

## **Why the Social and Armed Conflict of Colombia Is a Never-Ending War**

**By Francisco Ramirez**

(Translated by Jack Laun, CSN Volunteer Translator)

The idea of this first article is to begin to analyze the different economic actors who sustain the war in Colombia and who make it impossible for our country to live in peace. It is the same “phenomenon” which occurs in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, The North and the South of Sudan, Nigeria, Guatemala, and South Africa, among others. In these countries “by coincidence” there are the same multinational businesses and the same governments which develop the same policies of plunder of resources in the so-called third world; companies such as Glencore <sup>1</sup>, Anglo-American <sup>2</sup>, BHP Billiton<sup>3</sup>, Xtrata <sup>4</sup>, and Anglo Gold Ashanti <sup>5</sup> have been accused of serious violations of human rights and of provoking political, economic, and social instability in the countries where they operate.

Colombia has been involved for more than 60 years in a war which doesn't end, with a history of failed peace processes, with betrayals and the assassination of those who submit to processes of reconciliation, with a long list of genocides. These began when the Spanish exterminated 95% of the indigenous population, followed by the period of slavery in which more than 33 million African slaves, who replaced the indigenous manpower which had been exterminated by the works of plunder of natural resources.

More recently the genocide of the Gaitanista movement, that of the Patriotic Union, of union members, and at present of social leaders who oppose extractive industries in their regions have followed. Behind each one of those is the key of the reason why the war doesn't end: we are “standing upon” a quantity of natural resources that makes us the largest exporter of coal in the continent. We are the first producer of fine emeralds; we have the third largest mine of nickel in the continent; the second-largest reserve of strategic minerals in America, shared with Venezuela; one of the largest reserves of gold in the continent; deposits of uranium, of rare earth in the Amazon region, and the same amount of reserves of gas as Qatar. We are the second-most biodiverse country of the planet <sup>6</sup>, which includes very many resources, such as water, woods, flora and fauna, which feed the machinery of violence against the majority of the population.

But what is most serious is that in the last 100 years the country has been “governed” by an establishment which today occupies first place in corruption in the world, which uses “state” and para-state violence as a tool of domination,

making its armed forces one of the greatest violators of Human Rights on the planet.<sup>7</sup> It is the center of open and unrestricted operation of mercenary businesses and including armies like that of the United States, which constitutes the most important armed actor in the Colombian conflict.

In this setting a social and armed conflict developed, in which, on the one hand, there are those who oppose the looting, and on the other hand, those who impose it by violent force with the help of governments such as those of the United States, Canada, the countries of Western Europe, England, Israel, Australia, and racist South Africa. All of these are direct beneficiaries of the infamous plunder of the natural resources, not only at the cost of the destruction of the environment, but also most seriously with the destruction of life, liberties and the fundamental rights of the majority of its population.

### **Drug-trafficking as the “principal actor” of the violence.**

The hegemonic means of communication in the developed world show Colombia as a country immersed in a total war against drug-trafficking, which is a half-truth. This is due to the growing of the coca leaf and its “industrial” transformation for those in the developed world who can pay for the cocaine. This is a detonating force of the violence in our territory, a “cartelized” vision of the country where economic actors hide who most greatly benefit from this criminal “business”.

Drug-trafficking feeds the war, not only of the cartels, but also of common criminals, and of the multinationals which utilize their means of transportation to participate in the drug-trafficking business and use their profits to finance the violence against the marginalized people who oppose their plundering. Drug-trafficking feeds the war of the “state” with its “authorities” who possess their own cartels, and with the establishment and the international financial bourgeoisie which launder millions of dollars<sup>8</sup> in the first station of the international financial system, led by England<sup>9</sup>, the United States, and Switzerland, which are the largest launderers in the colossal business of the drug trade.

