

## AMERICAS OVERVIEW

### HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

Although the year was dominated by the human rights tragedy in Colombia, other parts of Latin America experienced positive change. With presidential balloting in April, Peru finally closed the door on the undemocratic and discredited administration of former President Alberto Fujimori. Mexico, having just ended seven decades of one-party rule, took several steps toward reform. And a number of different countries made meaningful progress in the area of truth, justice, and accountability. Still, all over Latin America and the Caribbean, chronic problems such as police brutality, deplorable prison conditions, domestic violence, and labor right abuses went largely unaddressed.

The human rights situation in Colombia deteriorated markedly over the course of the year, with civilians bearing the brunt of the country's violent armed conflict. In the first ten months of 2001, the office of the Public Advocate recorded ninety-two massacres, defined as the killing of three or more people at the same place and at the same time. Paramilitary groups linked to the security forces were responsible for the bulk of the killings, followed by guerrillas. The country's epidemic of kidnappings, half committed by leftist guerrilla forces, showed no sign of abating. Children, some as young as thirteen, were recruited into the irregular armed forces—guerrillas and paramilitaries—that played a primary role in the conflict. An estimated two million Colombians were internally displaced, with at least 300,000 reported displaced in 2001, the highest number ever in a single year. Human rights defenders, trade unionists, journalists, government investigators, and community leaders continued to be killed because of their work.

In Peru, the fall of the Fujimori government in late 2000 brought new hope for democracy and human rights. Both the interim administration of Valentín Paniagua and the new government of President Alejandro Toledo took important steps to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, while also taking aim at long neglected human rights problems.

Haiti remained mired in political turmoil stemming from fraudulent elections held in 2000. Despite the vigorous efforts of international negotiators to reach a solution to the crisis, the lack of progress discouraged donor states, leaving hundreds of millions of dollars in international aid frozen.

Chile's indictment of Augusto Pinochet was an important landmark in Latin America's efforts to achieve accountability for past human rights violations, even though the trial of the former military ruler was later terminated on the grounds of poor health. Equally significant was the decision of Argentine Federal Judge Gabriel

Cavallo to strike down the country's amnesty laws, a ruling that was later affirmed by a Buenos Aires appellate tribunal. In Peru, a truth commission was established to investigate responsibility for the systematic human rights violations and guerrilla abuses committed during the country's twenty-two year internal armed conflict, which began in 1980. The commission was mandated to investigate violations of collective rights of Peru's Andean and native communities as well as violations of individual rights such as extrajudicial executions, torture, and "disappearances." The large number of Latin American governments having signed or ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was further encouraging proof of the strength of the regional impetus toward justice.

In Mexico, as of this writing, President Vicente Fox had yet to establish a promised truth commission to examine past human rights abuses. Fox did, however, order his government to grant public access to files on "disappearances" that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. In November, after the country's National Human Rights Commission presented him with a study documenting the military's role in the forced disappearance and torture of hundreds of suspected leftists in the 1970s, Fox announced that he would name a special prosecutor to investigate the crimes. The commission report represented the Mexican government's first official acknowledgment of responsibility for the abuses, but it did not name the estimated seventy-four public officials said to be personally implicated in them.

Police violence, frequent in many Latin American countries, was of particular concern in Venezuela and Argentina. According to the Buenos Aires-based Center for Legal and Social Studies (Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, CELS), police in Argentina killed some 266 people in the last six months of 2000 and the first six months of 2001. While most of these killings were officially attributed to shoot-outs with suspected criminals, investigations by human rights groups suggested that many deaths resulted from the excessive use of lethal force by the police, or were deliberate executions. A disturbing recent development in Venezuela was the emergence in some states of organized death squads with ties to the police.

Prisoners throughout the region frequently suffered inhumane treatment, with particularly abusive prison and jail conditions found in Venezuela, Brazil, Haiti, Panama, Colombia, and El Salvador. The continued growth of inmate populations exacerbated overcrowding, at the root of a host of other problems. Yet, all over the region, prisons and jails were not crammed with convicted prisoners, but instead with pretrial detainees, turning the presumption of innocence on its head. In February, a large-scale inmate riot at Brazil's Carandirú prison ended bloodily, bringing momentary public attention to the country's chronic prison abuses. Fifteen prisoners were killed during and after the rioting, most by riot police, and some in circumstances suggesting extrajudicial executions. In November, similarly, prisoners in Haiti's National Penitentiary claimed that prison officials deliberately killed unarmed inmates in quelling prison unrest.

