

# Individual demobilization and reintegration process in Colombia: implementation, challenges and former combatants' perspectives

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*After decades of armed conflict, the Colombian government has implemented a voluntary individual disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme (DDR). This paper is based on interviews of former combatants from illegal armed groups, from both the left and right, governmental officials, and military personnel involved in the processes. The findings of this research suggest that the individual demobilization process as a military strategy is a success. However, in order to strengthen the peace-building process, the programme needs to give more support to the socialization and re-socialization processes that former combatants experience. It needs to provide the former combatants with the skills needed to be economically and socially productive members of society. This will help them redefine their identity as civilians and undergo a successful reintegration and reconciliation.*

**Keywords:** ex-combatants, peace-building, reconciliation, reintegration, re-socialization

## **Introduction**

After more than 40 years of armed conflict and several negotiation attempts, the Colombian government has taken an anti-insurgency containment approach. This military solution aims to end a conflict that has produced more than 200 000 refugees, 2.5 million internally displaced persons, and more than 60 000 civilian casualties in recent years

(Colombia's War on Children, 2004). In 2003 the government designed a comprehensive, long-term state policy, dubbed the 'Democratic Security and Defence Policy (2003)'. The main objective of this policy is to strengthen the rule of law in Colombia and to better guarantee citizens their rights and liberties. In order to achieve this goal, the government has placed an emphasis on the need to defeat the illegal armed groups. By this it means reducing the military capability of the guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and bringing an end to the illegal drug trade.

As part of this security policy, the government is offering the possibility for combatants to demobilize individually, or collectively, and then reintegrate into civilian life. The collective demobilization is framed in a peace agreement between the armed groups and the government. However, the voluntary demobilization process intends to reduce the military capacity of the illegal armed groups, by reducing their manpower and by gathering military information to stop their illegal actions. Currently, the illegal armed groups are comprised of approximately 22 000 guerrilla members and 6 000 paramilitary members (Gonzales, 2003).

The programmes for the individual demobilization that the Colombian government is implementing aim to reduce the power of the armed groups, leaving them with a

negotiated solution as the only alternative (Bernal, 1996). Demobilization is, therefore, perceived as a conflict resolution method, rather than a post conflict process. Few cases exist in which demobilization processes are being implemented under these conditions. The Colombian case could, therefore, serve as a case study to better understand the positive and negative effects of using a demobilization process as a security policy in countries undergoing conflict.

This paper is based on qualitative research and was conducted with open-ended question interviews of 30 former combatants, including six women<sup>1</sup>. The former combatants were all over 18 years old and had been in the programme for more than one month

### **Key concepts**

The process of Demobilization and Reintegration in Colombia has four key concepts: (1) demobilization, (2) reincorporation, (3) reintegration and (4) reconciliation.

Demobilization is understood as 'the formal disbanding of military formations and at the individual level, as the process of releasing combatants from a mobilized state' (Bernal, 1996). Therefore, the Colombian government defines a demobilized combatant as a person who voluntarily abandons his or her activity as a member of an armed group, joins the programme for the demobilization of the Ministry of Defence and who is granted the certification of the CODA (Comité Operativo para la Dejación de Armas) which verifies his/her past affiliation with an illegal armed group.

*Reincorporation* is defined as the creation of policies that aim 'to transform thousands of isolated individuals and ex-criminals into a force for peace' (Bernal, 1996). Reincorporation helps these individuals reintegrate into society and start the process of nation building. Furthermore, reincorporation is defined as

a process whose ultimate goal is the reintegration to civilian life of any member of the illegal armed organizations. The members of illegal armed organizations must intend to be part of the peace process and have decided to abandon the illegal organization (Del Castillo, 2004).

*Reintegration*, refers to medium and long term programmes, which include cash compensation, psychological assistance and training, aimed at facilitating the economic and social reintegration of former combatants and their families (Bernal, 1996).

*Reconciliation*, then, is the final result of a process wherein the parties, who once engaged in a protracted, violent and destructive conflict, aim for sustainable peace. The reconciliation process requires the involved parties to recognize and accept each other diplomatically and psychologically (Kelman, 1999).

