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ACTION ARA-01

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INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 AMAD-01 DS-00 HA-09 H-01 INM-01
INRE-00 INR-01 L-03 MMP-01 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01
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INFO DEPTJUSTICE WASHDC
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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

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TAGS: KRP, PINS, SNAR, PHUM, ASEC, CO
SUBJECT: TRENDS IN COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE: THE PROBLEM
- APART FROM NARCOS AND THE GUERRILLAS

1. (C) SUMMARY: WHILE THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND TO A GREAT EXTENT THE COLOMBIA GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON NARCO-TERRORISM, THE GUERRILLA WAR AND OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE, VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE NARCOS OR POLITICS GROW TO FRIGHTENING DIMENSIONS. THIS CABLE FOCUSES ON THE TWO LEADING TYPES OF NON-POLITICAL/NON-NARCO VIOLENCE -- HOMICIDES AND RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS -- AS WELL AS ON THE GROWING PHENOMENON OF "POPULAR MILITIAS," RESPONSIBLE FOR AN INCREASING NUMBER OF THE FORMER IN MEDELLIN'S POOR NEIGHBORHOODS. SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF THESE ASCENDANT CRIME CATEGORIES, HOWEVER, AND INDIRECT LINKS TO TRAFFICKING AND POLITICAL GROUPS BECOME EVIDENT. END SUMMARY.

RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS: A VERY LUCRATIVE BOOM INDUSTRY

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2. (U) RANSOM KIDNAPPINGS, BECAUSE OF THEIR PROFITABILITY TO AND IMPUNITY FOR PERPETRATORS, ARE COLOMBIA'S FASTEST GROWING VIOLENT CRIME. ACCORDING TO COLOMBIAN NATIONAL POLICE (CNP) STATISTICS, THERE WERE 253 REPORTED ABDUCTIONS BETWEEN 1976-80, 987 FROM 1981-85, SKYROCKETING TO 3,211 FROM 1986-90. WHILE COMMON CRIMINALS AND GUERRILLAS PRINCIPALLY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ABDUCTIONS, COMMON CRIMINALS ARE THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF THE TREMENDOUS INCREASE. FROM 1980-90, THE CNP REGISTERED 13,064 ABDUCTIONS, OF WHICH 4,242

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(32.4 PERCENT) WERE FOR RANSOM, THE MAJORITY BY COMMON CRIMINALS.

3. (U) "IT'S A BUSINESS THAT PRODUCES TOO MANY DIVIDENDS," ACCORDING TO MIGUEL ANGEL AFANADOR OF THE CNP'S CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS CENTER (CIC), WHICH CALCULATED THAT THE AVERAGE RANSOM PAID IN 1990 WAS 40 MILLION COLOMBIAN PESOS. CIC FIGURES SHOW THAT THE AVERAGE RANSOM, ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION, WAS 12 MILLION PESOS IN 1980. SEMANA NEWSWEEKLY HAS CALLED RANSOM ABDUCTIONS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST LUCRATIVE BUSINESSES.

4. (U) THE SCOURGE HAS AFFLICTED CERTAIN REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY AND TYPES OF PERSONS MORE THAN OTHERS. A PRIME TARGET HAS BEEN WEALTHY FARMERS. WHILE GUERRILLAS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF RURAL KIDNAPPINGS THAN URBAN ABDUCTIONS, SOME OWNERS OF LARGE TRACTS FALL VICTIM TO COMMON CRIMINALS, WHO SOMETIMES CLAIM TO BE INSURGENTS TO CONFUSE LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES. FARMERS IN CORDOBA AND CESAR DEPARTMENTS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY HARD HIT. BUSINESSMEN HAVE BEEN THE OTHER PRINCIPAL VICTIM, ACCOUNTING FOR 30 PERCENT OF REPORTED 1980-90 RANSOM ABDUCTIONS. FREQUENTLY, THE KIDNAPPERS ARE EMPLOYEES WITH WHOM THERE HAD BEEN A PROBLEM.

5. (U) COLOMBIA'S SECOND LARGEST CITY, MEDELLIN, BOASTS A LARGE POOL OF EXPERIENCED CRIMINALS AND LEADS THE NATION IN UNEMPLOYMENT AND KIDNAPPINGS. BETWEEN 1988-90, 640 KIDNAPPINGS, 23 PERCENT OF THE NATIONAL TOTAL, OCCURRED IN ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT (OF WHICH MEDELLIN IS THE CAPITAL). FIFTY-TWO PERCENT OF THE

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DEPARTMENT'S TOTAL OCCURRED IN VALLE DE ABURRA (THE AREA DOMINATED BY MEDELLIN).

