanism of Displacement

In 1997, the growth of internal displacement in the country forced the Colombian government to officially define an internally displaced person. Colombian law No.387 of 1997 recognises an internally displaced person as “any person who is forced to migrate within the national borders, abandoning his or her place of residence and habitual economic activity because his or her life, physical health or personal liberty have been jeopardised, or directly threatened, by the presence of any of the following situations: internal armed conflict, internal tensions and disturbances, generalised violence, massive violation of human rights, infractions of International Humanitarian Law and other circumstances caused by the above-mentioned situations that can alter, or have already seriously altered, public order”⁸. Although the definition of an internally displaced person given in Colombian Law is exhaustive, it does not fully satisfy the purposes of our investigation, since, in this paper, we aim to demonstrate that internal displacement in Colombia leads to profound changes in the socio-demographic characteristics of internally displaced persons, resulting in the large-scale impoverishment of IDPs. This is why we concentrate on the socio-economic phenomenon of the impoverishment of internally displaced persons due to the armed conflict and related violence (henceforth called the IDP phenomenon). But what exactly is it that differentiates the IDP phenomenon from other forms of internal migration?

There are a number of departments which had an extremely high rate of population displacement (often more than 20 percent of the total population) during the middle - second part of the 1990s. These departments are Antioquía, Chocó, Córdoba, Bolívar, Meta, Putumayo, Boyaca, Magdalena, Cesar, and Norte de Santander. At the same time, the important feature of this internal displacement was that the internally displaced population was concentrated in the departmental capitals and in the areas located geographically close to the large metropolitan areas. Large metropolitan areas like Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Montería, and Bucaramanga received the majority of displaced individuals and families, who came from various geographical locations throughout the country (see **Fig. 1**). The geography of displacement should not be viewed as a random choice by the displaced persons. Instead it can be explained by the mechanism of internal displacement, which we describe below.

Based on interviews with internally displaced people (CODHES, 1996, 1999b, and others), we can conclude that the process of internal displacement is made up of similar stages in most of the cases. Thus, we can describe the mechanism of internal displacement in the following way. First, people try not to abandon their residences completely. They start by temporarily leaving their homes for short



Figure 1. Principal cities, *Zona de Distensión* (de-militarised zone), and departments of Colombia. Most affected by the process of internal displacement in the mid-1990s.
Source: adapted from Medellín Lozano (2003).

periods of time, migrating between the places where they live and work. When the living conditions in the places where they live become insufferable, people usually move to the nearest small town. Finally, many of the refugees decide to move to a city due to the desire to relocate to areas where they will be less likely to become targets in the armed conflict: in Colombia, it is the rural areas and small towns that are turned into a battlefield, while the large metropolitan areas are considered to be safe in this respect. That is what differentiates internal displacement from other forms of internal migration, such as economically motivated ones. While it is true that the internal displacement, which originates in the rural areas, is linked to the process of economic migration caused by the general crisis in the agricultural sector in the country, IDPs - in most cases - would not leave the places of their habitual residence if they did not perceive a constant threat to their lives caused by the armed conflict: their migration is not motivated by “purely” economic reasons. Moreover, when we look at the stages of internal displacement, the difference between the second and third stages seems to be very important: migration involves a change of lifestyle (Wolf, 1981), and, in this sense, migration from a village to a small town is not a major change, but migration from a village to a metropolis is a significant one, which is directly connected to the process of impoverishment. That is because, as we demonstrate in this paper, IDPs are not prepared for, and are not looking for, this change to their lifestyles.

4. IDPs in Aguablanca and Soacha and the Armed Conflict

It can be argued that the value of a research methodology depends on the specific objective of a given study and, while some large comparative studies provide helpful guidance for the understanding of major generalities of a process, case studies, or small comparative studies, are more appropriate for identification of specific causal paths, and can help to explain the outcome more fully. Therefore, in order to achieve a better understanding of the processes related to the IDP phenomenon, in the following section of this paper we compare the IDP populations in similar compact urban areas of two major Colombian cities.