### **The individual DDR process**

The process of demobilization starts when a combatant voluntarily lays down his or her weapons to a governmental institution (disarmament). The end of the process is achieved with the independence of the former combatant and the approval of the productive life project. Once a combatant lays down their weapons, they enter the Ministry of National Defence Programme through which their basic needs are covered. They are relocated to a transitional shelter or Casa de Paz. In the shelter, they have access to comfortable beds, clean sanitary services, and a TV and lecture room (PAHD, 2003). In addition, they also have access to food, health services, clothing, and personal hygiene products. The government also provides former combatants with money for daily transportation. According to the law, if a former combatant is demobilized with his or her family, s/he is also entitled to the same benefits of shelter, food, clothing, and healthcare. If s/he is

single, s/he can include his/her parents in the programme (Decree 128 of January 2003).

During their stay in a shelter, the former combatants undergo a military interview. This interview is meant to verify that the person involved was a combatant in an illegal armed group. It is also aimed at obtaining information that can be used in the planning of military strategies to stop the illegal armed groups' actions and the rescuing of civilians. The former combatants also have the option of voluntarily helping the military organize military operations to counter terrorist acts. Former combatants are given economic compensation according to the type of information they provide and the results of the operation<sup>2</sup>.

Once their information is verified, the Operational Committee for the Laying Down of Arms (CODA) certifies the former combatants<sup>3</sup>.

After this, the former combatants complete the Integral Adult Assessment, an interview used to determine the emotional and psychological state of each former combatant. It is conducted by psychologists and is used to determine the psychological assistance that a person might require.

After they are certified, the former combatants enter the reintegration programme of the Ministry of Interior and Justice<sup>4</sup>. In this phase, the former combatants have access to education and technical training that will help him or her construct a productive life.

### **The combatants' perspectives**

*Life before being combatants.* The majority of the former combatants interviewed before joining the groups used to be peasants living in rural areas, often in conditions of poverty. Some of the women interviewed used to work as maids or secretaries. The agricultural activities in which the former combatants participated before entering their organizations included growing yucca, rice, and

plantain. These agricultural activities also included the growing of coca plants. The education level on average was limited to elementary or the first years of high school. The majority of the former combatants are heads of families with more than two children.

Their *reasons for joining organizations* varied, depending on the area where the person lived. Some former combatants said that they voluntarily joined these organizations. However, it is important to examine the conditions that lured them into enrolling. The former combatants often came from areas where these organizations have a strong presence. Therefore, some of them had grown up having daily contacts with people involved in these illegal activities. Consequently, joining the guerrilla or paramilitary groups is part of the tradition of some regions (Jefe Policía Judicial Arauca CIJIN, 2005). Other reasons why people enrol in these groups include; the influence of friends, false expectations of an easier life, and the search for better economic conditions. However, once in the groups, they realized that life as combatants is often harder than their previous living conditions. A female former combatant from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) stated the following: *I entered the FARC because a friend took me there. I was escaping from my father and we went to another town. My friend studied with me. She knew what the FARC was about, but I had no idea. I let her convince me. When I arrived there, well as a woman you can imagine, they start talking to you and convincing you that life in the organization is cool. Cool! Once in the organization I wanted to go back to my house, but they wouldn't let me go.*

Former members of the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) expressed the view that they started working for people involved in the organization but had no intention of actually being members of the AUC. After some time, they were sent to training

camps and enrolled completely into the military activities of the paramilitaries.

*Life as combatants* was often harder than they ever imagined, especially because not only did their lives change, but also those of their family members. The combatants did not have fixed salaries and, therefore, had no steady source of income to support their families. In addition, their families were put at risk of being targets by opposing factions.

The training as combatants in the guerrilla and paramilitary groups is the same for men and women. As a result, if a woman gets pregnant, she has to have an abortion. According to a former combatant of the AUC, in the event of need for abortions, the women are simply killed. The training is intended to sever any emotional attachment the person might have had before joining the organization. As part of their training, they are often forced to watch other combatants being executed for not following orders. The combatants, therefore, have traumatic experiences even before they enter combat.