MURDER: MORE COLOMBIANS DIE IN BARS THAN IN BATTLES

6. (U) NON-POLITICAL/NON-NARCO MURDERS ALSO HAVE SPIRALED UPWARD. THE NATIONAL POLICE REPORTED 27,015 HOMICIDES IN THE 15 MONTHS BETWEEN JANUARY 1990-MARCH 1991, OF WHICH 20,381 OR 75 PERCENT WERE BY COMMON CRIMINALS. IN 1990, MURDER OVERTOOK CANCER AS THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN COLOMBIA.

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7. (U) THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MURDER IN COLOMBIA HAS STABILIZED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. THE CNP REPORTED A SMALL INCREASE IN HOMICIDES IN 1990, 21,600, UP FROM 21,510 IN 1989. HOWEVER, IN TERMS OF NUMBER PER 100,000 INHABITANTS, THE MURDER RATE DECREASED SLIGHTLY FROM 66 IN 1989 TO 65 IN 1990.

8. (U) THE CNP'S ANNUAL REPORT ON CRIME, "CRIMINALITY," STATES THAT MORE THAN A THIRD OF 1990 HOMICIDES (37.5 PERCENT) TOOK PLACE IN ANTIOQUIA, THE GREAT MAJORITY IN VALLE DE ABURRA. THERE WERE 187 HOMICIDES PER 100,000 INHABITANTS IN ANTIOQUIA, BUT ONLY 49 IN BOGOTA AND 35 IN CALI. WHILE ANTIOQUIA'S MURDER RATE ROSE, ESPECIALLY IN VALLE DE ABURRA, BOGOTA'S AND CALI'S REMAINED STABLE. MEANWHILE, BOLIVAR, SUCRE, ATLANTICO AND CHOCO HAD THE LOWEST MURDER INDICES.

9. (U) POLICE ANALYSTS REPORT THAT COLOMBIANS KILL EACH OTHER MORE IN PERSONAL FIGHTS THAN IN CONFRONTATIONS INVOLVING THE SECURITY FORCES, GUERRILLAS, PARAMILITARY GROUPS OR TRAFFICKERS. THEY PARTIALLY ATTRIBUTE THE HIGH MURDER RATE TO THE THRIVING ILLEGAL ARMS MARKET, WHICH INSURES A GREAT QUANTITY OF FIREARMS IN PRIVATE HANDS.

POPULAR MILITIAS: PRIVATE JUSTICE REACHES THE BARRIOS

10. (U) WHILE NOT A NEW PHENOMENON, THE URBAN

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PRIVATE-JUSTICE GROUPS THAT HAVE COME TO BE KNOWN AS "POPULAR MILITIAS" CAME INTO THEIR OWN IN 1991, TAKING VIRTUAL CONTROL OF SEVERAL NEIGHBORHOODS IN MEDELLIN'S POOR NORTHEAST, WHERE THE WELL-ARMED VIGILANTE GROUPS HAVE BEEN FIGHTING A WAR TO THE DEATH WITH THE TRAFFICKING-SYMBIOTIC BANDS OF YOUNG SICARIOS (HIRED ASSASSINS) AND OTHER HOODLUMS THAT HAVE PREYED ON THE RESIDENTS FOR DECADES. MILITIA YOUTH HAVE BEEN BLAMED FOR AN INCREASING NUMBER OF MEDELLIN MASSACRES IN 1991.

11. (U) ASIDE FROM RIDDING THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE PARASITIC CRIMINAL GANGS, THE MILITIAS ALSO HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF "CLEANUP" KILLINGS, I.E., OF LIQUIDATING DRUG DEALERS AND ADDICTS, PROSTITUTES AND PIMPS, RAPISTS AND OTHER ANTI-SOCIAL ELEMENTS.

12. (C) IN THE AREAS WHERE THEY OPERATE, LONG NEGLECTED BY THE POLICE, THE MILITIAS ENJOY A GREAT DEAL OF POPULAR SUPPORT FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, WHICH REPORTEDLY HELPS FINANCE THEIR ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, FORMER NATIONAL HEAD OF PASTORAL

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SOCIAL, MONSIGNOR HECTOR FABIO HENAO, WHO HAS RETURNED TO WORK IN HIS NATIVE VALLE DEL ABURRA, TOLD POLOFF RESIDENTS ARE TIRED OF THE MILITIAS' STRICT CONTROL OVER THEIR LIVES, WHILE LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES REPORT THAT SOME MILITIAS RESORT TO EXTORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES.

13. (C) SOME OF THE MILITIAS APPEAR TO HAVE NO POLITICAL CONNECTIONS; HOWEVER, VARIOUS SOURCES, INCLUDING PRESS INTERVIEWS WITH MILITIA LEADERS, REPORT THAT MANY ARE ESSENTIALLY URBAN CELLS AND RECRUITING STATIONS FOR

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COLOMBIA'S STILL-ACTIVE GUERRILLA GROUPS. ACCORDING TO A DAS REPORT, THE FARC, ELN AND EPL-DISSIDENT INSURGENT GROUPS ALL HAVE THEIR OWN MILITIAS OPERATING IN MEDELLIN. DAS REPORTED THAT GROUPS CALLING THEMSELVES "POPULAR MILITIAS" BELONG TO THE ELN, WHILE THE SELF-NAMED "BOLIVARIAN MILITIAS" ARE LINKED TO THE FARC. OTHERS, INCLUDING MEDELLIN'S MAYOR, HAVE LINKED MILITIAS TO THE NOW DISARMED EPL AND M-19, A CHARGE BOTH GROUPS DENY.