The use of capital punishment was of particular concern in the English-speaking Caribbean, where countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados retained the death penalty. In August, Trinidad and Tobago sentenced ten men to hang for a single murder. One positive development occurred in April, when the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeal, which has jurisdiction over some Caribbean countries, ruled that the mandatory death penalty was unconstitutional.

In May, Chilean President Ricardo Lagos signed a law that substituted life in prison for the death penalty. Chile's legal reform left Guatemala and Cuba as the only Spanish-speaking countries in the region to fully apply the death penalty, although several others reserved the right to execute persons convicted of treason during wartime or of other extraordinary offenses. Guatemala not only retained the death penalty, but by imposing it in cases of non-fatal kidnappings it contravened the American Convention on Human Rights.

Chile also made important strides toward protecting freedom of expression by repealing article 6b of the State Security Law, a repressive and antediluvian penal statute that had protected public authorities from criticism. In Panama, in contrast, the government had yet to reform the draconian press laws inherited from military rule. More than fifty journalists reportedly faced criminal charges for defamation or "contempt of authority," with several being convicted of those offenses over the course of the year. In May, for example, journalist Marcelino Rodríguez of *El Siglo* was sentenced to sixteen months in prison, commutable to a fine of U.S. \$1,000, after being convicted of libel of a public employee.

Throughout Latin American and the Caribbean, workers continued to suffer myriad violations of internationally recognized labor rights. Common abuses included the worst forms of child labor, employment discrimination, and violations of the right to freedom of association. In some cases, violations were perpetuated by the government's failure to enforce domestic labor legislation and, in other cases, national labor laws fell short of international labor standards. The result was the same, however: governmental omissions that allowed employers to violate workers' rights with impunity.

In Ecuador, children as young as eight labored for long hours on banana plantations in unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. In Guatemala, women workers in the maquila sector often faced pregnancy-based discrimination. And in Brazil, according to a 2001 International Labor Organization report, the government's failure to apply effective sanctions, the slow judicial process, impunity for perpetrators, and lack of intra-governmental coordination impeded the eradication of "degrading working conditions and debt bondage" in the rural sector.

Workers' right to organize—the internationally sanctioned tool for demanding better working conditions and respect for labor rights—was obstructed or violated throughout the region. In Mexico, legitimate organizing activity was frequently hindered by collective bargaining agreements negotiated between management and pro-business, non-independent unions. In other cases, workers were impeded from organizing by employers' hiring practices, including the use of subcontractors and "permanent temporary" workers. Although employers benefited from subcontracted workers' labor and often even controlled their employment terms and conditions, employers were not required to bargain collectively with the subcontracted workers because, legally, the subcontractor was the employer. Similarly, employers hired workers for months or years on end using consecutive temporary employment contracts, creating a "permanent temporary" workforce without job stability and too afraid to organize. Such tactics inhibited worker organization, for example, in Ecuador's banana sector, where the banana worker affiliation rate, at roughly 1 percent, was exceptionally low.

In other cases, workers' right to organize was violated through direct anti-union

discrimination, including the harassment, demotion, or dismissal of union members and sympathizers. In the most serious cases, union leaders and their supporters risked assassination. Colombia led the world in such assassinations, with 112 trade unionists killed in 2000, and 125 killed in the first ten months of 2001, according to Colombia's largest trade union organization. In March 2001, the Governing Body of the International Labor Organization (ILO) criticized the Colombian authorities' failure to prosecute the perpetrators of such crimes and to implement adequate security measures to protect trade union officials and members.

Many women in the region faced daily violence and discrimination, perpetuated by their governments' failure to take meaningful action to protect women from abuse. Domestic violence remained a particularly salient issue in many countries, with men beating their wives and other female family members with little fear of criminal prosecution.

Some positive steps were taken to improve women's legal status, but much remained to be done. In August, the Brazilian Congress approved a new civil code that recognized men's and women's equality before the law. The new code did away with the expression "paternal power," replacing it with the gender-neutral concept of "the power of the family." Under the reformed code, women were to have equal authority with men in family affairs. In other countries, however, women still did not enjoy full legal equality with men, despite constitutional provisions granting both sexes equal rights. The Chilean civil code continued to grant husbands primary control over household decisions and property. The civil codes of countries such as Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia set lower marrying ages for girls than for boys. Venezuelan women were barred from remarrying until ten months after a divorce or annulment, unless they proved they were not pregnant.

Gays, lesbians, and transgender people were also particularly vulnerable to violations of their human rights. In several countries, police singled out gay people and transvestites for abuses. In Mexico, transvestites in Monterrey, the capital of Nuevo Leon state, faced arbitrary arrest, extortion, and physical violence. Even more frequently around the region, criminal justice authorities failed to respond to crimes against gays and transvestites. A series of killings of gay men in Colima, Mexico, went unpunished and inadequately investigated. "It's as if [the gay community] doesn't enjoy the protection of the law," commented Max Mejía, a Colima-based gay rights activist.