The combatants are frequently forced to fight, with few of them expressing belief in the group's ideology. Many acknowledge a lack of credible ideology within the armed groups where the war is a business. They risk their lives and their leaders get the economic benefits. As one of the former FARC commanders stated; *'I entered the organization convinced that a social change could be achieved and that the only alternative for us was to defend those ideals with arms. It was a rational conscientious decision, and I believed at that point in time that being in the revolution was the correct thing to do. However, the internal political crisis that the FARC was experiencing, the battle fatigue I was experiencing and seeing how the economic interests were more important than the political ideologies made me leave the organization. Weapons should be a means to achieve an objective; however, in the FARC, they are an objective by themselves.'*

*Reasons for demobilizing.* Combatants are demobilizing because they realized that there is a lack of ideology within the organizations and because their conditions as combatants are brutal. They realized that the war has become a source of economic profit and not a way to achieve social change. Many have recognized that the reasons behind the war in Colombia relate to the drug trade and territorial control. This only benefits the leaders of these illegal organizations.

*Life after demobilization.* Prior to entering the demobilization programme the combatants did not have much knowledge about it. However, the sparse information they had had been obtained from the radio or other demobilized combatants. In their organizations they are told that the government kills the demobilized combatants once they obtain all the information they desire. It is only once they demobilize that they are assured this is not true. Due to this propaganda, for the combatants to take the first step toward demobilizing is a very terrifying experience. Also, the former combatants recognize that in some areas there might be infiltrators attached to the illegal armed groups within the armed forces. This increases their anxiety and fear of laying down their weapons. However, the former combatants interviewed said that they were treated with respect when they did demobilize. For some of them, the moment they turned in their weapon was the first time they viewed any member of the armed forces as anything other than as an enemy. The demobilization process determines the atmosphere of the reintegration process from its initial stage. The fact that the army treats them with respect helps the former combatants to humanize an enemy again and start believing in the government for the first time in years.

*The DDR programme.* It is an obligation for all former combatants to attend an introductory lecture to familiarize themselves with the

process of demobilization and reintegration. Functionaries from both ministries explain the process. After the lectures, former combatants are asked what they remember about the goals, objectives and steps of the programme. The response is often that they do not have a clear understanding. The lectures are taught by people who work in the ministries and are highly educated, and in some cases, the former combatants do not understand the technical vocabulary used. A former combatant who easily identifies with the audience and who has experienced the difficulties of the entire process should give these lectures.

Overall, most former combatants said they are content with the process, especially with benefits such as food, shelter and the possibility of being with their families. They are also no longer persecuted and have the possibility of a better life. However, they also identified the difficulty for them in trusting others. Since anyone could be an infiltrator, there is a lack of trust among the former combatants themselves. Life in the shelters is not easy, especially for those with families, and because of the concern about security.

The regulations of the programme are very broad regarding economic compensation, and vary depending on the ministries' budgets. For these reasons, the amount of seed money for productivity projects, as well as other economic benefits, frequently changes. Because of these changes, former combatants often believe that the government is being dishonest.

In sum, the former combatants interviewed suggested that in order for them to have a better transition to civilian life, they needed more psychological attention, more information about the processes of demobilization and reintegration to clearly understand what they are experiencing, a faster certification process, easier access to health services, independent homes, more security within the shelters and

activities to keep them busy during the day while they are being certified. Their expectations for the future are to study, to invest the money from the productivity projects (seed money), and to be able to have a job, so that they would have two sources of income.

*Integration into a new social life and adapting an individualistic lifestyle.* The former combatants are not going through a real process of reintegration, but rather integration to a new social life. Since Colombia is still embroiled in war, for security reasons the former combatants cannot go back to the areas they came from. Some of the combatants have never been in a city and are being relocated to large cities, where they have to adapt to a new lifestyle. This makes their transition into civilian life more difficult. For this reason, the concept of reintegration is understood as the return to familiar social groups and becoming socially functional, cannot be applied in the case of Colombia.

