

Annex 1 – The characteristics of neo-paramilitaries

There is an ongoing debate between social organisations and the Colombian government on the characteristics and existence of paramilitary groups in Colombia.

Since the demobilisation in 2006 of paramilitary groups who were part of the AUC, the Colombian State has refused to acknowledge the political interference of these armed structures in regional territories. Since then it has called them Criminal Gangs (*Bandas Criminales* or *Bacrim*) referring exclusively to their economic interests which they satisfy through illicit profit-making activities. The National Centre for Historical Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* - CNMH)¹ has recently proposed the use of the term Armed Post-Demobilisation Groups (*Grupos Armados Posdesmovilización* - GAPD) to differentiate currently-existing structures from those existing prior to the 2006 paramilitary demobilisation, and suggests they have the following characteristics in common:

- They are not articulated at the national level, i.e. they are limited to regional action;
- They have evolved from structures that demobilised from the AUC;
- They have political influence in the territories where they operate and seek to interact with politicians or the state security forces.

However according to the CNMH they differ from previous structures prior to 2006, because their scope is more limited than that achieved in the previous period.

Because of their evident influence in regional territories and their clear political links, many social organisations call these GAPD neo-paramilitary structures, a term that is used in this report. The organisation INDEPAZ, which has investigated the presence and characteristics of these groups in its annual reports, highlights, among other aspects, the following:²

- The expansion of the group known as the *Clan del Golfo - Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*.
- The strengthening of the presence of this group in the north-west of Colombia and Bajo Cauca, the Pacific Coast from El Darién to Tumaco; its incursion into Norte de Santander and the Orinoquía region.
- The clear incursion into urban centres and important municipal centres in the areas mentioned. There the group has entered into disputes with other groups and taken over areas left by the FARC. The situations in Tumaco, Buenaventura, Quibdó, Cúcuta, Barrancabermeja and Mitú are particularly serious.

¹ National Centre for Historical Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*). [Análisis de las dinámicas territoriales y temporales de los Grupos Armados Posdesmovilización. Los retos para el posconflicto](#). 2017

² Indepaz. [El complejo paramilitar se transforma](#). 4 March 2017, p. 11-12

- In other urban centres there are reports of alliances and networks with local gangs, protection racket collection offices and money laundering processes.
- Retraction of the group known as *Los Rastrojos*.
- Reappearance of the group calling itself *Las Águilas Negras*. In 2013 they were present in 39 municipalities in 15 departments. In 2014 their presence fell to 27 municipalities in 14 departments, and increased in 2016 to presence in 41 municipalities in 19 departments. There has been a proliferation of *Águilas Negras* pamphlets in parallel with the progress in the Havana peace talks, smearing leaders and social organisations that the group consider to be allies of the FARC.
- Use of recycled acronyms and naming people as military objectives.
- There is a notable increase in activity, which is attributed to small far-right groups, local powers with a paramilitary background, para-politics and state officials who are allegedly continuing to use dirty war tactics as a way of resisting the peace agreements.
- Reorganisation of the remaining groups in the Orinoquía region under the umbrella of the *Clan del Golfo*. Regrouping is evident in Meta, Guaviare, Vichada and Casanare.
- The groups have affirmed their presence in 17 departments, with a large or significant presence in Córdoba (90%), Chocó (87%), Cesar (88%), Sucre (88%), Antioquia (75%), Meta (72%), Bolívar (65%), Valle (67%), Cauca (57%), Magdalena (53%), La Guajira (53%), Risaralda (50%), Putumayo (46%), Guaviare (100%), and Vichada (75%). On the Nariño coast large numbers have been reported, and narco-paramilitaries are active in all the municipalities of Norte de Santander especially in Cúcuta and in the municipalities of Catatumbo.