Yet over the course of the year significant advances were made in the area of gay rights. In an important legal victory, the Association of New Men and Women Association of Panama (Asociación Hombres y Mujeres Nuevos de Panamá, AHMNP) finally obtained legal recognition by the government. In other places, laws were passed to protect the rights of sexual minorities or legislation was drafted on the issue. The Brazilian state of Minas Gerais passed a measure in October 2001 adding sexual orientation as a protected status to existing anti-discrimination legislation. In November 2000, the city council of Niteroi, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, passed an ordinance barring discrimination based on sexual orientation. A similar draft bill was presented to Mexican President Vicente Fox and the leaders of Mexico's political parties in November 2001, a first step toward passing federal legislation on the topic.

## **DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

The strength of the human rights movement in Latin America and the Caribbean was evidenced by, among other things, the multitude of local and regional nongovernmental organizations dedicated to the issue. Made up of talented and committed lawyers, activists, community leaders, and others, these groups worked to put human rights principles into practice locally. In some countries, the work of nongovernmental groups was supplemented by that of permanent national human right commissions, ad hoc parliamentary bodies, and other government organs.

The public in many Latin American countries, having lived through repressive military governments, recognized the importance of human rights principles. Nonetheless, human rights defenders were frequently stigmatized for protecting the rights of unpopular groups, particularly criminal suspects.

In several countries, including Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, and Brazil, individual activists faced intimidation, assault, and sometimes death for their advocacy of human rights. Colombia remained the most dangerous country for human rights defenders. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists, eleven defenders were killed there in the first ten months of 2001. Government investigators handling prosecutions of paramilitary leaders were also at risk, as were witnesses in such cases.

The brutal murder of Mexican human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa in October 2001 further underscored the dangers that these frontline defenders of fundamental rights endure. Next to Ochoa's body was a note that warned members of the human rights center where Ochoa had worked for several years that the same could happen to them.

## **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

### **United Nations**

The United Nations did not have a particularly high profile on human rights issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, although specific problems and situations received attention. Colombia remained, appropriately, the primary recipient of the U.N.'s efforts in the region. The country's human rights and humanitarian crisis was on the agenda of a number of U.N. bodies.

With the departure in February of the U.N. mission in Haiti, only Colombia and Guatemala still hosted a long-term U.N. human rights field presence. In Guatemala, the United Nations verification mission, known as MINUGUA, played a central role in monitoring compliance with the country's 1996 peace accords. In Colombia, the U.N. maintained a field office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which did important work despite poor cooperation from Colombian government officials. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees also had field offices in Colombia, with an operational capacity in the Urabá and Middle Magdalena

regions as well as the department of Putumayo. Jan Egeland, the special adviser on Colombia to the U.N. Secretary-General, frequently visited Colombia to assist in peace talks

Three Latin American countries—Colombia, Cuba, and Haiti—were on the agenda at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights. The result, with regard to Cuba, was a resolution criticizing the government's continuing human rights violations. Haiti was the subject of a chairperson's statement that focused on electoral issues and the political crisis. For Colombia, the subject of a special segment of the Commission, the High Commissioner for Human Rights presented her annual report on human rights conditions.

U.N. thematic mechanisms visiting the Americas region included the special representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders, who visited Colombia, and the special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, who visited Guatemala. In addition, the various U.N. treaty bodies examined the human rights records of a number of Latin American and Caribbean states.

### **Organization of American States (OAS)**

On the diplomatic front, the Organization of American States (OAS) was extremely active in trying to negotiate a solution to the political crisis in Haiti. As of November, however, these efforts had not borne fruit.

In September, the OAS Permanent Council approved the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was subsequently ratified by the foreign ministers of OAS member states at a special general assembly in Lima. The charter attempts to set out the essential elements of representative democracy, citing, among other features, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; the rule of law; the holding of periodic free and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage; a multi-party system; the separation of powers; freedom of expression and of the press; and the constitutional subordination of all state institutions to a legally constituted civilian authority. Designed to protect democracy in the region, the charter codifies the OAS's power to suspend member states deemed undemocratic and sets up mechanisms for responding to coups and other threats against democracy.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights—both OAS human rights bodies—heard a number of important cases in 2001. In addition to cases relating to the American Convention on Human Rights, the two bodies had jurisdiction to consider violations of five other regional conventions and protocols pertaining to forced disappearance, the death penalty, violence against women, torture, and social and economic rights. At a special session held in December 2000, the Commission approved new rules of procedure, which took effect on May 1, 2001.