For a comparative analysis of IDP populations, we have chosen two areas, Aguablanca and Soacha, which are similar in number of inhabitants and their strategic locations on the routes taken by the displaced migrants. For this analysis, which falls chronologically into the third phase of the process of internal displacement in Colombia, we make extensive use of the data collected by the National Information System on Forced Displacement and Human Rights in Colombia, maintained by the Council on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), a non-governmental organization founded in 1995, as well as the materials collected by the Department of Geography of the University of Valle (Mora and González Barreiro, 2001, and other). In the case of the surveys conducted by CODHES, a quantitative approach relying on stratified random sampling was chosen. This sampling technique divides IDPs into stratum and draws a sample from each stratum at random. As Steven Howes and Jean Olson Lanjouw argue, “stratification with equal sample rates in the strata ensures a more representative sample overall, and so reduces variance. It can also be used to ensure that one obtains sufficient observation from small sub-populations of interest” (Howes and Lanjouw, 1997, 3). From this point of view, the methodology used for the collection of data in Aguablanca and Soacha seems to be the most appropriate.

Aguablanca is a special district within the city limits of Cali, the capital of the department of Valle del Cauca, and the third most important city in the country. This district was formed almost spontaneously in the end of the 1970s through the illegal occupation of unoccupied land on the right bank of the river Cauca by the poorest strata. In the 1990s, Aguablanca, with a population of 350.000 people, attracted tens of thousands of displaced people from the departments of Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Nariño y Putumayo, among others. The estimated number of internally displaced people who settled in this part of Cali during the period 1995-1999 is 53.500 persons (CODHES, 2000).

Soacha, with a population of 300.000 people, is a municipal area adjacent to the Colombian capital, Bogotá. It is the geographical concentration point in closest proximity to the capital for people migrating from the central and southern parts of the country, i.e. from such departments as Putumayo, Caquetá, Huila, Tolima, Quindío, Risaralda, and Caldas. It is interesting to note that in the cases of both Aguablanca and Soacha there is a presence of displaced persons from the department of Putumayo, which is characterised as an area with an extremely high rate of displaced population⁹. During the period 1995-1998, approximately 25.800 internally displaced persons migrated to Soacha (CODHES, 1999b).

In order to reveal the forces that are responsible for the process of internal displacement, we need to compare the results of research among the IDP populations in Aguablanca and Soacha. The analysis of this data, collected in the years 1997 and 1998 respectively, shows that the ratio of the groups responsible for the internal displacement, is similar in both cases. We have already noted the chronological con-

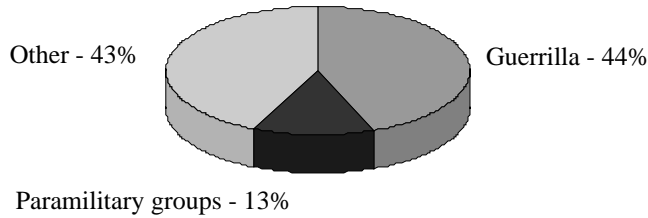


Figure 2. Major groups named responsible for internal displacement by IDPs in Aguablanca.
Source: Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz (1997).

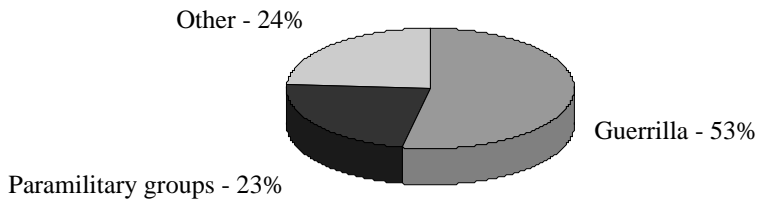


Figure 3. Major groups named responsible for internal displacement by IDPs in Soacha.
Source: CODHES (1999b).

nection between the escalation of the internal armed conflict in Colombia and the growth in the figures for the internally displaced population in the country. As shown in **Figs. 2 and 3**, the majority of respondents have named various guerrilla groups as the major cause for the process of forced migration. The paramilitary groups are the second major force responsible for the displacement.