There is no doubt that drug-trafficking generates and sustains part of the violence in Colombia. But I reiterate that it is not only the cartels, but also the establishment and the multinationals, which have always been covered with a “corporate veil”. But if we just investigate which ships and which planes are secretly moving the drug, and which banks benefit from the money laundering of this “industry”, that will give us an idea of who is effectively deriving profits from this other illicit business.<sup>10</sup>

### **One of the economic actors which feeds the war: the case of Canada.**

The intervention of the government of Canada in the social and armed conflict of Colombia is not new. But recently the state has been directed to guarantee the pillage of natural resources in a strategy which has 3 components:

The first is the participation in multilateral organizations which impose conditions on the country. Canada participates in multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The former has imposed on the country the opening of its markets, tax reductions for the multinationals, the lack of environmental control in the operations of the extractive industry, and extreme precariousness of labor. In addition, it has ordered the privatization of the refinery of Cartagena<sup>11</sup>, which resulted in the multinational Glencore<sup>12</sup> participating in what is today the most serious act of corruption in the history of the country<sup>13</sup>.

The World Bank co-finances mining projects in Colombia. One concrete case is the financing of the Canadian company Eco-Oro, which has now sued the country in the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) of the World Bank. In addition this Bank ordered the liquidation of the state mining company Minercol Limitada and the privatization of the hydrocarbon sector, which directly benefitted Canadian businesses<sup>14</sup>.

The second component is the creation of national legislation<sup>15</sup> totally favorable to the Canadian corporate interests—among others—which was enacted under a scheme of cooperation between the Canadian International “Development” Agency, CIDA; the Organization of Canadian Multinationals, CERI; and 16 Senators and Representatives, who in Colombia are designated as “parapolíticos”<sup>16</sup>. All of them are presently condemned for their ties with paramilitary groups created with money from the multinational oil and mining companies, agribusiness, cattle ranchers and Colombian drug-traffickers.

The creation of legislation by this alliance began with the legal telecommunications regulation, which years later provoked the privatization of the Colombian state telecommunications company TELECOM. This permitted Canadian and Spanish multinationals to own the company, which was sold for 360 million dollars—a third of its real cost – where 5,000 workers were illegally fired and Colombia was sued for the sum of 1.8 billion dollars by one of the multinationals which participated in the privatization of the state-owned telecommunications company<sup>17</sup>

Later in 1998, and under the same scheme, the collaborators CIDA-CERI-Parapolíticos hired a lawyer of a mining company which was interested in defrauding the Colombian state, alleging that a family which the attorney represented was the owner of the gold mines in the south of Bolivar province, so that she would draft the mining code which sought to take the mines from small-scale miners of

the region and, in a deal with a Mafioso tint, would pass them to the mining company Anglo Gold. The Canadian government of the time participated in this transaction<sup>18</sup>.

Later these same 3 actors presented a proposal to reform the Mining Code, which, after many denunciations of its bias in favor of the multinationals, was approved and today is Law 685 of 2001, the new Mining Code. This completely changed the term that contracts remained in force, extending it from 25 to 30 years with three possible extensions, which implies that the mineral resource is delivered in perpetuity. In addition, environmental control was partially given over to the multinational company, and the mining industry was declared to be of social interest, balancing this interest against the collective properties of the indigenous peoples and the Afro-descendants, thus making it possible for the mining companies to expel them from their territories, just as they are now doing.

The Mining Code also redefined zones where mining had been completely excluded as restricted zones where, with a simple permit, the exploitation of national natural parks, forest reserves, zones of origin of waters, etc. became possible. It initiated a broad tax reform, and introduced reductions and exemptions which, combined with three other tax reforms, also allowed a multinational like Cerrejón to pay 200 billion pesos in annual taxes and receive tax reductions of 600 billion pesos<sup>19</sup>, which is to say that it didn't pay anything and it received a refund of triple what it should have paid.