In April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued its first decision on the issue of violence against women. Ruling in a case brought by Maria da Penha, a Brazilian woman who was repeatedly beaten by her husband and finally left paraplegic, the Commission found Brazil to be responsible for numerous rights violations. Besides recommending that the perpetrator be prosecuted and the victim be adequately compensated, the commission concluded that Brazil should

adopt measures to remedy the problem of state tolerance of domestic violence against women.

In January, Peru's Congress overturned an earlier resolution, made in 1999 under the Fujimori government, by which it had voted to remove Peru from the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. (The Court had already declared the earlier resolution to be inadmissible.)

## European Union

The European Union (E.U.) gave its continuing support to efforts to address the region's most pressing human rights and humanitarian problems, including, most notably, the armed conflict in Colombia. The E.U. provided financial support for the Colombian peace process and for the humanitarian assistance of displaced persons. E.U. representatives expressed concern, however, regarding slowdowns in the peace process, mounting violence, and the failure of parties to the conflict to respect basic humanitarian law norms.

Cuba remained the only Latin American country that did not have a cooperation agreement with the European Union. An E.U. visit to Cuba in late November 2001, however, appeared to promise improved E.U.-Cuba relations, possibly signaling a future change in the E.U.'s "common position" on Cuba. Because of the Haitian government's failure to remedy the results of the country's seriously flawed 2000 elections, E.U. economic cooperation with Haiti remained suspended as of November.

Several Western European countries played a critical role in promoting accountability in Latin American and the Caribbean. European courts, continuing the "Pinochet precedent," heard criminal cases against the perpetrators of past human rights crimes, including the systematic abuses that took place in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s. Through the mechanism of universal jurisdiction, by which a country's national courts are empowered to adjudicate human rights crimes committed on another country's territory—and also through the passive personality principle, which recognizes a country's legal interest in crimes committed against its nationals—European courts adjudicated a number of criminal cases in which Latin American high officials and former high officials were defendants.

Courts in Spain, Italy, France, and Germany continued to prosecute, or to seek to prosecute, members of the Argentine armed forces implicated in "dirty war" abuses. The Argentine government, however, did not cooperate in these efforts. Asserting the principle of territoriality—that only Argentine courts had jurisdiction over the crimes at issue—the government failed to comply with the European extradition requests. This argument, which ignored the interest of all states in prosecuting gross violations of human rights, was particularly unconvincing in light of the impunity enjoyed for decades by the perpetrators of human rights crimes in Argentina.

Most disappointingly, Argentina refused to extradite former navy officer Alfredo Astiz, a notorious intelligence operative during military rule. Astiz was arrested and detained for a few weeks in July until the Argentine Foreign Ministry denied extradition requests made by Italian and French judges.

Another setback was the dismissal in December 2000 of a suit in Spain against

Guatemala's former military ruler, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, and several other military officials. The case, filed a year previously, was thrown out of court on the ground that the petitioners had not exhausted the possibility of prosecuting the defendants in Guatemala. Yet, given Ríos Montt's continuing power in Guatemala, the ability of the Guatemala courts to manage such a case was questionable. (Facing daunting obstacles, a group of indigenous Maya Indians sued Ríos Montt and others in Guatemala in June for crimes committed during military rule.)

In an important and encouraging new trend, the Mexican government became a strong regional voice in favor of accountability by ratifying the extradition to Spain of Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, a former Argentine navy officer. Cavallo, a member of a notorious naval task force implicated in numerous "disappearances," had been living and working in Mexico. In January, a Mexican district court ruled in favor of Spain's extradition request, and in February Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda authorized the extradition. As of November, Cavallo's appeal against the extradition order was pending.

In November, a French judge issued international arrest warrants for fifteen Chileans implicated in the torture and "disappearance" of four French citizens in Chile during the Pinochet era. The suspects included retired Gen. Manuel Contreras, former head of Pinochet's secret police, and four other former generals. Since Chile and France did not have an extradition agreement, the targets of the arrest warrants, all believed to be in Chile, would probably only face arrest if they were to leave the country.

The Belgian courts, too, played a part in the trend toward foreign prosecutions. In October, Cuban exiles filed suit in Brussels against President Fidel Castro and other high Cuban officials. Their criminal complaint, which had not been ruled upon at this writing, described torture and other abuses suffered by political prisoners, as well as Cuba's downing of two planes in 1996.

### **United States**

The Latin America policies of the Bush administration, in its first year in office, did not differ meaningfully from those of the previous administration. The United States under President Bush took a selective interest in the region, focusing primarily on trade and drug issues. The U.S. did not take the lead in promoting human rights in Latin America, nor were U.S. representatives especially vocal on the topic.