In the figures above, the forces behind “other” include other actors in the Colombian internal conflict: the IDPs in Aguablanca named the armed forces (4 percent of the total number of respondents), security authorities (DAS) (2 percent), police (3 percent), as those responsible for their displacement (Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz, 1997). For Soacha, the figures are the following: armed forces (4 percent), security authorities (DAS) (1 percent), and police (3 percent) (CODHES, 1999b). However, there are also some other active “players in the game”: in both Aguablanca and Soacha, a significant part of the IDPs indicated that they had to migrate because various criminal groups and outlaws (primarily those involved in the production chain of the illegal drugs industry) took advantage of the ongoing armed conflict and low presence of state authorities in order to terrify the rural population and force them off their land (Tokatlian, 2000; Mora and Gonzalez Barreiro, 2001).

Hence, as the replies from IDPs clearly show, the process of displacement is caused by the ongoing armed conflict, and the IDP populations in Soacha and Aguablanca represent the major segment of civilian population of the two major Colombian cities, who have been directly affected by the war in Colombia and are, as shown below, destined to become the new poor in urban settlements in contemporary Colombia.

5. Internal Displacement and Impoverishment of IDPs

It is a known fact that when there is competition over land in rural areas and no solution has been provided to ease this pressure in the long-run, migration of the rural population to urban areas grows, pre-

cisely because peasants cannot establish control over the means of their production, or they do not have enough spare capital to invest in order to improve their competitiveness. On the other hand, the experience of Latin America in general, and of Colombia in particular, shows that during times of import-substitution industrialisation policy, the migration of rural population to the cities aided in the formation of local labour markets, and that was indeed one of the ideas behind these economic reforms (Valderrama and Mondragon, 1999). In 1950-1957, the rapid growth of the Colombian economy helped to improve living conditions in urban areas. The migrants were assimilated into the cities and were able to find their appropriate place within the urban social-economic infrastructure. This changed during the next decade. Unemployment and growing problems related to living in low stratum urban areas had made the assimilation process for rural migrants much more difficult.

The opportunity for employment is the most important parameter determining the income of the urban poor (Moser, 1996). As we have already mentioned, the IDP phenomenon is not just about the migration from a village to a small town, which differs from a village only in the number of houses. Internal displacement in Colombia is a kind of migration that involves a cardinal change of lifestyle, which occurs only after migration from a village to a city. In many cases, the urban incomers from the rural areas are not sufficiently educated for a city job (Salazar Cruz, 2002). The data collected by CODHES (1999a) show that among the displaced persons in Aguablanca the level of unemployment reached 48.9 percent, while almost all of the heads of households formerly had a stable source of income, either from selling agricultural products produced on their land or from another type of job.

Another important characteristic of IDPs, which helps us to understand the process of impoverishment, is that these people have lost most of the assets they owned. Since they have had to flee rapidly from their homes in order to avoid becoming casualties of the internal war in Colombia, these people have lost such assets as their houses, crops, cattle, etc. The loss of these assets is one of the clear manifestations of the causal connection between armed conflict and the impoverishment of IDPs in Colombia.

The loss of assets becomes even more obvious when we compare ownership of land before and after the displacement: most of the land was abandoned (**Figs. 4 and 5**)¹⁰. In addition, when we take a closer look at some other socio-demographic characteristics, which are normally used to assess the well-being of a population, it is easy to see that the internally displaced persons, after being forced to migrate to urban areas, have significantly lower indexes for housing, education, medical services, and access to public services than they had before displacement took place.

Housing. CODHES (1999a) informs us that before displacement, 86 percent of IDPs lived in houses (70 percent lived in their own homes), located in rural or semi-rural areas. When forced to migrate to urban areas, only 33 percent of these people continue to live in houses (and only 13 percent own their

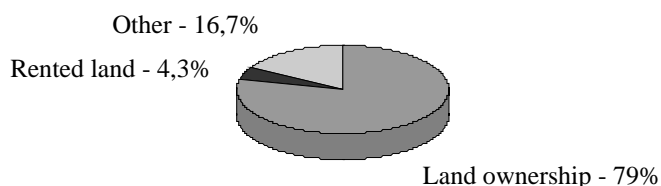


Figure 4. Distribution of IDP land before displacement.