In addition, they introduced Article 227, which reduced the taxes to 0.4% for private owners of the subsoil, directly benefitting the Canadian company Caribbean Resources, which mines coal in the middle Cerrejon zone, in an area which was illegally declared to be private property. It also benefitted Gran Colombia Gold which mines gold in Marmato in Caldas Province and in Segovia in Antioquia Province, where, in a fraudulent manner, a mine was taken possession of which belonged to the workers<sup>20</sup>; and it also benefitted the transportation company of the former Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin, who transports Colombian coal to Canada in his ships.

To these corporate "advantages" are added acts of colossal corruption by the Colombian governments of the time to favor the multinationals, such as the extension of Concept 015766 of 2005 of the National Tax Department, which had only applied to state businesses, which permitted the deduction of royalty payments from the annual declaration of income. Subsequently it was extended by a Minister of Hacienda (Treasury) to the multinational companies, which generated a loss of more than 8.7 billion dollars to the country.

Additionally, in the development plan of the present government, a new tax reduction is introduced for the private owners of the subsoil—where there are

several Canadian businesses operating—which in a general manner lowers the taxes from 10% to 3.27% if the mining is more than 3 tons, and from 5% to 1.64% if it is less than 3 tons. It also reduced the tax of gold from 4% to 0.4%, of gold and silver alluvium from 6% to 2%—which is going to have a serious impact upon the channel of the rivers from which the indigenous and Afro-descendants derive their subsistence—and of platinum from 5% to 1%.

The government of Canada and the multilateral banks imposed a “free trade” agreement which requires that all of the infrastructure of ports, airports, highways, cargo loading and unloading zones, deposits, and tax-free zones be constructed with the nation’s resources so as to permit the greatest velocity in the sacking of natural resources.

This treaty also allows all types of abuses, plunder and arbitrary acts which have permitted Canadian businesses such as Eco-Oro, Galway Gold, and Cosigo Resources, to sue the country in the CIADI for a sum equal to one fourth of the annual budget of the nation. This compromises the resources for health, food, education, basic sanitation, etc. of the poorest population.

The third component is their government’s military consulting <sup>21</sup> to a Colombian military force which manages paramilitary operations in areas where the Canadian businesses develop their extractive projects, and where they have a relationship with those armed actors, taking into account the “security” contracts with the Ministry of Defense which all companies operating in the country sign. These involve battalions and brigades which carry out a wide range of criminal actions <sup>22</sup> which guarantee the multinationals the “security” they require <sup>23</sup>. The result of this is that 98% of the assassinations of social leaders in the country occur in the mining, energy and agro-industrial zones.

The leaders they do not murder they send to prison, as has just occurred with three social leaders in the South of Bolivar, Cauca, and east central part of the country, where “coincidentally” Canadian companies of the extractive sector—among others—operate. These have signed contracts with the Ministry of Defense and the Attorney General’s Office <sup>24</sup>, two of the entities which are involved in the assassinations of leaders and the illegal detentions.

Finally, as if the humanitarian tragedy in which the country is living were not sufficient, the Canadian company Auxico Resources irregularly obtained a contract for operation in an area of the Colombian Amazon rainforest which is expressly excluded from any mineral exploitation and is the object of legal protection as a forest reserve. In that area this business intends to mine strategic minerals which extend from the states of Amazonas and Bolivar in Venezuela, and which the mining companies of the West prioritize for development of their military industry, since they cannot gain access to the resources of China.

Their interest in this zone is an explanation for the position of the Canadian government in defending the illegal interests of its companies, and is why it treats as a “dictatorship” the government of Venezuela, where the war crimes and the offenses of lese humanity which the governments and the multinationals of the West commit do not occur, as they do in Colombia, where they can loot, murder, displace, change legislation provisions, and charge taxes instead of paying them, etc.