14. (U) WHILE THE MILITIAS' ORIGINS ARE DISPUTED, NO ONE DENIES THEIR INFLUENCE IS GROWING. DAS REPORTS THEY HAVE BROKEN OUT OF THEIR DEFENSIVE POSTURE AND GONE ON THE OFFENSIVE, INFILTRATING AND ORGANIZING BOTH NON-POLITICAL AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AS WELL AS STUDENT GROUPS AND TRADE UNIONS. MEANWHILE, MILITIAS HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN OTHER COLOMBIAN CITIES, INCLUDING BOGOTA, BARRANCABERMEJA, MANIZALES AND PEREIRA.

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WHY THE RISE IN NON-POLITICAL, NON-NARCO VIOLENCE?

15. (U) SOME ANALYSTS, INCLUDING EDUARDO PIZARRO, DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY'S POLITICAL STUDIES INSTITUTE, SAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT, UNABLE TO WAGE A WAR ON ALL FRONTS AT THE SAME TIME, HAS FOCUSED ITS LIMITED RESOURCES ON COMBATING NARCO-TERRORISM, THE GUERRILLAS AND NARCO-TRAFFICKING BECAUSE THEY THREATENED NATIONAL SECURITY, THE POWER OF THE POLITICAL ELITES AS WELL AS BECAUSE OF PRESSURE FROM WASHINGTON TO GO AFTER THE DRUG MAFIAS AND STEM THE FLOW OF COCAINE TO THE UNITED STATES. ACCORDING TO PIZARRO AND OTHERS, THE GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITIES HAVE LEFT THE DOOR OPEN FOR COMMON CRIMINALS TO PREY ON THE GENERAL POPULATION.

COMMENT: TODAY'S SICARIO MAY BE TOMMORROW'S KIDNAPPER

16. (C) THIS CABLE HAS ATTEMPTED TO HIGHLIGHT LEADING TYPES NON-POLITICAL/NON-NARCO VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA THAT ANYONE LIVING IN THE COUNTRY IS ALL TO AWARE OF BUT ON WHICH REPORTING USUALLY DOESN'T FOCUS. HOWEVER, IN THE COMPLEX WEB THAT CONSTITUTES COLOMBIAN VIOLENCE, THERE IS A LINK BETWEEN THE TYPES OF CRIME DETAILED ABOVE AND THE NARCOS AND GUERRILLAS. MANY OF THE PERPETRATORS ARE INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS OF GUERRILLAS WHOSE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS MADE PEACE, OR ARE LOWER-LEVEL NARCO

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EMPLOYEES OR SICARIOS PUT OUT OF WORK BY THE BARCO
ADMINISTRATION'S WAR ON THEIR EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS AND

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THE SURRENDER OF NARCO KINGPINS.

17. (C) REGARDING THE GUERRILLA CONNECTION, COLOMBIA HAS AN HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE WITH EX-GUERRILLAS TURNING TO BANDITRY. THE PERIOD BEGINNING IN 1948 KNOWN AS LA VIOLENCIA, THE LAST CIVIL WAR BETWEEN COLOMBIA'S TWO TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, THE CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS, ENDED WITH MANY OF THE RURAL GUERRILLA BANDS TURNING TO BANDITRY AFTER THE POLITICAL CONFLICT HAD ENDED. IT TOOK LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES ABOUT 10 YEARS -- TO ABOUT 1965 -- TO ELIMINATE THE PROBLEM. HISTORY MAY BE REPEATING ITSELF; ELEMENTS OF THE EPL, WHICH MADE PEACE IN 1991, HAVE TURNED TO BANDITRY. MEANWHILE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES REPORT THAT OUT-OF-WORK NARCO SICARIOS HAVE FILLED THE RANKS OF NEW WELL-ORGANIZED, -TRAINED AND -ARMED CRIMINAL BANDS SPECIALIZING IN RANSOM ABDUCTIONS, ROBBERIES OR CAR THEFTS.

18. (C) MOST EXPERTS BELIEVE GOC SUCCESS IN ELIMINATING/REDUCING THE GUERRILLAS AND TRAFFICKING WILL FUEL OTHER TYPES OF VIOLENCE AND CRIME. THE BOTTOMLINE IS THAT NON-POLITICAL/NON-NARCO VIOLENCE WILL CONTINUE AT VERY HIGH LEVELS FOR MANY YEARS AFTER THE INSURGENCY AND NARCO-TERRORISM ARE A THING OF THE PAST. END COMMENT.

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