Source: Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz (1997).

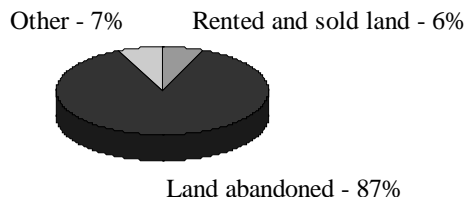


Figure 5. Distribution of IDP land after displacement.

Source: Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz (1997).

own home). 46 percent live in rented rooms, and 21 percent live in squatter settlements located in high-risk urban areas.

Education. At the beginning of the 1990s, 41.9 percent of the urban poor in Colombia had incomplete primary education, 20 percent had completed primary, and 12.8 percent had incomplete secondary education (DANE, 1993). Among the displaced population, the figures are as follows: 37 percent of internally displaced people had incomplete primary, 12 percent had completed primary, and 14 percent had incomplete secondary education. 10 percent of IDPs are illiterate (CODHES, 1999a). Moreover, within IDPs, 77 percent of children and young people who were attending schools before the displacement no longer had access to formal education after migration (CODHES, 1997). These numbers are especially appalling since the overwhelming majority of IDP families have more than two children (CODHES, 1997)

Medical Services. The data available from CODHES (1999a) manifest that only 34 percent of displaced families have access to medical services. 8 percent of families reported illnesses, including respiratory, gastrointestinal, and arterial diseases. In addition, most of the displaced population has been exposed to psychological pressure accompanying the process of internal displacement.

Access to Public Services. In general, the access to public services in Colombia is much better in urban areas than in the countryside. For example, in the early 1990s, an aqueduct as a source of water supply was available to 81.3 percent of the urban poor and only to 18.1 percent of the rural poor (DANE, 1993). As a rule, electricity, water supply and sanitation services were more accessible for IDPs after the displacement than before. However, the situation changed in 1998. The figures for that year published by CODHES (1999a) show that 46 percent of internally displaced people used to have access to electricity before migration and only 43 percent still have access to this service after they were forced to move. Even in the case of water supply, 37 percent of IDPs had access to an aqueduct before they were forced to migrate but only 32 percent continued to use it as a source of water following displacement.

Thus, there is no doubt that the internally displaced population in Colombia has poorer living conditions after migration to urban areas. This is a direct contribution to the process of growing urban poverty, which slowed during the country's economic growth at the end of the 1980s and during the first part of the 1990s (World Bank, 1994), but which then regained its force due to the economic recession, on the one hand, and the escalation of the IDP phenomenon, on the other hand.

It goes without saying that the internally displaced persons were not willing to accept their fate without trying to change the situation. In 1998, a group of IDPs occupied the Red Cross building in Bogotá for several weeks, demanding attention to, and real solutions for, the problem. During the second part

of the 1990s - beginning of 2000s, the internally displaced persons also organised more than a dozen different protests and demonstrations, which sometimes became violent. That was a clear indication of the insufficiency of the assistance provided.

During the period we have chosen to examine - the third phase of the internal displacement, humanitarian aid - food, transportation and lodging - was available to 81 percent of internally displaced people country-wide (CODHES, 1999a). The principal sources of help were the Church (28 percent), the Government (21 percent), non-governmental organisations (20 percent), family and friends (20 percent). This ratio reflects a situation in which the way aid was provided did not guarantee the satisfaction of the priority needs of the displaced population. Hence, after the storm of IDPs' protests and severe criticism from international organizations for the lack of a thorough approach to the problems of IDPs, the government of Colombia issued a decree modifying the existed law on forced displacement. The major new feature introduced by decree No. 2569 in December 2000 was the creation of a unified nation-wide register of displaced persons to be maintained by a specialized governmental institution, the Social Solidarity Network (RSS), which also received a broad mandate to deal with the issues related to internal displacement, through the National System of Comprehensive Assistance to IDPs. However, it is clear that a real solution for the problems generated by the IDP phenomenon is closely connected to the task of solving the whole complex of problems faced by the contemporary Colombian State. At the same time, there can be little doubt that the most important challenge is to diminish the intensity of the internal armed conflict and to resume a full-scale peace process.

