



General Assembly First Committee Topic Background Guide

***Topic 3: Strengthening Security and Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>1</sup>***

October 12, 2009

According to Chapter I, Article I of the United Nations (UN) Charter, the purpose of the UN is:

- To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;
- To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;
- To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.<sup>2</sup>

As the General Assembly (GA) subcommittee charged with security issues, the General Assembly First Committee (GA-1) considers ways to strengthen international security and cooperation. Thus a frequent topic is how the three goals listed above fit together in particular regions.

The Latin American and Caribbean region faces some of the greatest socio-economic inequalities in the world. Within the region, it is estimated that 42.9 percent of the population is poor, with around 18.1 percent living in extreme poverty.<sup>3</sup> Although the World Bank reported that the region experienced economic growth of 5.1 percent in 2007, significant disparities between the rich and the poor remain.<sup>4</sup> For example, only 41 percent of indigenous women in Guatemala are estimated to be literate,<sup>5</sup> compared to 82.9 percent of all Guatemalan women.<sup>6</sup>

To address socio-economic concerns such as these, in 2000, the UN developed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>7</sup> The MDGs set targets for improvement in poverty, gender equality, maternal health

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<sup>1</sup> This document was written by Kedra Hildebrand, Teaching Assistant.

<sup>2</sup> "Charter of the United Nations," June 21, 1946, available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), "Latin America & the Caribbean," available at <http://www.unfpa.org/latinamerica/overview.cfm>

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, "Latin America and the Caribbean," available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,menuPK:258559~pagePK:158889~piPK:146815~theSitePK:258554,00.html>

<sup>5</sup> UNPF, "Latin America & the Caribbean."

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, "Literacy Rates of 15-24 year-olds, both sexes, percentage," United Nations Millennium Development Goals Indicators, July 14, 2008, available at <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, "End Poverty, UN Millennium Goals: 2015 Make it Happen," available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

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and the reduction of HIV/AIDS. Although the region has experienced gradual economic improvement in these areas since the end of the Cold War, much remains to be done to reduce high maternal mortality, the large disparity in wages between men and women, and the continued spread of HIV/AIDS.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the obstacles to reaching the MDGs are security issues. These include the high incidence of violence against women, fighting among paramilitary forces, and the success of drug trafficking cartels. To address these problems, cooperation within the region and among extra-regional actors such as the US and the UN is needed.

To explore these security and cooperation issues, this topic background guide will focus on two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The first is Colombia, a country recovering from over 50 years of civil war. Successful development in Colombia has long been held hostage to competition between the government and guerillas supported by drug trafficking.<sup>9</sup>

The second focus is Nicaragua, which struggles with many of the same security concerns as Colombia including poverty, demobilization of soldiers, international weapons smuggling, and drug cartels. Despite UN involvement in the successful 1996 federal election, Nicaragua faces ongoing internal social tensions and fragmentation, highlighting the need for increased efforts to create sustainable development.<sup>10</sup>

Colombia and Nicaragua are two case-studies that draw attention to the complicated economic, military, and international concerns and challenges associated with strengthening security and cooperation in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

### ***History and Current Events***

#### *Colombia:*

Following the civil war known as *La Violencia*, which lasted for over a decade in the 1950s and resulted in the death of more than 200,000 Colombians, the 1960s were marked by the establishment of several guerrilla factions.<sup>11</sup> One of the most notorious factions is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). FARC originally started as a peasant defense movement that combined with the militant wing of the Communist party and was ideologically motivated to defend the poor against the wealthy government and the intervention of the United States.<sup>12</sup> The second most notorious faction, the Army for National Liberation (ELN), was established in 1964 by university students recently returned from Cuba seeking to emulate Fidel Castro's communist revolution, and is based on much of the same ideology as FARC.<sup>13</sup> Other, less notorious factions established during the 1960s included the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO) which in 1972 became the M-19 guerilla movement, and the popular Army of Liberation (EPL). M-19 and the EPL struggled to survive after the end of the Cold War, and through assassination and dissolution are no longer significant concerns.

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<sup>8</sup> Annabel Boissonnade-Fotheringham, "AIDS Education: Challenges Ahead for Latin America and the Caribbean," *UN Chronicle*, November 2003, available at <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2003/issue4/0403p60.asp>

<sup>9</sup> Gary Leech, "Fifty Years of Violence," *Colombia Journal*, May 1999, available at <http://www.colombiajournal.org/fiftyyearsofviolence.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Frans Van Haren and Kristjan Guy Burgess, "Lessons from the 'Support Group for Nicaragua,'" *Peace and Conflict Monitor*, April 21, 2003, available at [http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id\\_article=25](http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=25)

<sup>11</sup> Julia Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia? History Repeating Itself," *Foreign Affairs* 81:5 (Sep/Oct 2002), pp. 122-141, available through Infotrac High School Reference.

