

MAY 2024

SPECIAL BULLETIN

# PARAMILITARISM

**Strategy of Control and Territorial Hegemony  
Following the Signing of the Peace Agreement  
in Magdalena Medio (2017-2024)**





**CREDHOS**  
Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

## **PARAMILITARISM IN THE MAGDALENA MEDIO REGION**

The Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights -CREDHOS-, presents to civil society and its organizations, local, regional, national authorities and the international community, a Special Bulletin on the actions of paramilitary groups in the Magdalena Medio region. This document summarizes the dynamics of territorial control and territorial hegemony carried out by paramilitary groups after the signing of the Peace Accords between the FARC-EP and the National Government. With this, we hope to provide inputs for the understanding, dialogue and formulation of policies for the dismantling of these structures, as well as the implementation of actions that guarantee the life and safeguarding of the civilian population, their leadership and organizations.

This bulletin covers the dynamics of paramilitary armed groups -one of the coercive arms of paramilitary politics- in the Magdalena Medio region, taking -due to their size and regional power- the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia -ACG- as the main armed actor, who in recent years have managed to position themselves as almost hegemonic in the region.

It should be noted that this document does not attempt to address paramilitarism in its entirety, as it is seen as a State policy that promotes the continuity of a development model based on extractivism, land concentration - large estates and extensive cattle ranching - and the use of illicit rents associated with drug trafficking. All this, under the interrelation of political, economic, armed (legal and illegal) and social actors, who, in local, regional and national spheres, strive to sustain power, thanks to the normalization of their dominance in the daily life of the communities and the territory. This topic will be addressed in the next bulletin.

### **Expansion, disputes and territorial control after the signing of the Peace Agreement (2017-2024).**

In the last seven (7) years, following the signing of the Peace Agreement, the Magdalena Medio region has seen a reconfiguration and intensification of the internal armed conflict, initially around the territories once controlled by the FARC-EP. The positioning and expansion of the illegal armed groups, as well as the alliances and confrontations between them and the legal armed groups of the Colombian State, led to an increase in serious human rights violations and breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

It should be noted that the region has the historical presence of the National Liberation Army (ELN), the "Central General Staff" of the post-Farc groups, the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), the Joint Task Force Marte -as the main military unit-, the National Navy and the National Police. In the year 2023, the presence of a new post-Farc group with national recognition, but without previous presence in the region, the Second Marquetalia - a

**Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486**  
**Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)**  
**<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - <https://twitter.com/Credhos> Paz**  
**Barrancabermeja, Colombia**



group within which "Iván Márquez" is identified as one of its main figures - was foreseen. The level of influence of each armed group varies according to the subregion and municipality, and there are even substantial changes from one hamlet to another.

### **1. Of disputes in the pre-pandemic period.**

During 2017, 2018 and 2019, the political and military actions of the illegal armed groups were aimed at extending their territorial control in the former FARC-EP territories, including alliances and territorial pacts in function of not affecting the circularity of illicit economies. This implied new dynamics of co-optation and subjugation of the communities and their organizational forms, generating multiple human rights violations and breaches of IHL, such as threats to physical integrity, forced displacements, assassinations, forced confinement, restrictions on mobility and destruction of civilian property. In the midst of the measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the AGC -the main paramilitary group with a presence in the region- began a slow process of expansion and territorial control, while the positioning and advance of the Military Units attached to the Joint Task Force Marte, was reduced to the forced eradication of illicit crops -without directing greater efforts to stop the actions of the AGC-, which accentuated the humanitarian crisis faced by rural communities during the years 2020 and 2021.

### **2. 2020 - 2021: Prelude to widespread territorial expansion and control.**

By 2020, in the midst of the Covid pandemic,<sup>19</sup> the AGC fought with Los Caparrapos for the upper zone of the sub-region of Sur de Bolívar - the municipalities of Achí, Barranca de Loba, San Martín de Loba, Altos del Rosario, Río Viejo and Norosí - while in the lower zone - the municipalities of Simití, Cantagallo and San Pablo - there was a distribution of territory with the ELN. As for Magdalena Medio Santandereano, especially Barrancabermeja and Puerto Wilches, their actions were concentrated in groups known as "pandillas or combos" with a strong presence and neighborhood control, thus allowing the extension of illicit economies around drug trafficking and the execution of criminal actions against the civilian population, directly or in the midst of territorial disputes with other illegal armed groups. In these subregions, their sources of financing are focused on drug trafficking, extortion and illegal mining.

In some municipalities of the subregions of Sur de Bolívar -San Pablo and Cantagallo-, Magdalena Medio Santandereano -Barrancabermeja and Puerto Wilches-, Magdalena Medio Antioqueño - Yondó- and Nordeste Antioqueño -Segovia and Remedios-; the AGC established territorial pacts with the ELN and post-Farc groups during this period, motivated by the maintenance of illicit economic routes, arms trafficking and logistical supplies. Their regional presence was exercised through the operation of the Erlin Pinto Duarte Bloc and the Luis Alfonso Echavarria Front.

By 2021, the expansion of the AGC allowed their hegemonic presence in the municipalities of Achí and Montecristo -sub-region of Sur de Bolívar- after disputes with Los Caparrapos, while in the



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

municipalities of Barranca de Loba, San Martín de Loba, Altos del Rosario, Río Viejo and Norosí, they faced the advance of the ELN, whom they also confronted for territorial control of Santa Rosa del Sur, Simití and San Pablo. By then they had a smaller presence in the municipalities of Cantagallo and Yondó. The urban structures with a strong presence in the municipalities of Puerto Wilches and Barrancabermeja extended to the municipality of Sabana de Torres, also in the Magdalena Medio Santandereano sub-region.