The former combatants lived cultural collectivistic lives before they joined the illegal groups. As combatants, they understood that their lives depended on their fellow combatants. When they demobilize, they have to adapt to an individualistic lifestyle, where they do not have a support system. First, because they do not trust people in the shelters, and second, because they have to create economically productive projects individually, they perceive their situation to be highly challenging.

*Loss of status.* Another problem is that some people acquired special social status within the illegal armed groups. After demobilization, they lose that status. For example, women combatants obtain respect and status depending on the role they play and the service they provide to an organization. Although in some cases they are sexually abused and the requirement to abort any pregnancy is usually stated in the rules of

the group, there is a possibility that they may achieve a status that they could not have had outside the organization (UNDP, 2003). Having weapons and being useful to the organization requires women to play different roles from those available to them as part of a rural community.

*Problems for family members.* Some of the combatants may not have seen their families since enrolling in the armed groups. When they leave the organizations, they have to flee with their families, forcing them to resume the family role that they discarded when joining the organizations. The families often blame the former combatant for the situation they are facing in the shelters (Chavez, 2004a; UNDP, 2003).

*Psychological problems.* The psychological changes that former combatants experience are compounded by feelings of shame. The former combatants are only in the PAHD shelters for a few months and do not have time to build solid relationships with their peers. They often attempt to strengthen their positions within the shelter by conveying a strong attitude through rude and aggressive behaviour. If they publicly acknowledge that they are experiencing nightmares or other psychological problems, they feel they may be perceived as mentally unstable. This could affect their self-esteem, as well as their social position within the shelter. According to the PAHD 2004 reports, 13,6% of the demobilized combatants in Santa Fe de Bogotá had a negative self-image. This is reflected in low self-esteem, insecurity, and the inability to identify their potential to build a new life (Chavez, 2004b). These emotional problems are exacerbated by what the psychologists of the programme refer to as identity problems. This occurs when former combatants enter a new urban life at a stage when they have not fully embraced their role as civilians. Their disposition continues to relate to

the collective identity developed during their days as combatants. This generates a sense of detachment from their new socio-cultural context, increasing their stress and making interaction with other former combatants more difficult.

The result of this emotional stress is seen in the aggressiveness and impulsive response present in 16,1% of the population (Chavez, 2004b). This aggressiveness is directly related to the feelings of frustration they are experiencing. Negative feelings can be traced to their life experiences before they became combatants through to the demobilization process. The former combatants initially feel frustrated because their expectations have not been met. In most cases, they joined the illegal organizations in search of a better life. However, the fact that they are demobilizing shows that those expectations were not fulfilled.

As mentioned earlier, these frustrations are reflected in aggressive behaviour. The former combatants that experience these feelings tend to have low levels of tolerance as evident in their willingness to use violence. Violence is the most commonly utilized problem-solving method among former combatants and often manifests itself as domestic violence (Chavez, 2004a). Approximately 33% of former combatants experience intra-family violence (PAHD, 2004).

*Reconciliation.* Since demobilization is an individual process, as soon as the combatant demobilizes, the organization to which s/he belongs becomes his/her enemy. For their former organization, s/he is now a deserter who deserves to die if captured. For this reason, former combatants are often willing to give all the information required to capture and dismantle the block from which they escaped (Toro, 2004). However, this does not mean that they do not continue to see the former combatants of opposing groups as their enemies.