Their interest in unleashing a war between Venezuela and Colombia would provoke a humanitarian disaster worse than that which occurs in Syria, taking into account that we already have 8 million forcibly displaced persons; 83,000 forcibly disappeared; 283,000 persons murdered; three genocides in recent decades; 4,000 union members murdered; and more than 700 social leaders assassinated, all this to guarantee the criminal profits of the multinationals of the West and of the national monopolies which eat the leftovers of this extractive model.

### **The result of this intervention**

This destruction of life and nature culminates in the fact that, after decades of violence, corruption and marginalization imposed by the establishment and the governments of the so-called “developed countries”, the Colombian population today has a poverty index of more than 72%<sup>25</sup>, a Gini index of concentration of wealth of 0.88% on average in the most recent years, the same as the Theil index, which shows how the concentration of wealth increased from 0.14 to 0.20 in nine years (where “0” is total equality). This measures the inequality of the distribution of wealth and, according to an investigation of the Universidad Nacional, shows that “10% of the richest persons held 37.6% of the total wealth, a figure which increased to 42.7% in 2013”. Likewise, “the 10% of the richest legal persons possessed 91% of the wealth, a figure which increased to 92.2% in 2013”<sup>26</sup>.

The analysis permits us to establish that in those six years these transnational businesses have obtained profits of one billion one hundred sixty-nine million 485 thousand 464 dollars ( \$1,169,485,464). Meanwhile, a mine worker in Colombia earns between 7 and 8 times less than any other miner in that sector in a western country.<sup>27</sup>

As we have said in a previous article, the negative impact of the reforms carried out by the government and the multinationals of Canada in Colombia show in cases such as that of the Cerrejon mine that in the last 30 years they have left losses of 14 billion dollars for the country. There are more than 1,000 workers sick, and in Drummond the number is 800, with all kinds of injuries. The

mining companies evade the payment of 3.78 billion pesos to the country by not recognizing the high-risk pension for their men and women workers. A high percentage of these earnings are “reinvested” in violence and corruption to sustain and reproduce the model.

The mining-energy zones which are on average 35% of Colombian municipalities present 87% of the forced displacements, 99% of the murders of indigenous persons, 98% of murders of Afro-Colombians, 78% of murders of union members, 80 % of the total serious violations of Human Rights and 98% of the murders of social leaders in the country.

### **Our Call to the people of Canada**

For the people of Colombia it is clear that the policies of the Canadian government and the Canadian multinationals are one thing, and the vision and commitment of the Canadian people is another. For that reason we make a call to civil society, to their social organizations and to the Parliament of the country to intervene immediately in their meddling policies in Colombia; to suspend all economic and military assistance to the Colombian government and its military-paramilitary forces and mercenaries; to suspend all investment in mining, energy and agro-industrial areas; and to contribute to building the peace which we Colombians need in order that this generation will finally live in that peace which has been denied to several generations of Colombian men and women.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://omal.info/spip.php?article6433>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dw.com/es/violaciones-de-derechos-humanos-en-el-congo/a-1603127>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cetim.ch/violaciones-de-los-derechos-humanos-cometidas-por-las-empresas-transnacionales-en-Colombia/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/PERU-REPORTELECTRONIC.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ocmal.org/anglogold-ashanti-caracterizacion-de-uns-amenaza/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ocmal.org/anglogold-ashanti-caracterizacion-de-uns-amenaza/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-53259476>. <https://www.las2orillas.co/las-fuerzas-militares-y-la-violacion-derechos-humanos/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://taxjustice.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The\\_State\\_of\\_Tax\\_Justice\\_2020\\_English.pdf](https://taxjustice.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The_State_of_Tax_Justice_2020_English.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hg3IPAusQIY>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cicad.oas.org/drogas/elinforme/informeDrogas2013/laEconomiaNarcotraficoESP.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://sidn.ramajudicial.gov.co/SIDN/PUBLICATIONS%20PERIODICAS/TEXTO%20COMPLETO%20Y%20TABLAS%20DE%20CONTENIDO%20PPGaceta%20del%20Congreso/Gaceta%20del%20Congreso%202014/GC%20114%20de%202014.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> With an important participation of investors and businesses in Canada.