In the city of Barrancabermeja, a case of special attention, the AGC has consolidated hegemonic control since 2021 thanks to territorial pacts with other illegal armed groups. Their presence is concentrated in six (6) of the seven (7) communes of the city and in the districts of El Llanito, El Centro and Meseta de San Rafael. Their main source of income is the control of the so-called "micro-trafficking pots" and the sale of narcotics. In second place is the extortion of businessmen and contractors of the hydrocarbon industry. In addition, some of its members are immersed in the oil industry, through their employment with contractors. This allows them to maintain a low profile with the authorities and to carry out intelligence activities. Some hitmen of this structure work formally during the day and commit crimes at night.

The housing deficit in the city of Barrancabermeja and municipalities such as Puerto Wilches and Puerto Berrío led to a boom in human settlements. This situation was taken advantage of by the alliance of armed structures at the service of the AGC to impose norms of social control or "coexistence", threaten community leaders who confronted them, charge "security quotas", resell lots, establish "micro-trafficking pots" and recruit minors in areas where there was little or no state presence. During this lapse, the AGC - in some cases in alliance with the ELN - managed to position themselves in human settlements to exercise tacit social, economic and military control. It is in some of these locations where their major urban presence in the Magdalena Medio is concentrated.

Between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the expansion, positioning and control of the CGA in the sub-region of Sur de Bolívar is registered, their incursion and presence begins to become evident in the villages of Cañabral Bajo, Patio Bonito, El Diamante, Virgencita, San Juan Alto and Muribá in the municipality of San Pablo; Monterrey and the villages of El Triángulo, Humareda, La Ramona and Aguas Lindas in the municipality of Simití; and the village of Puente Sogamoso in the municipality of Puerto Wilches. During this period, in the municipalities of San Pablo and Puerto Wilches, through public communiqués and summons to meetings, the AGC threatened and coerced social leaders, unemployed people, human rights defenders and presidents of Community Action Boards. Through these actions, the AGC warned of their territorial control and violently imposed "norms of conduct" on the civilian population.

A fact that evidences the clear violation of IHL by this paramilitary group was the settlement of approximately 30 armed men inside the village of El Paraíso in the municipality of Simití since mid-December 2021. By the beginning of 2022, there was fighting with the ELN that put the integrity of the civilian population at serious risk. It is worth noting that, despite a strong deployment of the Military Forces in the territory, the AGC maintained for several days -until

**Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486**

**Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)**

**<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - [https://twitter.com/Credhos\\_Paz](https://twitter.com/Credhos_Paz)**

**Barrancabermeja, Colombia**



February 1, 2022- two checkpoints in the township of El Paraíso; the first one in the "Alto Ventanas" sector and the second one in the "Y de Agua Linda", with the National Army just 500 meters away in "Punto Tablones".

It should be noted that during this period, human rights, social, community, peasant, mining and environmental organizations, as well as their respective leaders, alerted and sufficiently denounced to civilian and military authorities the military incursion that the AGC had been carrying out, as well as their intention to position themselves and exercise hegemonic control over the Magdalena Medio region. The clear passivity and, in some cases, operational coincidence and possible connivance and acquiescence of the Military Forces with this paramilitary group was noted with great concern. The response of the authorities was to emphatically deny the presence of the AGC, arguing that the violent and victimizing acts against the civilian population were carried out by criminal groups that had nothing to do with an organized armed group. All this, while the paramilitary group began a process of unchecked expansion.

### **3. 2022 - Present: Accelerated expansion and territorial control without major opposition.**

During the year 2022, the expansion of the AGC was sustained, accelerated and without major opposition, which allowed the positioning and control of large villages, townships and municipalities in the Magdalena Medio region. Through the strategy of terror and terror, their political, social and economic control is already tacit in the municipalities of Barrancabermeja, Puerto Wilches, Cimitarra, San Pablo, Simití, Santa Rosa del Sur, Montecristo, Achí and Puerto Berrío; with a strong position in the Magdalena Medio Antioqueño. Some paramilitary actions - threats, forced displacements and assassinations - were motivated by the economic interests of large-scale cattle, palm and oil projects, such as the assassination of three members of the Interlocution Commission of Southern Bolívar, Central and Southern Cesar (CISBCSC) in the municipalities of San Martín and Tamalameque, Southern Cesar; and the threats and forced displacement of environmental leaders who mobilized against the Integral Research Pilot Projects (PII) in the municipality of Puerto Wilches .

In April 2022, the AGC in a public communiqué stated the beginning of a "gun plan" in Magdalena Medio Santandereano, but also pointed out as allies of the structure commanded by John Jairo Fernández Pórtala, alias "Marihuano", members of the SIJIN of the National Police and the CTI of the Attorney General's Office. As background of the relationship of the National Police in Barrancabermeja with paramilitary groups, there is the capture of two (2) policemen in 2019 for links with the Black Eagles, and the capture of a policeman (1) in 2020 for belonging to Los Rastrojos .

In May 2022, the AGC, in a clear demonstration of force and territorial control, declared an armed strike that seriously affected the fundamental rights of the communities of Magdalena Medio,



# **CREDHOS**

**Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos**  
**"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"**  
**NIT. 800.079.235-6**

demonstrating their hegemonic control over large sub-regions. The armed strike mainly affected the municipalities of Cantagallo, San Pablo, Simití and Santa Rosa del Sur -South of Bolívar-;

Puerto Berrio and Yondó -Magdalena Medio Antioqueño-; and Puerto Wilches and Barrancabermeja in Magdalena Medio Santandereano. There were threats to the commercial and transportation sector, symbolic actions - graffiti, placement of flags, pamphlets - and burning of vehicles. In the face of these actions, the omission of the local, departmental and national authorities was evident, as during the armed strike they did not deploy actions to guarantee the physical integrity of the civilian population .

