

4.2 Mission Notes

Latin America and the Caribbean

The Organization of American States (OAS) serves as the primary regional forum on peace and security issues in the Americas. As the OAS's focal point for handling political and institutional conflicts in the region, the Department of Democratic Sustainability and Special Missions of the Secretariat for Political Affairs carries out efforts to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. In doing so, the Department conducts political analysis, provides advice and technical support to field missions, and coordinates activities geared toward the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes and the promotion of a culture of peace.

In 2011, the Department supports political missions in Colombia, in the Belize and Guatemala Adjacency Zone and at the Colombian and Ecuadorian border.

COLOMBIA

Since 2004, the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, known by its Spanish acronym MAPP/OEA, has supported compliance with the peace agreement between the government and paramilitary groups. The mission verifies the disbanding of paramilitary structures and the reintegration of ex-combatants, while monitoring public order in zones where these groups operated. MAPP/OEA also facilitates the government's implementation of demobilization, land restitution, and aid distribution initiatives, verifying that both sides adhere to their commitments. The mission

has 13 regional offices and nearly one hundred officials spread throughout the country.

Much of MAPP/OEA's work supports Colombia's 2005 Justice and Peace Law, which seeks to enhance trust in the state, give legal security to demobilized forces and provide victims greater access to their rights. With MAPP/OEA's assistance, this law helped victims become the key protagonists in the peace process, but the OAS is seeking better coordination between national and state governments on the law's implementation and improved security for demobilized fighters and their families, as well as for the prosecutors and officers of the court who have been subject to violence. The Justice and Peace Law also sought to dismantle paramilitary groups by providing a path towards amnesty for their top commanders, but over 20,000 demobilized low-level combatants were left with an uncertain legal status until a June 2011 ruling allowed them to avoid incarceration if they comply with the stipulations of the demobilization program.

The demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation of combatants is a major challenge. A large number of participants have exited the program and some have rearmed, joining neo-paramilitary groups involved in drug trafficking or other criminal activities. Armed drug trafficking groups have now overtaken left wing rebels as the main source of violence and have a presence in nearly a third of the country, with the government announcing that they threaten to influence the October 2011 local elections in many of Colombia's municipalities.

OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OEA)

Authorization and Start Date	6 February 2004 (CP/RES.859 (1397/04))
Head of Mission	Marcelo Alvarez (Argentina)
Budget	\$9.0 million (1 January 2011-31 December 2011)
Strength as of 30 April 2011	International Civilian: 30 National Civilian: 61

For detailed mission information see p. 320

OAS Good Offices Mission in Ecuador and Colombia (MIB/OEA)

Authorization and Start Date	17 March 2008 (RC.25/doc.15/08 and RC.25/ RES.1/08 rev.1)
Head of Mission	Ambassador Victor Rico (Bolivia)
Budget	\$0.1 million (1 January 2011-31 December 2011)
Strength as of 30 April 2011	International Civilian: 4 National Civilian: 1

For detailed mission information see p. 322

OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala (OAS/AZ)

Authorization Date	1 December 2000 (CP/RES.780 (1257/00))
Start Date	2003
Head of Mission	Special Representative of the OAS Secretary General for Belize-Guatemala: Ambassador Raúl Lago (Uruguay) Interim Director OAS/AZ: Sergio Benítez
Deputy Head of Mission	Juan Carlos Sagastume (Guatemala)
Budget	\$0.4 million (1 January 2011-31 December 2011)
Strength as of 30 April 2011	International Civilian: 3 National Civilian: 4

For detailed mission information see p. 324

MAPP/OEA has been working with Colombia's Department for Reintegration to conduct focus groups for demobilized individuals and the communities affected by reintegration. The first set of results, released in May 2010, highlighted the need to revamp and refine the current system for relocating ex-combatants and reintegrating them into communities. Further findings will be released later in 2011.

In May 2011, the high-profile Spanish judge and assessor to the International Criminal Court (ICC) Baltasar Garzón, best known for his case against former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, joined MAPP/OEA as a consultant supporting the Colombian government in transitional justice and restitution for victims. OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza has expressed hope that support from Garzón will help move Colombia's peace and reconciliation processes forward. Garzón, who in August 2010 suggested that the ICC could intervene in Colombia if the government failed to provide justice to the conflict's victims, is a controversial figure to some. The Prosecutor General Alejandro Ordoñez, for example, sees Garzón as a "polarizing ingredient" who might hinder progress.¹

In June 2011, the Colombian government enacted a Victim's Law that grants compensation to victims and seeks to secure the return of stolen land. In the course of the country's decade-long conflict, paramilitaries have forced over one million people off their land, and resolution of this situation remains a major challenge not least because of frequent murders of activists working toward land restitution. Since President Santos proposed the law in October 2010, 16 representatives of displaced people have been murdered.² Both UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and OAS Secretary-General Insulza have urged the government to adopt comprehensive protection measures and to ensure proper implementation of the new law.

MAPP/OEA monitors the land restitution process and provides advice and support to the Ministry of Agriculture in its implementation. The mission provides expert teams to verify the security situation of restored communities, raises awareness among communities and local authorities about the restitution process and assists in building an implementation strategy. MAPP/OEA also engages in

Human rights defenders and trade unionists are among those subject to the intimidation and violence of these groups.

activities to build trust and confidence between government institutions, affected communities and civil society at the national and local levels.