The former combatants consider civilians to be the major victims of the conflict, especially the peasants in the combat areas. In addition, they recognize that they, as well as their families, are also victims of the conflict. They identify themselves as victims due to the atrocities they had to endure as combatants. Some of them talked about the opportunities they lost when they entered the organizations and the loss of their childhood and youth. When former combatants were asked whom they would like to ask for forgiveness, their responses were (1) God, (2) their mothers and (3) their families. They acknowledged that forgiveness is an essential component of reconciliation. The former combatants also realized that, because of their actions while in the organizations, they needed the forgiveness of civilians. On the other hand, most of the former combatants interviewed also accepted the fact that they needed to forgive any wrong that was done to them.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The demobilization programme has successfully reduced the personnel of the illegal armed groups. In addition, it has provided the government with important information to stop terrorist attacks and has helped rescue kidnapped civilians. From a military perspective, the process is a successful policy; however, the programme still presents problems in the reincorporation and reintegration part. Although the programme offers the combatants alternative possibilities to war, there is still a long way to go before they can be fully reintegrated into civilian life and a process of national reconciliation achieved.

*Access to health services.* One of the challenges that the former combatants encounter in the demobilization stage concerns their access to health services. The health card, according to the law, covers general medicine

and visits to specialists in public hospitals, and there are nurses that periodically visit the shelters. However, the card expires after 45 days because, when the programme was designed, it was estimated that a person would spend less than 45 days under the supervision of the Ministry of National Defence. The hospitals have the obligation to treat the former combatants even after their health cards expired. However, that is not often the case. Another of the concerns of the former combatants is that there have been cases when they visited a hospital, but were unable to see a doctor. The former combatants claimed that hospital personnel are often not familiar with the health service process for former combatants and, subsequently, deny them services (Carrillo, 2004).

*Temporary shelters.* Currently, one of the biggest concerns of the former combatants, especially those with young children, is life in the temporary shelters. There have been reported alcohol and drug related problems, as well as robbery and inter-personal violence (Toro, 2004). During the interviews, one of the most frequent responses when former combatants were asked what else was needed to ease their transition into civilian life was independent housing. The temporary shelters are under the administration of private companies, which are contracted through public bidding. The requirements to enter the bidding are to have the necessary infrastructure (a house big enough to give shelter to a group of former combatants) and the capacity to provide food and personal hygiene products to everyone in the shelter. Each temporary shelter is assigned a manager. Usually, the managers have no previous training in how to deal with the specific population, or in crisis management. The companies in charge of the shelters are now required to have psychological assistance available for the former combatants.

**Security.** In terms of security, the families of the former combatants tend to live in high-risk zones. This presents an obstacle for the authorities trying to relocate them. It is also very difficult for the government to provide security for them. The difficulties in relocating the families and the family reunion itself cause high levels of anxiety and stress to the former combatants. This affects their interaction with their families, as well as the other members of the shelters. It is often expressed through domestic violence and abuse (Chavez, 2004a).

Security is also a major concern within the shelters. The former combatants fear that the guerrillas or the paramilitary groups – who see them as deserters – could discover their locations and attack the shelters. This fear is enhanced by the possibility of having an infiltrated person within the shelters that could provide information to illegal organizations about the locations of the shelters.<sup>5</sup>

**Reintegration.** The former combatants are not being reintegrated but integrated into new communities. They pass from a collectivistic rural military life to an individualistic urban life as civilians. In addition, their war traumas are not being treated adequately. These factors make it difficult for them to acknowledge their responsibilities and duties as civilians.

**Reconciliation.** The reconciliation process requires the involved parties to recognize and accept one another diplomatically and psychologically (Kelman, 1999). Civil society in Colombia still sees former combatants as a threat. For this reason, neither former combatants nor the rest of society are ready to accept one another in this nation building process and initiate a sustainable peace that could help the state protect democracy and citizens' rights. In addition, an important aspect of a reconciliation process is to help former combatants deal with their fears, their pasts, and their grievances. However, these

psychological needs are not being properly addressed in the programme. An appropriate process of trauma healing will help former combatants become reconciled with themselves, deal with their past, take advantage of the benefits of the programme, and help them adapt to their new lifestyle, and will help reduce the chances of returning to the guerrilla or paramilitary groups.

In addition, there is no re-humanization or change in the stereotyped image<sup>6</sup> of the enemy among the former combatants and with the civilians. The re-humanization of the enemy is the process by which an individual or group changes their stereotypes of the other, and acknowledges the other group or person's attributes as a human being. Society in Colombia is not ready to undergo this process and recognize the former combatants as civilians, nor do the former combatants recognize themselves as such. These factors hinder the possibility of national reconciliation and the possibilities of sustainable peace.