<sup>12</sup> Leech, "Fifty Years of Violence."

<sup>13</sup> While FARC and ELN espoused similar ideals their relationship was tenuous. In some instances they worked together, while in others they fought directly. Stephanie Hanson, "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerillas," Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, March 11, 2008, available at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9272/#2>

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FARC and the ELN, by contrast, have increased their power and hold over Colombia since the 1960s. FARC has evolved into Colombia's "largest and best-equipped rebel group," which in March 2008 boasted 9,000 fighters, down from the 15,000-20,000 fighters estimated in 2003. In 2008, FARC was estimated to control one-third of the country and was responsible for hijacking a domestic flight in February 2002, kidnapping a Colombian Presidential candidate in 2002, assassinating the former Colombian Minister of Culture in 2001, and murdering three United States missionaries in 1999.<sup>14</sup>

In 2008, ELN was estimated to have between 2,200 and 3,000 members. Though smaller than the FARC, the ELN possesses several special units trained in weapons manufacturing and explosives. It is known for kidnapping wealthy Colombian citizens for ransom and bombing oil pipelines, resulting in several civilian deaths. Although the Colombian government has made concerted efforts at both peace-talks and military action against these two groups, as of 2008 the FARC and ELN remained a powerful presence in Colombia.<sup>15</sup>

The main source of income for both FARC and ELN is drug trafficking. It is estimated that these groups take in several hundred million dollars annually, with at least half of the income stemming from the illegal drug trade.<sup>16</sup> The finances provided by the illegal drug trade in Colombia make it almost impossible to resolve the civil war between the government and the guerrilla groups. Moreover, fighting between the government's military and paramilitary forces, on the one hand, and the FARC and ELN guerrillas on the other had makes it difficult to make meaningful progress on sustainable development in Colombia. For example, in 2002, Colombia was the world's homicide capital and had the third highest number of internal refugees after Angola and Sudan. Moreover, any organization seeking to improve the human rights conditions in Colombia is subject to assassinations of its staff members, as evidenced by the 11 human rights monitors killed in the country in 2001 alone.<sup>17</sup>

### *Nicaragua:*

Nicaragua has experienced lengthy periods of military dictatorship, the longest being the rule of the Somoza family which was in power for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Somozas came to power in Nicaragua in 1927 with the support of the US in exchange for their promise to replace the several armies that were then running the country with a single National Guard. Domestic opposition to the pact between the US and the Somozas was led by a Nicaraguan named Augusto César Sandino, who formed a guerilla group to resist US and Somozan forces.<sup>18</sup>

In February 1934, the US pulled the Marines out of Nicaragua in response to years of successful battles fought by Sandino's forces, and the chief of the National Guard, Anasatsio Somoza, fearing future conflict with Sandino, had him assassinated. The assassination of Sandino led to decades of further assassinations and political unrest within Nicaragua, culminating in the creation of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in 1961. By 1979, the Sandinistas were supported by much of the Nicaraguan populace including elements of the Catholic Church and regional governments. Under pressure from the FSLN, the last Somoza president fled the country in 1979, and was assassinated in 1980.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hanson, "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerillas."

<sup>15</sup> Hanson, "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerillas."

<sup>16</sup> To see the affects of drug trafficking from Colombia to the rest of the world see the 2007 UN World Drug report. United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, "2007 World Drug Report," November 2007, pp. 174-182, available at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2007.html>

<sup>17</sup> Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia?"

<sup>18</sup> Louisa Reynolds, "Nicaragua," *New Internationalist* 399 (April 2007), p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, "Nicaragua."

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In the 1970s and 1980s, conflict between the FSLN and the US led the Reagan Administration to impose sanctions and trade embargoes on Nicaragua. In addition, the US was found guilty by the International Court of Justice of illegally mining Nicaragua's harbors and financing counterrevolutionary groups (the Contras) in neighboring Honduras to oppose the FSLN government.<sup>20</sup> The sanctions and the creation of the Contras weakened Nicaragua's economy and created instability within the government. In response to the growing insecurity and conflict between the Contras and the FSLN, the FSLN dedicated itself to building up the Sandinista Peoples' Army (EPS). By 1993 the EPS boasted 80,000 soldiers and had defeated the Contras to the point that they were willing to commit to a ceasefire.<sup>21</sup> In 1996, Nicaragua had what the UN considered free and fair democratic elections for the first time.

Despite the end of the war and successful elections, decades of violence continue to impose a heavy toll. Moreover, the war continues to flare up from time to time. In 1991, a year and a half after the Contra war ended, groups of rearmed Contras began to attack towns. In response, former Sandinista soldiers began to form small guerrilla units known as *recompas* to fight the Contras.<sup>22</sup> The violence continues to this day and creates an inhospitable environment for successful development.