6. Plan Colombia and the IDP Phenomenon

The administration of President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) attempted to achieve a peace agreement with the FARC by providing the biggest insurgency group in the country with a "safe haven" - a de-militarized zone, which covered an area equal in size to Kyushu Island, the so-called *Zona de Distensión*¹¹ (see Map 1). This attempt, however, failed to reach the desired result. The end of the FARC's control of the zone was marked by a dramatic escalation in armed combat. Not surprisingly, the new President, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, was elected on the wave of a strong demand of a significant part of the Colombian electorate to conduct a more aggressive campaign against the guerrilla and paramilitary movements. The new President is constantly calling on the international community to participate more actively in finding a solution to the enduring conflict in Colombia. However, the issue of international involvement in Colombia is overshadowed by the already-mentioned Plan Colombia, the largest project the United States has participated in within Latin America during the post cold-war era. Since Plan Colombia directly influences the processes of internal displacement in the country, it is certainly worthy of our attention.

As was shown in the analysis of the socio-political conditions for the growth of the illegal drug industry in Colombia (Rouvinski, 2000), when legal economic activities are limited, in some rural areas the poorest strata of the Colombian peasantry turn to the production of coca. Many IDPs either had to grow coca before the displacement or have had to accept the fact that now their land is abandoned it is being used by the drug lords to grow coca¹². Moreover, when they do not find a job in the cities after being displaced, some of the IDPs choose to become "harvesters" - the seasonal workers who are hired only for the period of the coca harvest. The "harvesters" recruited among the IDPs make charter trips to the areas of coca production, leaving their families in the places of the new settlement¹³. On the other hand,

the United States is the major market for the illegal Colombian drugs and, during the 1990s - beginning of the 2000s, a national emergency was declared several times by the White House due to the threat to US national security posed by the Colombian illegal drug trade¹⁴. Thus, when the government of Pastrana came to power in 1998, it found itself under great US pressure to conduct a much stricter policy toward the illegal drug industry in the country¹⁵. Those were the circumstances of the birth of a plan, which became known as Plan Colombia. Today, it may be said without exaggeration that Colombian society is in a state of war between opponents and supporters of the plan. That is because many share concerns that the implementation of the plan will worsen the situation rather than improving it.

The first version of Plan Colombia, introduced in 1998, focused on rehabilitation and investments in the zones most affected by the production of the illegal crops, i.e. in the areas of the so-called environmental conflict¹⁶. The major guerrilla movements were supposed to participate in the process of designing and implementing Plan Colombia. The initial plan involved sustainable development, and sought to achieve the necessary balance between use and conservation of resources through a consensus-building scheme¹⁷.

Later on, however, a new version of the plan appeared, mainly because the United States decided to finance the plan but considered that the earlier version was not effective enough to quickly stop illegal drug production in the country¹⁸. The words "sustainable development" have disappeared from the new version of the plan, and, from this point on, the emphasis was placed on the fumigation of the areas of environmental conflict, or the areas of industrial coca production, to use the terminology of the US State Department¹⁹. In addition, the major role in the plan's implementation was given to the Armed Forces and the Police²⁰. Their actions later became known among the IDPs as "land cleaning" because the anti-drug actions in the areas in question usually have been accompanied by the total destruction of all crops and destruction of property²¹. And, since the areas of fumigation and of "land cleaning" correspond to a large extent to the land abandoned by the Colombian IDPs (CODHES 2003), further implementation of Plan Colombia in its current form threatens the future of many IDPs, who have become destined to remain permanently in the Colombian belts of misery.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted, firstly, to provide a brief historical overview of the process of internal displacement in Colombia, secondly, to demonstrate a causal mechanism of the process of impoverishment of internally displaced persons in contemporary Colombia, due to the armed conflict during the period of the second part of the 1990s, and, thirdly, to show how one of the most important programs of international cooperation between Colombia and the United States is related to the issue of the impoverishment of IDPs. Concluding our analysis, it is important to emphasize the fact that as long as the government of Colombia is not able to provide IDPs with enough personal security and to guarantee them respect for their economic, social and cultural rights in the places of their permanent residence, Colombian peasants will continue to flee their homes. However, the implementation of Plan Colombia in its current form only further complicates the situation. Thus, there is little doubt that the IDPs will continue to concentrate in the urban areas of major Colombian cities. Therefore, the governmental policy towards IDPs should be based on a clear understanding of the nature of the IDP phenomenon. There is a need to develop a well-thought out strategy to deal with internal displacement, not just a simple form of assistance to internally displaced persons, aimed at their rapid return to the place they were