With the help of MAPP/OEA, Colombia has made progress in a number of areas, but a sustained mission presence is necessary. The Colombian government asked for a continuation of the mission in the country and extended MAPP/OEA's mandate for an additional three years. In the face of an increase in drug-related violence across Latin America, including Colombia, and the growth of armed criminal groups that threaten stability in the country, both the government and MAPP/OEA have to increase their efforts and resources to address the outstanding issues of the peace process, particularly in combating impunity. To address the growing challenges related to guerilla groups and drug-related crime, the government may wish to request an expansion of the mission's mandate.

THE BELIZE AND GUATEMALA ADJACENCY ZONE

In 2003, Belize and Guatemala agreed to establish an Adjacency Zone (AZ) in the disputed border area that has been a source of contention between the two countries for centuries. The agreement also established the OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone (OAS/AZ) that verifies, reports on, and provides early warning of incidents that occur in the AZ. It monitors the implementation of confidence-building measures, develops activities to improve relations among inhabitants of the AZ, helps to promote development in the area, provides information on the dispute to AZ residents and surrounding areas and executes other projects as requested. OAS/AZ conducts around 100 verifications of incidents per year.³

As part of its work on confidence-building measures, the OAS/AZ has initiated operational coordination meetings with representatives of the two countries' police and armed forces. It provides Global Positioning System devices to both armies to avoid accidental territorial incidents and works to accurately map information it gathers in the field.

The OAS also facilitated the creation of a High Level Working Group with representatives of both governments to assess the fulfillment of confidence-building measures and discuss specific incidents and bilateral issues. OAS/AZ supports coordination between municipal governments, NGOs and public agencies in the AZ of each country, identifying areas for the development of local projects and events that advance integration and understanding.

OAS/AZ has also coordinated the resettlement of families originally living in the AZ by providing logistical and financial support. This process was successfully concluded in August 2010, though the Office continues to provide a number of services and subsidies for families, schools and institutions directly affected by the situation or incidents in the AZ. In addition, OAS/AZ helps to promote development in the area by offering training in rural tourism to those who live in the AZ.

In 2008, the two countries agreed to have the territorial dispute settled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), pending approval by their respective electorates. The vote is supposed to take place simultaneously in both states. In September 2010, the Congress of Guatemala unanimously approved a national referendum on the matter. The Belize parliament, however, still has to approve a referendum. With elections scheduled for both states in late 2011, a referendum is unlikely to take place until 2013 at the earliest.

The OAS General Secretariat asserted that the OAS/AZ must continue to function at least until proceedings begin at the ICJ to ensure continuity of the confidence-building measures. As the only independent actor in the zone to investigate incidents, reduce tensions in the area, and coordinate activities of the police and armed forces of both countries, the Office indeed plays an important role. A major challenge for the OAS/AZ is to attract new donors to fund its operations. Already in 2010, due to a decrease in contributions received, the Office had to cut activities and reduce the number of verification officers from three to two. Despite an increase in requests received for verifications and support to local communities, the 2011 budget has been further reduced, down almost 40 percent compared to 2010.

COLOMBIA AND ECUADOR

Tensions between Colombia and Ecuador came to a head in March 2008, when Colombia conducted a cross-border military operation in Ecuadoran territory. The unauthorized attack, which killed a well-known FARC guerilla commander, caused Ecuador to cut ties with Colombia. After an OAS commission visited both states, it recommended the formation of a mission to address the issue.

The Colombia-Ecuador Good Offices Mission (MIB/OEA, after its Spanish acronym), established in April 2008, is mandated with restoring an atmosphere of trust between the two states, observing compliance with commitments made, assisting in the establishment of confidence-building measures and participating in the prevention and verification of incidents in the border zone. MIB/OEA has the support of OAS staff in Quito and Bogota, and there is a team of stand-by civilian mediation experts. If necessary, the OAS Secretary-General can request that OAS member states appoint military advisors to help with the mission's tasks.

Since its establishment, MIB/OEA has convened a series of meetings between high-ranking civilian and military representatives from both states. In June 2010, as part of the confidence-building measures promoted by the mission, MIB/OEA helped facilitate a bi-national meeting of water experts from Colombia and Ecuador to identify development opportunities and priorities for integrated water resources management in the Esmeraldas River Basin.

In November 2010, Colombia and Ecuador agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations and to share information about the 2008 incident – a move hailed by the OAS Secretary-General as “a great day for the entire continent.”⁴ At the time of writing, MIB/OEA was set to continue its work in the follow-up and verification of commitments and agreements between the two countries on border issues and other matters of common interest, strengthening dialogue and cooperation, and to study the possibility of a bilateral early-warning system to defuse potential volatile situations.

NOTES

- 1 A. Alsema, “Spanish ‘super-judge’ cleared to consult in Colombia,” *Colombia Reports*, 18 May 2011, available at <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/16357-spanish-super-judge-cleared-to-consult-in-colombia.html>.
- 2 A. Alsema, “UN’s Ban Ki-moon commends Victims’ Law,” *Colombia Reports*, 12 June 2011, available at <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/16911-uns-ban-ki-moon-commends-victims-law.html>.
- 3 Organization of American States, “OAS Office in the Adjacency Zone,” *OAS Peace Fund*, available at <http://www.oas.org/sap/peacefund/belizeandguatemala/AdjacencyZone.html>.
- 4 Organization of American States, “OAS Secretary General Welcomes Normalization of Colombia-Ecuador Relations,” OAS Media Center, available at http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-459/10.