Today, Nicaraguans continue to experience significant disparities in wealth distribution, access to public goods, and democratic participation. In addition, there is considerable government corruption, an unprecedented number of people in poverty, international trafficking in weapons acquired during the war, and a "drug-trafficking corridor in north-central Nicaragua."<sup>23</sup> Nicaragua continues to struggle to ensure security and cooperation within its borders.

### ***Previous Committee Work on This Topic***

In 1948, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was created as one of five regional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The mandate of the commission is to deepen the understanding of development challenges facing the region and contribute to a solution.<sup>24</sup> ECLAC provides reviews of development issues facing Latin America and the Caribbean and addresses actions being taken by organizations within the UN to support the development of the region.

In September 2000, world leaders came together to adopt the UN MDGs, which committed member nations to reducing extreme poverty through a list of target goals and a deadline of 2015. These goals have a direct impact on the Latin American and Caribbean region by providing targets for development which have become indicators of progress.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> International Court of Justice, "Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. The United States of America) Summary of the Summary of the Judgment," June 27, 1986, available at <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=367&code=nus&p1=3&p2=3&case=70&k=66&p3=5>

<sup>21</sup> Foundation for Sustainable Development, "Human Rights Issues in Nicaragua," available at <http://www.fsdinternational.org/?q=ntlopps/country/nicaragua/humanrights>

<sup>22</sup> Tim Rogers, "Silent War in Nicaragua," *NACLA Report in the Americas* 34:4 (Jan/Feb 2001), pp. 11-16.

<sup>23</sup> Rogers, "Silent War in Nicaragua."

<sup>24</sup> UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "About ECLAC/CDCC," available at [http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/noticias/paginas/0/21710/P21710.xml&xsl=/tpl-i/p18f-st.xsl&base=/tpl-i/top-bottom\\_acerca.xsl](http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/noticias/paginas/0/21710/P21710.xml&xsl=/tpl-i/p18f-st.xsl&base=/tpl-i/top-bottom_acerca.xsl)

<sup>25</sup> UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean," 2008, available at [http://www.eclac.cl/mdg/ro/ro\\_01\\_en.asp](http://www.eclac.cl/mdg/ro/ro_01_en.asp)

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### *Colombia:*

The UN has made several efforts to address drug trafficking in Colombia. In 1998, for example, the GA held a special session to consider the “Fight Against the Illicit Production, Sale, Demand, Traffic and Distribution of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Related Activities and to Propose New Strategies, Methods, Practical Activities and Specific Measures to Strengthen International Cooperation in Addressing the Problem of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.”<sup>26</sup> Colombia was central to this effort, as the GA sought to elicit international cooperation to halt the continued trafficking stemming from the country. In 2003, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) signed several marketing agreements with supermarkets to support the elimination of coca and poppy cultivation in Colombia by replacing them with food crops.<sup>27</sup>

In 2001, the UN agencies in Colombia developed a humanitarian action plan for the country which:

aimed to ensure respect for, access to and implementation of human rights and basic humanitarian principles for the population affected by the humanitarian crisis caused by armed conflict and massive population movements. Seven areas of action were highlighted: (i) prevention and protection; (ii) food security; (iii) health; (iv) education; (v) family well-being; (vi) socio-economic transition; and (vii) coordination and institutional strengthening.

In 2005, the UN Security Council discussed the use of child soldiers by the FARC and the ELN. This Security Council discussion followed an exploratory meeting held in 2004 by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which highlighted the need to end the recruitment of children by guerrilla groups in Colombia.<sup>28</sup>

In 2006, the UN Refugee Agency created a country operations plan to deal with the growing displacement of non-combatants due to the ongoing conflict between the FARC, ELN and the Colombian Government. As mentioned, at that time, the number of displaced people in Colombia was exceeded only by Angola and Sudan.<sup>29</sup>

In 2008, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization highlighted three main goals for assistance to Colombia for 2008–2012, including

elimination of poverty; conservation and sustainable use of resources; and consolidation of democracy. National, regional and local capacity will be strengthened to ensure improved and more equal access to services, particularly for more vulnerable groups; sustainable resource management; more effective institutions; and peacebuilding.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Jelsma, “Background on the United Nations General Assembly Special session on Drug Control,” *Transnational Institute*, March 1998, available at [http://www.tni.org/detail\\_page.phtml?page=archives\\_jelsma\\_ungass](http://www.tni.org/detail_page.phtml?page=archives_jelsma_ungass)