The expansion of the AGC generated an escalation in the number of victimizing acts against the civilian population in the Magdalena Medio region. Faced with this situation, the communities denounced the passivity and omission of police authorities and the National Army's Joint Task Force Marte, whose operational coincidence with the paramilitary group once again raised the alarm in the region. In mid 2022, the AGC installed a roadblock in the village of Pozo Azul in the municipality of San Pablo, a few kilometers from the presence of the National Army, which did not take immediate and effective action to dismantle it . Another IHL violation by the AGC was committed at the beginning of September 2022, when they settled in the hamlet of Los Canelos de Santa Rosa del Sur, while approximately 150 meters away this structure was engaged in confrontations with the National Army . More recently, on May 7, 2024 in the afternoon, a group of paramilitaries of the AGC arrived at the Vereda la Capilla (20 minutes on foot and 5 minutes by motorcycle) of the village of Micoahumado belonging to the municipality of Morales, Sur de Bolivar, while another group approached the field that is at the entrance of the village. While all this was going on, the army was in the township cemetery, doing nothing. Despite calls from the communities, the Army officer stated that they did not act due to the presence of members of the National Liberation Army -ELN- in the area.

Among the victims of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia -AGC- so far in 2024, are the comrades FABER DE JESUS RINCÓN PEREZ, defender of Human Rights and "local labor", on February 3, 2024 in the municipality of Yondó and NARCISO BELEÑO, recognized social leader of the South of Bolivar, PRESIDENT of the FEDERACIÓN AGROMINERA DEL SUR DE BOLIVAR -FEDEAGROBISMOL- and, political reference in the defense of the rights of the historically excluded communities of the region, who was murdered on April 21, 2024 around 9:30 pm, in the urban center of the municipality of Yondó, in the municipality of Yondó, in the municipality of Yondó:30 pm, in the urban center of the municipality of Santa Rosa del Sur. It should be noted that FEDEAGROBISMOL is an organization that has strongly and repeatedly denounced the expansion, territorial control and victimizing acts of the AGC against the civilian population in the south of Bolivar, for which it was declared a "military objective" on previous occasions by the AGC.



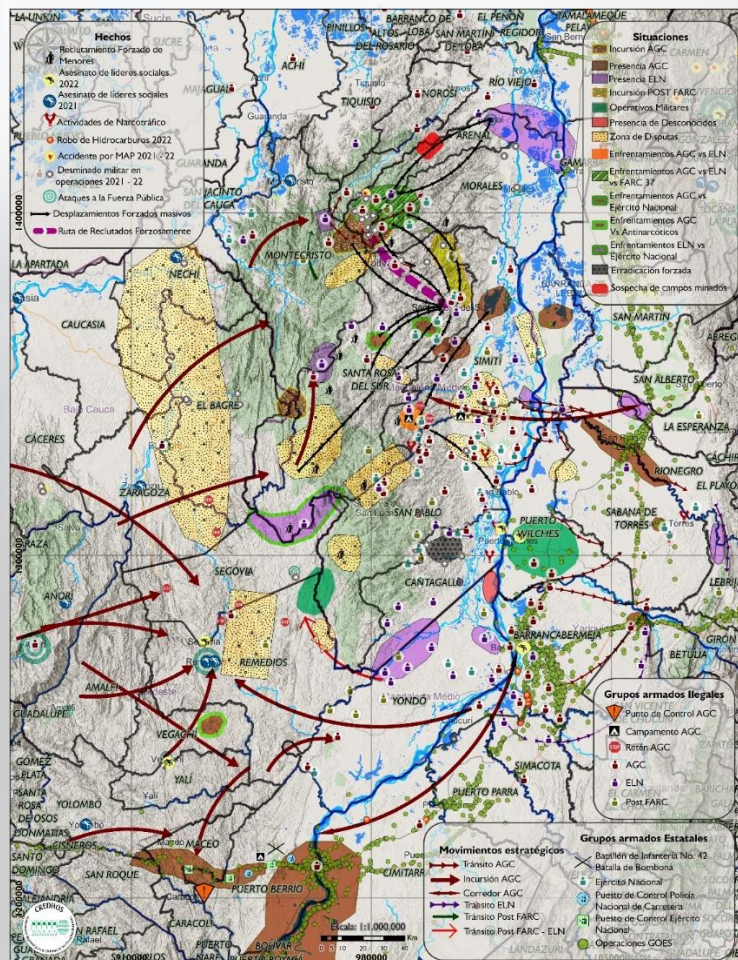
# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"

NIT. 800.079.235-6

As evidenced by the facts presented above, and through the analysis of the map "Dynamics of armed actors in the Magdalena Medio region" (Figure 1), prepared by the Observatory of Human Rights, Peace and Environment of the CREDHOS Corporation, the AGC structure had greater incidence in the Magdalena Medio region during the last two years; The AGC structure had greater incidence in the Magdalena Medio region during the last two years, who have also expanded multidirectionally towards the Serranía de San Lucas and Magdalena Medio Antioqueño - municipalities such as Maceo and Puerto Berrío- passing towards municipalities of Santander - such as Cimitarra and Landázuri-, with important movements and incursions undertaken from Bajo Cauca and Northeast Antioqueño. The AGC managed to establish a permanent presence in some sectors (brown polygons), camps and checkpoints in rural areas where the ELN and, to a lesser extent, the post-Farc groups previously exercised greater territorial control. (MAPA)

Figure 1. Dynamics of armed actors in the Magdalena Medio region.