forced to abandon and which has become, in many cases, “cleaned land”.

Unfortunately, so far there is not a great deal of international co-operation or offers of help for Colombian IDPs, although the presence of UN specialized agencies and international non-governmental organizations, which focus on providing relief for internally displaced persons in the country is growing²². On the other hand, some departments and municipalities in Colombia are trying to build upon their local programs of attention for internally displaced persons and are attempting to find the mechanisms and means to protect this sector of the population, as well as to eliminate discrimination against, and exclusion of IDPs by other sectors of society and, at times, even by the authorities *en situ*. After all, the problems of IDPs do not only affect the new poor of Colombia. These problems are of great importance for Colombian society as a whole. Moreover, since internal conflicts and internal displacement constitute some of the most serious problems for a number of other countries, the bi-centennial story of the forced migration in Colombia certainly deserves very careful consideration.

Notes

- (1) As recently as February 2003, the participants in a conference on internal displacement raised concerns about the state of the art in the field of research on internal displacement. Many aspects of the scientific research into such matters as what distinguishes research on internal displacement from other types of research, and the purposes and consequences of research still have to be more clearly defined. For more on this subject see *Forced Migration Review* (2003).
- (2) This estimation of the number of displaced persons during the first phase is given in Sandoval (1999). For the related statistics, see also Medellín Lozado (2003, 24-25). Overall, it should be noted that the relevant statistics concerned with the period between 1950s - end of 1980s are very scarce and based mostly on the results of the censuses conducted by the Colombian National Department of Statistics in 1964, 1973 and 1985.
- (3) The *phenomenon of all-encompassing violence* is understood by Colombian economists and social scientists as the enormous impact of various continuous manifestations of violence on Colombian social and economic organization. See more on this subject in Avila, L.A. et al (1997, 12-15)
- (4) Impact of the illegal drugs industry on the Colombian economy during this period is well-known: “From the beginning of the 1960s, when the so-called *bonanza marimbera* [illegal marihuana trade - V.R., J.V.S.] began, till the end of 1970s, when the country witnessed a coca bonanza, Colombian authorities were tolerant with respect to the illegal drugs industry and its actors. The government appreciated the fresh investments to the national economy; it was at that time when the Banco de la República opened a sinister window aimed at capturing financial resources in US dollars without asking any questions about the origins of money” (Caballero 2001, 128; here and everywhere in this paper the translation from the originals in Spanish is ours - V.R., J.V.S).
- (5) The peace negotiations were initiated by the government of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), who signed a cease-fire agreement with the FARC in 1982. However, the agreement with the FARC was broken down by the government of César Gaviria (1990-1994), who ordered a bombardment of the Casa Verde (the FARC’s Headquarters) on December 9, 1990. It is important to note that since the FARC has initiated its armed struggle with the government once again, this insurgent group has changed its tactics: if before 1990, the majority of the FARC’s operations were directed from their bases in the Colombian rainforests, after 1990 the FARC’s leaders decided to broaden the geography of the combat by attacking the economically most important areas everywhere in the country, as well as those regions of Colombia where a significant rural infrastructure exists, thus creating the so-called “corridors of displacement”.