<https://es.finance.yahoo.com/quote/GLCNF/holders/>

<sup>13</sup> With respect to this, the president of the Union Sindical Obrera, USO, Cesar Loza, told El Heraldo that “today they pretend to evade responsibility since the first persons who in Ecopetrol and in the Government gave the contract to Glencore. There is a responsibility shared by the President of Ecopetrol, of Mr. Isaac Yanovich, with the Minister of the Treasury of the time, Mr. Alberto Carrasquilla, with the government of Uribe, and in the same way the Board of Directors of Ecopetrol which delivers the contract to Glencore, because when Glencore delivered the contract to Ecopetrol Glencore had already signed a contract with CB&I to build the refinery.” For that reason, the union leader warns that “as a consequence there is a systematic and continuing responsibility as much of the Board of Directors of Ecopetrol of that time, of Glencore, of CB&I and of the board of directors of Glencore which arrived later.”

<https://www.elheraldo.co/economia/glencore-asegura-que-tras-contrato-entre-cbu-y-reficar-estuvo-ecopetrol-243015>

<sup>14</sup> According to the corporation for development of exports of Canada (EDC, Export Development Canada): “Canada has become the leading country investing in Colombia.” In this sense the leading investments in this country have centered on the hydrocarbon and mining sector to the extent of 64% for 2012”.

<http://recientificas.uninorte.edu.co/index.php/economia/article/view/7063/6569>

<sup>15</sup> By means of the agreement in 1998 between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the NGO of Multinationals CERI (Canadian Energy Research Institute) and the government of Colombia.

<sup>16</sup> These “para-políticos” are Miguel de la Espriella; Eleanora Pineda; Jorge Luis Caballero; Edgar Ulises Torres, sponsor of the draft of the Mining Code and the petroleum legislation; Alvaro Garcia Romero; Mauricio Pimiento; Alvaro Araujo, coordinator-sponsor of the Mining Code; Rocio Arias; Eric Morris; Alfonso Campo Escobar; Luis Fernando Almario, sponsor of the Mining Code; Dieb Maloof; Jairo Merlano; Luis Eduardo Vives; Juan Manuel Lopez; and William Montes, among others.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dinero.com/empresas/articulo/telefonica-demando-a-colombia-por-reversion-de-activos/255705>

<sup>18</sup> <https://corpotratierra.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SINTRAMIN.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Guillermo Rudas Lleras, Environmental Consultant and University Professor.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.colombiaunforma.info/segovia-el-oro-y-sus-entradas/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.semana.com/contenidos-editoriales/especiales-regionales-canada/articulo/canada-apoya-a-las-fuerzas-militares-de-colombia/530403/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://repository.usta.edu.co/handle/11634/11549> and <https://www.lafm.com.co/judicial/hay-militares-investigados-por-asesinatos-de-lideres-sociales-revela-la-procuraduria>.

<sup>23</sup> According to the dozens of confessions of demobilized paramilitaries, they received payments from petroleum companies, mining companies, food companies and agro-industrial companies, among which are found businesses with Canadian shareholders, such as the former Grey Star, and the Cerrejon and Glencore companies, among others.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/prtoleras-y-mineras-financian-la-fuerza-publica-y-la-fiscalia-articulo>

917517/?utm\_source=Whatsapp&utm\_medium=organic&utm\_campaign=Compartido-Mobile

<sup>25</sup> Study of the Universidad de los Andes of 2019 cited by Salomon Kalmanovitz

<sup>26</sup> <https://agenciadenoticias.unal.edu.co/detalle/article/la-riqueza-cada-vez-mas-concentrada-en-colombia.html>

<sup>27</sup> A European miner earns an average of 230,000 Euros per year. A Colombian working 12 hours in shifts day and night earns an average of between 10,000 and 15,000 Euros per year.