Source: Own elaboration. CREDHOS Human Rights, Peace and Environment Observatory..

Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486

Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)

<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - [https://twitter.com/Credhos\\_Paz](https://twitter.com/Credhos_Paz)

Barrancabermeja, Colombia



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

At present, the AGC have control over a large part of the western margin of Magdalena Medio and Magdalena Medio Santandereano, deploying a "pincer" that leaves the members of the post-Farc and ELN groups concentrated in the municipalities of Yondó, Cantagallo, some villages of San Pablo -primarily in the Cimitarra River Valley- and some villages of the Serranía de San Lucas. Comparing their presence with the moment of greatest expansion of the extinct United

Self-Defense Forces of Colombia -AUC- and its Central Bolivar Block -BCB-, it is possible to affirm that the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia -AGC- have achieved greater expansion and control than the feared paramilitary group had in the first decade of the 21st century. Meanwhile, it is of particular concern that the extensive military deployment of Joint Task Force Marte remains undirected to confront the expansion of this armed group.

## - Security Fronts: Paramilitary Strategy?

Now, in addition to the strong concern for the expansion and control of the AGC, in the region there is evidence of the proliferation of the so-called "security fronts", which, according to the National Police, are "voluntary civic organizations of community character led by the National Police where their associates decide to organize themselves to improve coexistence and citizen security in urban and rural areas, building a culture of security based on citizen participation" . In practice, however, they are returning to formulas of the past, where groups of armed civilians - mainly associated with large estates and extensive cattle ranching-, under the auspices and tutelage of the Military and Police Forces, carried out illegal actions and violent acts against

the civilian population. The operation of these structures and their support networks has been widely studied, analyzed, judged and prohibited as a form of "paramilitarism", having as an easily remembered antecedent the CONVIVIR -which were private security and surveillance cooperatives- placed at the service of the paramilitary model.

In the case of the security fronts present in Magdalena Medio, it has become evident that some of their members use the legal umbrella and support of the military and police forces to carry weapons for the exclusive use of the military forces, to cover up victimizing acts against the civilian population and to attack the lives and integrity of social leaders, human rights defenders and the international community.

As an example of the above, it is found that members of a security front of the Corregimiento EL Llanito, in the city of Barrancabermeja, attacked with gunfire on April 11, 2023, a commission of human rights defenders of the CREDHOS Corporation, the international accompaniment of INTERNATIONAL ACTION FOR PEACE "IAP" and other persons who, accompanied by the Police Inspector, were carrying out an inspection of a farm in the said Corregimiento. Despite the capture in flagrante delicto of the members of the security front, they were released by the



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

competent authorities. While the investigation progresses, these people remain active in this "community civic organization", constantly harassing, attacking and threatening their victims.

## 4. General considerations.

A brief comparison of the presence of the AGC with the paramilitary group with the greatest impact in recent decades, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and its Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB), shows that the AGC have managed to make inroads in areas where the AUC was unable to penetrate at the time of its greatest expansion. For the time being, they have a greater presence in areas of the Magdalena Medio, such as the Serranía del San Lucas. Currently, the AGC control areas of historical presence of the ELN, FARC-EP and AUC. They are the illegal armed group with the largest presence in the Magdalena Medio.

Undoubtedly, the announced process of expansion and territorial control of the AGC would not have been possible if the civilian and military authorities had taken the necessary actions to prevent it. It is incredible how, in such a militarized region, with repeated public warnings and denunciations, this paramilitary group managed to consolidate its presence without the slightest resistance or response from the military authorities. On the contrary, the communities have repeatedly called attention to the clear passivity, striking operational coincidence and possible acquiescence and connivance of military units with the AGC.

Among the main victimizing events and strategies used to impose control over the civilian population are homicides, individual forced displacements, threats and forced recruitment. In the city of Barrancabermeja alone, homicides went from (31) in 2021, to (94) in 2022, (123) in 2023 and (59) so far in 2024. In other words, from 2021 to 2023 there was a 396.7% increase in homicides in the city of Barrancabermeja. In previous years the number of threats was higher, now homicides double this figure.

Regarding the interests that motivate the expansion of the AGC, as well as their discourse to the communities, it is necessary to highlight two characteristics: a) When they arrive in populated areas, they mention that "they are a group that recognizes the errors of the past, that they are not going to commit the excesses committed by the AUC again. On the contrary, they "come to work with the communities. After this, they force the leaders and communities to attend meetings where they redirect their first approach, to end up imposing "norms of conduct", as well as their authority at the moment of settling social, economic and community problems; b) their expansion maintains the continuity of the past in economic terms, they are directed towards areas of agro-industrial, mining, cattle, oil and drug trafficking interests - from illicit crops, processing, transport and sale in micro-trafficking. There is continuity in the interests defended and their main economic allies. In practical terms, they continue to direct their victimizing actions against communities or leaderships that represent a risk or resistance against the extractivist model and the aforementioned economic projects.



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"

NIT. 800.079.235-6

It is also necessary to mention that, in some cases, the so-called security fronts serve as a legal shield for the actions of armed groups of civilians who commit human rights violations, with the support of military and police forces, among other actors. This action is framed in what has been widely called paramilitarism and constitutes an imminent risk against the life of the communities and their permanence in the territory.

Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486

Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)

<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - [https://twitter.com/Credhos\\_Paz](https://twitter.com/Credhos_Paz)

Barrancabermeja, Colombia



**CREDHOS**  
Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

## **PARAMILITARISM IN THE MAGDALENA MEDIO REGION**

The Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights -CREDHOS-, presents to civil society and its organizations, local, regional, national authorities and the international community, a Special Bulletin on the actions of paramilitary groups in the Magdalena Medio region. This document summarizes the dynamics of territorial control and territorial hegemony carried out by paramilitary groups after the signing of the Peace Accords between the FARC-EP and the National Government. With this, we hope to provide inputs for the understanding, dialogue and formulation of policies for the dismantling of these structures, as well as the implementation of actions that guarantee the life and safeguarding of the civilian population, their leadership and organizations.

This bulletin covers the dynamics of paramilitary armed groups -one of the coercive arms of paramilitary politics- in the Magdalena Medio region, taking -due to their size and regional power- the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia -ACG- as the main armed actor, who in recent years have managed to position themselves as almost hegemonic in the region.

It should be noted that this document does not attempt to address paramilitarism in its entirety, as it is seen as a State policy that promotes the continuity of a development model based on extractivism, land concentration - large estates and extensive cattle ranching - and the use of illicit rents associated with drug trafficking. All this, under the interrelation of political, economic, armed (legal and illegal) and social actors, who, in local, regional and national spheres, strive to sustain power, thanks to the normalization of their dominance in the daily life of the communities and the territory. This topic will be addressed in the next bulletin.

### **Expansion, disputes and territorial control after the signing of the Peace Agreement (2017-2024).**

In the last seven (7) years, following the signing of the Peace Agreement, the Magdalena Medio region has seen a reconfiguration and intensification of the internal armed conflict, initially around the territories once controlled by the FARC-EP. The positioning and expansion of the illegal armed groups, as well as the alliances and confrontations between them and the legal armed groups of the Colombian State, led to an increase in serious human rights violations and breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

It should be noted that the region has the historical presence of the National Liberation Army (ELN), the "Central General Staff" of the post-Farc groups, the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), the Joint Task Force Marte -as the main military unit-, the National Navy and the National Police. In the year 2023, the presence of a new post-Farc group with national recognition, but without previous presence in the region, the Second Marquetalia - a

**Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486**  
**Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)**  
**<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - <https://twitter.com/Credhos> Paz**  
**Barrancabermeja, Colombia**



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

group within which "Iván Márquez" is identified as one of its main figures - was foreseen. The level of influence of each armed group varies according to the subregion and municipality, and there are even substantial changes from one hamlet to another.

## 1. Of disputes in the pre-pandemic period.

During 2017, 2018 and 2019, the political and military actions of the illegal armed groups were aimed at extending their territorial control in the former FARC-EP territories, including alliances and territorial pacts in function of not affecting the circularity of illicit economies. This implied new dynamics of co-optation and subjugation of the communities and their organizational forms, generating multiple human rights violations and breaches of IHL, such as threats to physical integrity, forced displacements, assassinations, forced confinement, restrictions on mobility and destruction of civilian property. In the midst of the measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the AGC -the main paramilitary group with a presence in the region- began a slow process of expansion and territorial control, while the positioning and advance of the Military Units attached to the Joint Task Force Marte, was reduced to the forced eradication of illicit crops -without directing greater efforts to stop the actions of the AGC-, which accentuated the humanitarian crisis faced by rural communities during the years 2020 and 2021.

## 2. 2020 - 2021: Prelude to widespread territorial expansion and control.

By 2020, in the midst of the Covid pandemic,<sup>19</sup> the AGC fought with Los Caparrapos for the upper zone of the sub-region of Sur de Bolívar - the municipalities of Achí, Barranca de Loba, San Martín de Loba, Altos del Rosario, Río Viejo and Norosí - while in the lower zone - the municipalities of Simití, Cantagallo and San Pablo - there was a distribution of territory with the ELN. As for Magdalena Medio Santandereano, especially Barrancabermeja and Puerto Wilches, their actions were concentrated in groups known as "pandillas or combos" with a strong presence and neighborhood control, thus allowing the extension of illicit economies around drug trafficking and the execution of criminal actions against the civilian population, directly or in the midst of territorial disputes with other illegal armed groups. In these subregions, their sources of financing are focused on drug trafficking, extortion and illegal mining.

In some municipalities of the subregions of Sur de Bolívar -San Pablo and Cantagallo-, Magdalena Medio Santandereano -Barrancabermeja and Puerto Wilches-, Magdalena Medio Antioqueño - Yondó- and Nordeste Antioqueño -Segovia and Remedios-; the AGC established territorial pacts with the ELN and post-Farc groups during this period, motivated by the maintenance of illicit economic routes, arms trafficking and logistical supplies. Their regional presence was exercised through the operation of the Erlin Pinto Duarte Bloc and the Luis Alfonso Echavarría Front.

By 2021, the expansion of the AGC allowed their hegemonic presence in the municipalities of Achí and Montecristo -sub-region of Sur de Bolívar- after disputes with Los Caparrapos, while in the



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

municipalities of Barranca de Loba, San Martín de Loba, Altos del Rosario, Río Viejo and Norosí, they faced the advance of the ELN, whom they also confronted for territorial control of Santa Rosa del Sur, Simití and San Pablo. By then they had a smaller presence in the municipalities of Cantagallo and Yondó. The urban structures with a strong presence in the municipalities of Puerto Wilches and Barrancabermeja extended to the municipality of Sabana de Torres, also in the Magdalena Medio Santandereano sub-region.