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- de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and 13 from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). Among the 30 former combatants there were six women (three from the AUC, two from the FARC and one from the ELN). The interviews only include former combatants from various transitional shelters located in Bogotá. Some interviews were conducted at the office for the Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado (Program for Humanitarian Aid for the Demobilization or PAHD) and others in an open field during some of the training sessions organized by the programme. The interviews were scheduled to last no more than two hours. However, the time varied according to the willingness of the former combatants to answer the questions. If in any case, as Keairns urges, the former combatants interviewed were experiencing discomfort recalling or reflecting on past experience, the interviews were stopped (Keairns, 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> According to a report of the Colombian Embassy in the United States, the information and testimonies provided by the former combatants in the military interviews have served to neutralize terrorist actions. For example, the detonation of 11 car bombs in Bogotá was prevented during 2003, as was the occupation of four small towns in the same year. In addition, based on military interviews, the army designs and expedites military operations against illegal groups that have resulted in the destruction of 160 subversive camps and the liberation of seven civilians (*La Política de Desmovilización y Reincorporación a la Vida Civil*, 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> The CODA is comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Interior and Justice, the Ministry of National Defence, the Public Prosecutor's office, the Ombudsman, and the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) (Medina, 2005). The CODA analyzes the files for each former combatant and decides whether that person was really a member of an illegal armed group. If the person is denied certification, s/he and his/her family have

<sup>1</sup> The people interviewed included 13 former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), two from the Ejército

72 hours to leave the shelter. However, the person has the right to an appeal, through which s/he can present the CODA with more information and have the decision reversed. If the information is not enough to certify or deny a person, the case is suspended. At that point, more information is gathered and the case is re-opened (Medina, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The programme of the Ministry of Justice and Interior has five main areas: (1) Security, (2) Judicial, (3) Humanitarian Aid, (4) Education and (5) Projects. The area of Security encompasses cooperation with the police and other armed forces that provide security for the shelters, and teaching the former combatants about self-protection. If a former combatant requires special security, this programme is responsible for relocating him/her to independent homes. The Judicial area takes care of any legal problem the former combatants might face. The programme offers the former combatants the possibility of having their judicial situation clarified. Every combatant in the AUC is charged with intent to break the law, illegal possession of weapons and military uniforms of the armed forces, and any associated crimes. For being a member of an insurgent group, a person is charged with rebellion, illegal possession of weapons and associated crimes. The programme grants amnesty for these crimes, but not for any crime against humanity. After former combatants are granted preclusion of their cases, if they are involved in any crime for the next two years, the precluded cases are reopened and they are recharged for those crimes.

The judicial benefits the programme offers are among the biggest incentives for combatants to demobilize. The former combatants said that if they deserted from an illegal armed group and did not enter the demobilization programme, both the illegal armed groups and the judicial governmental institutions would persecute them.

The area of Humanitarian Aid is in charge of providing the former combatants with shelter, food, clothing (150 000 pesos bonus ticket per person),

and money for transportation (60 000 pesos per month). It also includes personal hygiene kits, psychological assistance, health insurance, and any necessary follow up of their needs. The former combatants have to stay in the shelters for a period of six months after being certified in order to be granted independent homes. The requirements for an independent home are (a) being enrolled in an educational programme or working, (b) being certified by the CODA, (c) possessing valid identification cards for themselves and their family members if they are part of the programme, (d) writing a letter stating their desire for an independent home, (e) opening a savings account, (f) a letter from a psychologist stating that they are psychologically prepared to live independently and (g) a letter of good behaviour from the shelter's manager.

The area of education is in charge of providing the training that the former combatants will need to be economically productive after finishing the programme. All of the former combatants are required to be literate before completing the programme. This area offers elementary, secondary and vocational studies. The former combatants have the opportunity to take classes targeted to improve their skills in what they have decided for their Productivity Project.