- (6) The paramilitary groups were looking for financial support from the illegal drug dealers, the owners of latifundia and big businesses. Their number was growing. This came together with a process of unification of various paramilitary groups in the country, and resulted in 1997 in the creation of Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). It was not until the beginning of 2004 that some groups of paramilitaries began the process of demobilization.
- (7) In August 2003, a representative of the Colombian government, Alejandro Gaviria, stated in an interview that the government will not be able to stop the growth of poverty in the circumstances of the current economic crisis - there is no money available for the purposes of fighting poverty; for example, only slightly more than 14 million US dollars were devoted to deal with the problem of unemployment (*El País*, August 31, 2003). It is appropriate to mention here, that, according to some calculations, each day of the continuing armed conflict in the country costs the government of Colombia approximately 11.5 million US dollars, or more than 4 billion dollars a year, not including the amount contributed by US aid (CODHES, 2003).
- (8) Quoted from *La Ley 387 de 1997*, July 18, El Congreso de Colombia, Bogotá D.C..
- (9) The Department of Putumayo is one of the primary targets for the fumigation of illegal crops and active presence of paramilitary groups in the area has been constantly reported.
- (10) It is difficult to establish the precise area of the land abandoned, but the following testimony speaks for itself: "One of those gentlemen who buys the best lands has bought a lot, and what he did first was to change the course of the stream ... so our harvest was damaged... mysteriously, those who complained started to find some of their relatives dead and others were threatened and forced to abandon their land" (Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz, 1997, 41)
- (11) Can be translated to English as "Zone of Goodwill"
- (12) Up until the end of the 1990s, illegal drug businessmen controlled over 11 million hectares of the best arable land in Colombia, owing to the tremendous growth of the internal displacement and the economy of violence (CODHES, 2003)
- (13) For more details on this subject see Rouvinski (2000)
- (14) *Continuation of Emergency with Respect to Significant Narcotics Traffickers Centered in Colombia*. Office of the President of the United States, Federal Register Notice 440, Washington, DC, October 17, 2001
- (15) During the administration of president Ernesto Samper (1994-1998), relations between the United States and Colombia deteriorated to a critical level when Colombia was excluded from the US list of the countries actively fighting against illegal drugs and the US stopped its financial aid. In 1996, president Samper's US visa was cancelled and the State Department used the term "narcodemocracy" to refer to the regime in Colombia, mainly because of accusations that Samper's presidential campaign had been financed by money from the Cali drug cartel.
- (16) The *environmental conflict* is an interesting term, used by some Colombian and US authorities to describe the areas where illegal drugs have been produced, and which have a heavy presence of guerilla and paramilitary groups actively involved in the illegal drug trade.
- (17) More information on the first version of Plan Colombia can be found in *European Parliament Resolution on Plan Colombia and Support for the Peace Process in Colombia*, European Parliament Document, February 1, 2001.
- (18) At the beginning, the government of Colombia was seeking help in the plan's implementation from the European countries, but the version which is currently being implementing is very different from the plan that was proposed to Strasbourg. To the general public, the current Plan Colombia was introduced as "a purely Colombian initiative". However, the United States confirmed the fact that extensive consultations between

Colombia and the US preceded the plan's presentation to the public. US State Department advisors actively participated in the drawing up of the current version of Plan Colombia (Crandall, 2002).

- (19) See, e.g. *The Andes Under Siege: Environmental Consequences of the Drug Trade*. A publication of the International Information Programs, US. Department of State, Washington, D.C., 2001; *Glyphosate Colombia: Questions and Answers*. An informative bulletin by the US Embassy, Bogota, Colombia, 2001
- (20) From the total aid package of 1.6 billion US dollars only 2.5 million are dedicated to environmental programs, while over \$460 million has been allocated for the acquisition of US-produced weapons (*Plan Colombia*. Fact Sheet by the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2001).
- (21) See, e.g., *Plan Colombia's "Ground Zero". A Report from CIP's trip to Putumayo, Colombia, March 9-12, 2001*. International Policy Report, Center for International Policy, Washington, DC, April 2001.
- (22) For the most recent information on the presence of UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations in Colombia see: <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wCountries/Colombia>

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