In the city of Barrancabermeja, a case of special attention, the AGC has consolidated hegemonic control since 2021 thanks to territorial pacts with other illegal armed groups. Their presence is concentrated in six (6) of the seven (7) communes of the city and in the districts of El Llanito, El Centro and Meseta de San Rafael. Their main source of income is the control of the so-called "micro-trafficking pots" and the sale of narcotics. In second place is the extortion of businessmen and contractors of the hydrocarbon industry. In addition, some of its members are immersed in the oil industry, through their employment with contractors. This allows them to maintain a low profile with the authorities and to carry out intelligence activities. Some hitmen of this structure work formally during the day and commit crimes at night.

The housing deficit in the city of Barrancabermeja and municipalities such as Puerto Wilches and Puerto Berrío led to a boom in human settlements. This situation was taken advantage of by the alliance of armed structures at the service of the AGC to impose norms of social control or "coexistence", threaten community leaders who confronted them, charge "security quotas", resell lots, establish "micro-trafficking pots" and recruit minors in areas where there was little or no state presence. During this lapse, the AGC - in some cases in alliance with the ELN - managed to position themselves in human settlements to exercise tacit social, economic and military control. It is in some of these locations where their major urban presence in the Magdalena Medio is concentrated.

Between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the expansion, positioning and control of the CGA in the sub-region of Sur de Bolívar is registered, their incursion and presence begins to become evident in the villages of Cañabral Bajo, Patio Bonito, El Diamante, Virgencita, San Juan Alto and Muribá in the municipality of San Pablo; Monterrey and the villages of El Triángulo, Humareda, La Ramona and Aguas Lindas in the municipality of Simití; and the village of Puente Sogamoso in the municipality of Puerto Wilches. During this period, in the municipalities of San Pablo and Puerto Wilches, through public communiqués and summons to meetings, the AGC threatened and coerced social leaders, unemployed people, human rights defenders and presidents of Community Action Boards. Through these actions, the AGC warned of their territorial control and violently imposed "norms of conduct" on the civilian population.

A fact that evidences the clear violation of IHL by this paramilitary group was the settlement of approximately 30 armed men inside the village of El Paraíso in the municipality of Simití since mid-December 2021. By the beginning of 2022, there was fighting with the ELN that put the integrity of the civilian population at serious risk. It is worth noting that, despite a strong deployment of the Military Forces in the territory, the AGC maintained for several days -until

**Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486**

**Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)**

**<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - [https://twitter.com/Credhos\\_Paz](https://twitter.com/Credhos_Paz)**

**Barrancabermeja, Colombia**



February 1, 2022- two checkpoints in the township of El Paraíso; the first one in the "Alto Ventanas" sector and the second one in the "Y de Agua Linda", with the National Army just 500 meters away in "Punto Tablones".

It should be noted that during this period, human rights, social, community, peasant, mining and environmental organizations, as well as their respective leaders, alerted and sufficiently denounced to civilian and military authorities the military incursion that the AGC had been carrying out, as well as their intention to position themselves and exercise hegemonic control over the Magdalena Medio region. The clear passivity and, in some cases, operational coincidence and possible connivance and acquiescence of the Military Forces with this paramilitary group was noted with great concern. The response of the authorities was to emphatically deny the presence of the AGC, arguing that the violent and victimizing acts against the civilian population were carried out by criminal groups that had nothing to do with an organized armed group. All this, while the paramilitary group began a process of unchecked expansion.

### **3. 2022 - Present: Accelerated expansion and territorial control without major opposition.**

During the year 2022, the expansion of the AGC was sustained, accelerated and without major opposition, which allowed the positioning and control of large villages, townships and municipalities in the Magdalena Medio region. Through the strategy of terror and terror, their political, social and economic control is already tacit in the municipalities of Barrancabermeja, Puerto Wilches, Cimitarra, San Pablo, Simití, Santa Rosa del Sur, Montecristo, Achí and Puerto Berrío; with a strong position in the Magdalena Medio Antioqueño. Some paramilitary actions - threats, forced displacements and assassinations - were motivated by the economic interests of large-scale cattle, palm and oil projects, such as the assassination of three members of the Interlocution Commission of Southern Bolívar, Central and Southern Cesar (CISBCSC) in the municipalities of San Martín and Tamalameque, Southern Cesar; and the threats and forced displacement of environmental leaders who mobilized against the Integral Research Pilot Projects (PII) in the municipality of Puerto Wilches .

In April 2022, the AGC in a public communiqué stated the beginning of a "gun plan" in Magdalena Medio Santandereano, but also pointed out as allies of the structure commanded by John Jairo Fernández Pórtala, alias "Marihuano", members of the SIJIN of the National Police and the CTI of the Attorney General's Office. As background of the relationship of the National Police in Barrancabermeja with paramilitary groups, there is the capture of two (2) policemen in 2019 for links with the Black Eagles, and the capture of a policeman (1) in 2020 for belonging to Los Rastrojos .

In May 2022, the AGC, in a clear demonstration of force and territorial control, declared an armed strike that seriously affected the fundamental rights of the communities of Magdalena Medio,



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

demonstrating their hegemonic control over large sub-regions. The armed strike mainly affected the municipalities of Cantagallo, San Pablo, Simití and Santa Rosa del Sur -South of Bolívar-;

Puerto Berrio and Yondó -Magdalena Medio Antioqueño-; and Puerto Wilches and Barrancabermeja in Magdalena Medio Santandereano. There were threats to the commercial and transportation sector, symbolic actions - graffiti, placement of flags, pamphlets - and burning of vehicles. In the face of these actions, the omission of the local, departmental and national authorities was evident, as during the armed strike they did not deploy actions to guarantee the physical integrity of the civilian population .