The projects area is in charge of helping the former combatants design a long-term plan or Productivity Project to ensure their incomes after the programme ends. The Ministry of Interior and Justice gives each former combatant seed money for his/her project. The amount of money changes according to the ministry's budget (Clavijo, 2005). In 2005, the seed money was 8 000 000 pesos. The former combatants received this amount in consumables based on their Productivity Projects.

If the former combatants want to leave the programme at any point, they need to sign an agreement stating their voluntarily departure. They lose the economic benefits of the productive project. However, they do not lose the judicial benefits.

If former combatants leave the programme without notifying the Ministry of Interior and Justice, they will be prosecuted for the crimes committed before entering the programme.

<sup>5</sup> Two logistic and implementation challenges that the DDR programme encounters are the storage of weapons, and the allocation of resources. In a collective demobilization process, all the arms are destroyed. However, in the absence of an agreement, the weapons of the former combatants are a source of judicial information. From the weapons the combatants turn in, the government can determine the routes of arms traffickers or the crimes committed with particular weapons. In an individual process, weapons are not destroyed but instead are placed in a depot under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor. After all the judicial information has been obtained from the arms, those meeting military standards are reused and the others are destroyed. These weapons used by the FARC and AUC, such as the AK47 rifle, came from the Soviet Union. Such weapons are not compatible with the ones the army uses (Toro, 2004). Keeping the weapons implies a high cost to the government, and there is always the risk of theft by illegal armed groups and reused.

With regard to the allocation of resources, since it is a voluntary and individual process, it is difficult to budget for the costs. Predicting the number of combatants and where they are going to be demobilized is a difficult task. It is challenging for the PAHD to plan how many shelters and supplies and what level of transportation should be available.

One of the problems that the former combatants face before they lay down their weapons is the corruption within the military forces. In some areas, there are infiltrators of the illegal armies in the national armed forces. In some cases, combatants have to send a request or petition to high military officials expressing their desire to demobilize. According to a former combatant from the FARC interviewed, by doing so, they are able to protect

their lives and ensure that their information and location will not be sold back to the illegal armed groups that they are deserting.

Some logistic challenges that the PAHD faces are the Adult Integral Assessment and the military interview. Regarding the Adult Integral Assessment, the problem is that there are not enough specialists to assist the entire population. In addition, quantifying the information gathered to actually draw a profile of the population is difficult. First, the interviews are not designed in a way that would enable the information to be categorized into variables; second the software used for obtaining statistics of the population is not used in an adequate way. However, some general valuable information can be obtained from the assessments that help the programme to provide an understanding of the behaviour and characteristics of former combatants.

In the military interviews, the interviewers are all male members of the military forces, in addition to being intelligence experts in particular areas of the country. Therefore, they can verify whether the information provided by any demobilizing person concurs with the reality of a region. All of the former combatants would ideally be subjected to a polygraph test. However, the ones demobilized in Bogotá take precedence. The information is then presented to a committee that compares it with military intelligence. The interviewers gather the information, make their evaluations, and pass them on to the CODA, which is the entity that grants certification.

The programme fails to follow up on the former combatants once they are independent. There is no follow-up monitoring of former combatants during their reintegration process. The only information available is the records obtained from the Adult Integral Assessment and from the files that the Ministry of Interior and Justice has on every combatant. Not having follow-up mechanisms makes it impossible to know if a former combatant has returned to an illegal armed group. Former combatants are compensated for information

about their organizations that they volunteer to the government. However, there is no way of preventing a former combatant from rejoining another faction of the same organization but in a different location.

The effect of this loophole is not only that the government money might end up helping these illegal organizations, but also that the other former combatants are placed at higher risk. The former combatants who return to their organizations know the locations of the shelters, the names of the other demobilized combatants, and how the system works. Therefore, in the hands of these organiz-

ations, such information places the shelters in a vulnerable position.

<sup>6</sup> According to Gross Stein, Stren, Fitzgibbon and Maclean (2001), an image refers to a set of beliefs or the hypotheses and theories that an individual or group is convinced are valid.

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