<sup>27</sup> Guillermo Garcia Miranda, “Combating Illicit cultivations in Colombia: A Shared Global Responsibility,” *UN Chronicle*, November 3, 2006, available at <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2006/issue3/0306p48.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Colombia: Armed Groups Send Children to War (U.N. Security Council to Discuss Colombia’s Child Soldiers,” February 22, 2005, available at <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2005/02/22/colomb10202.htm>

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “Country Operations Plan: Overview (Country: Colombia),” 2006, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/home/PROTECTION/43253fec2.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Colombia,” 2008, available at [http://www.fao.org/emergencies/country\\_information/list/latinamerica/colombia/en/](http://www.fao.org/emergencies/country_information/list/latinamerica/colombia/en/)

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### *Nicaragua:*

In 1996, the UN sent a mission to Nicaragua to monitor elections and verify the “demobilization, disarmament, repatriation, and reintegration of the Contra forces.”<sup>31</sup> The involvement of the UN resulted in the first fair and free elections in the country’s history.

In 2001, the International Development Fund partnered with the IMF to present a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Nicaragua. The strategy was based on four pillars: (i) broad-based economic growth; (ii) investment in human capital; (iii) better protection of vulnerable groups; and (iv) institutional strengthening and good governance.<sup>32</sup>

In 2003, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Capital Development Fund boasted success in implementing a small loan program in Nicaragua. The trial program lasted for three years and extended loans for micro-enterprises and small businesses in northern Nicaragua. In view of this success, the UNDP committed another \$1.75 million revolving loan to continue the efforts in Nicaragua.

In 2008, despite being a “vigorous critic of the United States and vocal ally of Hugo Chávez, the Washington-baiting president of Venezuela,” Nicaragua managed to get the backing of the 33-member Latin America and Caribbean group for the General Assembly President position.<sup>33</sup> The endorsement of the region assured Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua the election.<sup>34</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Members of the Latin American and the Caribbean regions continue to struggle with establishing security and cooperation to achieve successful development. The concerns in the region are multifaceted and require support from UN member states.

In researching your country’s position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- Is your country a member of the Latin American and Caribbean Region? If so, what are its security concerns? What is its level of development, and how is this affecting security and human rights in the country? How are other countries helping or hindering its progress?
- If your country is not a member of the region, has your country’s history been similar to that of Nicaragua and Colombia? Has your country contributed to or detracted from security, development, and human rights in the region?
- How can your country help Latin America and the Caribbean achieve the MDGs?
- How can the UN contribute to security and cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- Which security issues in the region are most pressing, and how should they be addressed?

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Karns, “The Roots of UN Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Autonomous Agency,” paper presented at the 2008 annual meeting of the APSA, August 28, 2008, p. 12, available at [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p278902\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p278902_index.html)

<sup>32</sup> International Development Association and International Monetary Fund, “Nicaragua: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Joint Staff Assessment,” August 27, 2001, available at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/jsa/2001/nic/eng/082701.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Warren Hoge, “Nicaragua Credited With Shrewd Tactics in Bid for General Assembly Presidency,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/13/world/13nations.html>

<sup>34</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua, President of Sixty-Third,” GA/10745 BIO/4022, September 16, 2008, available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/bio4022.doc.htm>

*Recommended Reading*

Hanson, Stephanie. "FARC, ELN: Colombia's Left-Wing Guerillas." Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder. March 11, 2008. Available online at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9272/#2>

This article provides a good background on the Colombian civil war.

Human Rights Watch. Website. Available at <http://www.hrw.org>.

Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental organization that provides information on the human rights effects of wars and government policies worldwide. It is an excellent source for up-to-date reports on the human rights and human security situation in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "Armed Conflicts and Conflict Management" and "Arms Control and Disarmament Documentary Survey." Website. Available at <http://www.sipri.org/>

This non-governmental organization provides information on military conflicts around the world and is a good place to start to understand ongoing conflicts in Latin America and the Caribbean

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Website. Available at <http://www.eclac.cl/default.asp?idioma=IN>

This is the home page for ECLAC. It provides updates on ongoing projects, reports regarding development issues, and analysis of regional achievement of the MDGs. See especially "Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean," [http://www.eclac.cl/mdg/ro/ro\\_01\\_en.asp](http://www.eclac.cl/mdg/ro/ro_01_en.asp)

United Nations, "End Poverty, UN Millennium Goals: 2015 Make it Happen." Available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

This website provides information regarding the UN Millennium Goals including updated progress reports. The website also provides a list and links to all of the UN organizations committed to achieving these goals, including several that have active projects in Latin American and the Caribbean.

World Bank. "Latin America and the Caribbean." Website. Available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,menuPK:258559~pagePK:158889~piPK:146815~theSitePK:258554,00.html>

The World Bank was founded to advance post-war reconstruction and development worldwide. This website provides news, regional analyses, and country briefs, data and statistics on development topics and initiatives being undertaken by the World Bank in the region.