The expansion of the AGC generated an escalation in the number of victimizing acts against the civilian population in the Magdalena Medio region. Faced with this situation, the communities denounced the passivity and omission of police authorities and the National Army's Joint Task Force Marte, whose operational coincidence with the paramilitary group once again raised the alarm in the region. In mid 2022, the AGC installed a roadblock in the village of Pozo Azul in the municipality of San Pablo, a few kilometers from the presence of the National Army, which did not take immediate and effective action to dismantle it . Another IHL violation by the AGC was committed at the beginning of September 2022, when they settled in the hamlet of Los Canelos de Santa Rosa del Sur, while approximately 150 meters away this structure was engaged in confrontations with the National Army . More recently, on May 7, 2024 in the afternoon, a group of paramilitaries of the AGC arrived at the Vereda la Capilla (20 minutes on foot and 5 minutes by motorcycle) of the village of Micoahumado belonging to the municipality of Morales, Sur de Bolivar, while another group approached the field that is at the entrance of the village. While all this was going on, the army was in the township cemetery, doing nothing. Despite calls from the communities, the Army officer stated that they did not act due to the presence of members of the National Liberation Army -ELN- in the area.

Among the victims of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia -AGC- so far in 2024, are the comrades FABER DE JESUS RINCÓN PEREZ, defender of Human Rights and "local labor", on February 3, 2024 in the municipality of Yondó and NARCISO BELEÑO, recognized social leader of the South of Bolivar, PRESIDENT of the FEDERACIÓN AGROMINERA DEL SUR DE BOLIVAR -FEDEAGROBISMOL- and, political reference in the defense of the rights of the historically excluded communities of the region, who was murdered on April 21, 2024 around 9:30 pm, in the urban center of the municipality of Yondó, in the municipality of Yondó, in the municipality of Yondó:30 pm, in the urban center of the municipality of Santa Rosa del Sur. It should be noted that FEDEAGROBISMOL is an organization that has strongly and repeatedly denounced the expansion, territorial control and victimizing acts of the AGC against the civilian population in the south of Bolivar, for which it was declared a "military objective" on previous occasions by the AGC.



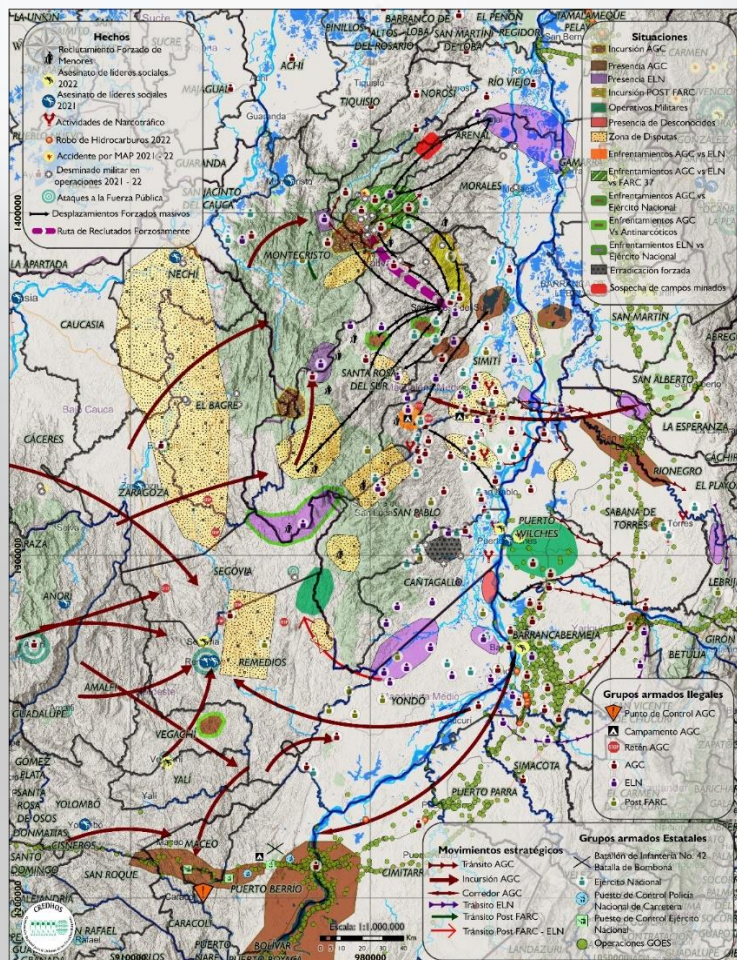
# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"

NIT. 800.079.235-6

As evidenced by the facts presented above, and through the analysis of the map "Dynamics of armed actors in the Magdalena Medio region" (Figure 1), prepared by the Observatory of Human Rights, Peace and Environment of the CREDHOS Corporation, the AGC structure had greater incidence in the Magdalena Medio region during the last two years; The AGC structure had greater incidence in the Magdalena Medio region during the last two years, who have also expanded multidirectionally towards the Serranía de San Lucas and Magdalena Medio Antioqueño - municipalities such as Maceo and Puerto Berrío- passing towards municipalities of Santander - such as Cimitarra and Landázuri-, with important movements and incursions undertaken from Bajo Cauca and Northeast Antioqueño. The AGC managed to establish a permanent presence in some sectors (brown polygons), camps and checkpoints in rural areas where the ELN and, to a lesser extent, the post-Farc groups previously exercised greater territorial control. (MAPA)

Figure 1. Dynamics of armed actors in the Magdalena Medio region.



