

# Colombia surrenders sovereignty for hostages

by Javier Almarío

On June 15, the narco-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) handed over to delegates of the International Red Cross and to a commission of prominent international observers, 60 soldiers and 10 sailors, most of whom had been held hostage for nearly 300 days. The main condition for the release of the hostages was that Colombian narco-President Ernesto Samper Pizano order the military evacuation of 13,000 square kilometers (5,000 square miles) of sovereign territory, in the region of Caguán, in the province of Caquetá.

Samper not only accepted the condition, but did everything in his power to make sure that the release of the hostages would be turned into a vast international show, with nearly every important news media organization in the world present, so that the FARC could issue its second demand: that Samper deliver to them, again without having to fire a shot, an additional 50,000 square kilometers of national territory, as the condition for sitting down to peace talks with the government.

## Armed Forces humiliated

That Samper has accepted the FARC's condition is a major blow to national sovereignty, and represents the total humiliation of the Colombian Armed Forces, whose commander, Gen. Harold Bedoya, had repeatedly rejected the narco-terrorists' demand, because it represents a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the nation. It is humiliating enough that the Armed Forces have had to accept as their commander-in-chief a man like Samper, who "won" his Presidency with millions of dollars from the drug cartels. But this time, Samper also ordered every national security agency not to interfere with the Red Cross's support operations for the FARC narco-terrorists. Some \$4 million was spent in complying with the FARC's demands, and in transferring to the targeted jungle zone all the equipment and satellite antennae necessary for direct transmission of the FARC's propaganda.

The speech by narc-FARC chieftain Manuel Marulanda Vélez, read by his "Commander Fabián" as part of the official act of handing over the hostages, reiterated that if the government wants to "talk about peace," it must first retire General Bedoya from his post as Armed Forces commander. In other words, the FARC is demanding the right to determine military promotions and changes. Marulanda also demanded the dis-

mantling of the rural security cooperatives known as *Convivir*, a prohibition on any government official or news organization calling the FARC "narco-guerrilla," and, above all, the demilitarization of another 50,000 square kilometers, encompassing the municipalities of La Uribe, Mesetas, Vistahermosa, and La Macarena, in the department of Meta.

For its part, the Samper government is heeding the demands of the International Monetary Fund in drastically reducing the military budget. The 1997 military budget was \$1.937 billion. After a series of cutbacks ordered by the Finance Ministry, under the personal instructions of IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus, the budget was cut to \$1.187 billion—a nearly 40% reduction!

Even before the release of the hostages, the United Nations human rights non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with Samper's "People's Defender" and Attorney General, were setting the basis for preventing the Armed Forces from recovering control of the 13,000 square kilometers, arguing that confrontations that could affect the "human rights" of the region's inhabitants had to be avoided at all cost. Not surprisingly, these same forces repeatedly contrasted the supposedly "peaceful" solution to the hostage crisis in Colombia, with the "violence" employed by Peru's President Alberto Fujimori, who had refused to yield an inch of Peru's national sovereignty to the MRTA narco-terrorists.

While the military is being kept out of the region of Caguán, the coca growers and the cocaine processors are hurriedly re-populating the area, confident that they can rely on the protection of the narc-FARC.

In a communiqué issued from Mexico, FARC spokesman Marcos Carlacá demanded "the application of social solutions to the drug-trafficking problem," which in plain language means legalization of the drug trade. In a second communiqué, Carlacá demanded that the Colombian Congress refuse to approve the extradition of Colombian drug traffickers, a proposal currently passing through the legislature. In other communiqués, the narc-FARC has warned that it will not allow any politicians to carry out electoral campaigns in regions under its control; it has also threatened to prevent the upcoming legislative and Presidential elections scheduled in 1998.

Other narco-terrorist groups, such as the People's Liberation Army (EPL), following the model of Caguán, kidnapped three policemen and demanded as the price for their release that EPL leader Francisco Caraballo, currently in an Itagüí jail near Medellín, be transferred to a lower-security jail in Bogotá—from which he could presumably be freed more easily. The National Liberation Army (ELN), yet another narco-terrorist group, is demanding a chunk of Santander department in exchange for release of several hostages they are holding.

If things continue as they are, the nation today known as Colombia will soon be divided into a series of "republiclets," each controlled by a different band of narco-terrorists.