

5-5-1992

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Recommended Citation

Khol, Barbara. "Americas Watch On Failure Of Anti-drug Campaign In Colombia." (1992). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/9153>

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Americas Watch On Failure Of Anti-drug Campaign In Colombia

by Barbara Khol

Category/Department: General

Published: Tuesday, May 5, 1992

According to Americas Watch, the "drug war" in Colombia launched in 1989 led to militarization of the police, but with few substantiative results. In a report titled "Asesinato politico y reforma en Colombia: la violencia continua," the human rights monitor organization said Colombian society has "paid a terrible price" for its anti-drug policy. The report said that Colombia appears to have abandoned its "priority search" for major drug traffickers. Instead, the government has offered them guarantees that they will not be extradited in exchange for confessions and surrender to authorities. Meanwhile, the cocaine traffic has not declined, and the drug mafia has commenced diversification into cultivating poppies for trade in heroin. Last year, Pablo Escobar Gaviria, one of the world's biggest traffickers, surrendered to Colombian authorities. Despite the surrender of Gaviria and several other Cali and Medellin drug trade leaders, US government and independent sources indicate that the impact on the drug trade and violence in Colombia has been minimal. The Colombian government's actions, said Americas Watch, will have little impact until human rights abuses are investigated and perpetrators punished, regardless of where the investigation is conducted. After two years in power, President Cesar Gaviria has not been able to reduce violence. According to the report, 3,760 people were murdered last year in political violence. Despite the government's "good intentions," political assassinations continue to be the most serious human rights problem. Americas Watch attributed the killings to paramilitary groups, guerrillas and government security forces. (Basic data from Notimex, 04/27/92)

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