Source: Own elaboration. CREDHOS Human Rights, Peace and Environment Observatory..

Avenida 52 N° 25-49 Galán Teléfonos: (57) 6114003 - 6010486

Correo electrónico: [corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com](mailto:corporacionregionalparaladefen@gmail.com)

<http://credhos.org> - <https://www.facebook.com/Credhos/> - [https://twitter.com/Credhos\\_Paz](https://twitter.com/Credhos_Paz)

Barrancabermeja, Colombia



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

At present, the AGC have control over a large part of the western margin of Magdalena Medio and Magdalena Medio Santandereano, deploying a "pincer" that leaves the members of the post-Farc and ELN groups concentrated in the municipalities of Yondó, Cantagallo, some villages of San Pablo -primarily in the Cimitarra River Valley- and some villages of the Serranía de San Lucas. Comparing their presence with the moment of greatest expansion of the extinct United

Self-Defense Forces of Colombia -AUC- and its Central Bolivar Block -BCB-, it is possible to affirm that the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia -AGC- have achieved greater expansion and control than the feared paramilitary group had in the first decade of the 21st century. Meanwhile, it is of particular concern that the extensive military deployment of Joint Task Force Marte remains undirected to confront the expansion of this armed group.

## - Security Fronts: Paramilitary Strategy?

Now, in addition to the strong concern for the expansion and control of the AGC, in the region there is evidence of the proliferation of the so-called "security fronts", which, according to the National Police, are "voluntary civic organizations of community character led by the National Police where their associates decide to organize themselves to improve coexistence and citizen security in urban and rural areas, building a culture of security based on citizen participation" . In practice, however, they are returning to formulas of the past, where groups of armed civilians - mainly associated with large estates and extensive cattle ranching-, under the auspices and tutelage of the Military and Police Forces, carried out illegal actions and violent acts against

the civilian population. The operation of these structures and their support networks has been widely studied, analyzed, judged and prohibited as a form of "paramilitarism", having as an easily remembered antecedent the CONVIVIR -which were private security and surveillance cooperatives- placed at the service of the paramilitary model.

In the case of the security fronts present in Magdalena Medio, it has become evident that some of their members use the legal umbrella and support of the military and police forces to carry weapons for the exclusive use of the military forces, to cover up victimizing acts against the civilian population and to attack the lives and integrity of social leaders, human rights defenders and the international community.

As an example of the above, it is found that members of a security front of the Corregimiento EL Llanito, in the city of Barrancabermeja, attacked with gunfire on April 11, 2023, a commission of human rights defenders of the CREDHOS Corporation, the international accompaniment of INTERNATIONAL ACTION FOR PEACE "IAP" and other persons who, accompanied by the Police Inspector, were carrying out an inspection of a farm in the said Corregimiento. Despite the capture in flagrante delicto of the members of the security front, they were released by the



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

competent authorities. While the investigation progresses, these people remain active in this "community civic organization", constantly harassing, attacking and threatening their victims.

#### 4. General considerations.

A brief comparison of the presence of the AGC with the paramilitary group with the greatest impact in recent decades, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and its Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB), shows that the AGC have managed to make inroads in areas where the AUC was unable to penetrate at the time of its greatest expansion. For the time being, they have a greater presence in areas of the Magdalena Medio, such as the Serranía del San Lucas. Currently, the AGC control areas of historical presence of the ELN, FARC-EP and AUC. They are the illegal armed group with the largest presence in the Magdalena Medio.

Undoubtedly, the announced process of expansion and territorial control of the AGC would not have been possible if the civilian and military authorities had taken the necessary actions to prevent it. It is incredible how, in such a militarized region, with repeated public warnings and denunciations, this paramilitary group managed to consolidate its presence without the slightest resistance or response from the military authorities. On the contrary, the communities have repeatedly called attention to the clear passivity, striking operational coincidence and possible acquiescence and connivance of military units with the AGC.

Among the main victimizing events and strategies used to impose control over the civilian population are homicides, individual forced displacements, threats and forced recruitment. In the city of Barrancabermeja alone, homicides went from (31) in 2021, to (94) in 2022, (123) in 2023 and (59) so far in 2024. In other words, from 2021 to 2023 there was a 396.7% increase in homicides in the city of Barrancabermeja. In previous years the number of threats was higher, now homicides double this figure.

Regarding the interests that motivate the expansion of the AGC, as well as their discourse to the communities, it is necessary to highlight two characteristics: a) When they arrive in populated areas, they mention that "they are a group that recognizes the errors of the past, that they are not going to commit the excesses committed by the AUC again. On the contrary, they "come to work with the communities. After this, they force the leaders and communities to attend meetings where they redirect their first approach, to end up imposing "norms of conduct", as well as their authority at the moment of settling social, economic and community problems; b) their expansion maintains the continuity of the past in economic terms, they are directed towards areas of agro-industrial, mining, cattle, oil and drug trafficking interests - from illicit crops, processing, transport and sale in micro-trafficking. There is continuity in the interests defended and their main economic allies. In practical terms, they continue to direct their victimizing actions against communities or leaderships that represent a risk or resistance against the extractivist model and the aforementioned economic projects.



# CREDHOS

Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos  
"Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad"  
NIT. 800.079.235-6

It is also necessary to mention that, in some cases, the so-called security fronts serve as a legal shield for the actions of armed groups of civilians who commit human rights violations, with the support of military and police forces, among other actors. This action is framed in what has been widely called paramilitarism and constitutes an imminent risk against the life of the communities and their permanence in the territory.