In 2001, as in 2000, Colombia was the Latin American country that received the greater part of the U.S. government's attention and funding. The United States continued to push a drug control strategy based on aerial eradication, providing the funding for Colombian counter-narcotics military battalions. In January, President Clinton, under a questionable reading of the relevant legislation, dispersed a second tranche of the military aid passed the previous year. The Bush administration sought an additional U.S. \$400 million for Colombia for fiscal year 2002. But in a clear improvement over the previous year's legislation, the draft legislation before Congress as of this writing did not contain presidential waiver authority for its human rights conditions. In other words, Colombia would have to show concrete progress in breaking military-paramilitary ties to be eligible to receive aid.

In early September, the United States named the Colombian paramilitary



alliance—the United Self Defense Group of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC)—as a “foreign terrorist organization” under U.S. law. Among other legal consequences, the designation requires U.S. banks to block the group’s funds.

Peru’s downing of a civilian aircraft during a U.S.-Peruvian surveillance operation on April 20 caused the joint drug interdiction program to be suspended. Although the plane’s pilot survived the crash of the small Cessna, two others were killed in the incident: Veronica Bowers, a missionary, and her infant daughter. A joint U.S.-Peruvian report released by the State Department in August put the blame for the tragedy on lax procedures and the failure of the Peruvian pilot to give proper warning.

By nominating Otto Reich, a Cuban-American anti-communist, to be assistant secretary of state, President Bush signaled an apparent unwillingness to modify the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba. In July, when Bush suspended certain provisions under the Helms-Burton sanctions law, he publicly reaffirmed his administration’s commitment to maintaining the embargo. Nonetheless, a milestone in U.S.-Cuban economic relations was reached with the sale to Cuba of some \$30 million in food and medicine by U.S. companies in October. Made necessary after Hurricane Michelle devastated the island, they were the first U.S. sales to Cuba since the imposition of the embargo in 1962.

## **THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

The Americas division of Human Rights Watch kept abreast of human rights developments around the region through frequent visits, close contact with local activists, and intensive monitoring of the media and other information sources. The division sought not only to identify the most pressing problems of the countries in which it worked, but also to understand the root causes of violations and to formulate strategies for addressing them. It campaigned vigorously to put a stop to violations, relying on targeted advocacy with policy-makers, careful coordination with like-minded groups, and outreach to the broader public via the media and the internet.

While the Americas division responded quickly to fast-breaking events, it also gave sustained attention to chronic, long-term problems. Among the issues the division worked on in 2001 were military-paramilitary links and violations of international humanitarian law in Colombia; the Pinochet prosecution and freedom of expression in Chile; military abuses, violence against sexual minorities, and labor rights in Mexico; political violence and impunity in Haiti; accountability in Argentina; freedom of association and child labor in Ecuador; the treatment of Haitian immigrants and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic; police violence in Jamaica; accountability in Peru; the protection of NGOs and human rights defenders in Guatemala; and overall human rights conditions in Cuba.

Over the course of the year, the Americas division fielded investigative and advocacy missions to nearly a dozen countries. In addition to brief two- or three-day advocacy visits, the division’s researchers conducted longer fact-finding investigations in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Mex-

ico, Peru, and Venezuela, with the division sending, in some cases, more than one mission to a single country. With the information collected during these trips, the Americas division prepared detailed reports and other materials to document the problems under review.

Besides disseminating information via written materials, Human Rights Watch directly addressed high-level government officials and representatives of relevant regional and international bodies, conveying our human rights concerns in a firm, concise, and timely way. In several countries, Human Rights Watch representatives held meetings with presidents and other top government officials. In meetings, as well as in correspondence and written statements, the Americas division made specific recommendations for improving human rights conditions.

As the region's gravest human rights crisis, Colombia was the major focus of the Americas division during 2001. The division's work in support of human rights in Colombia had three tracks: pressing for change within the country, working to influence U.S. policy toward Colombia, and promoting U.N. and other international efforts.

Because all parties to the conflict in Colombia were guilty of serious violations, the division examined not only government abuses but also those committed by non-state actors. In a twenty-page letter sent in July to Manuel Marulanda, the commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP), the executive director of the Americas division assessed the FARC-EP's actions by the standards of international humanitarian law. The letter set out the FARC-EP's responsibility for serious violations, including killings of civilians, cruel and inhuman treatment of captured combatants, abductions of civilians, hostage-taking, the use of child soldiers, grossly unfair trials, and forced displacement of civilians. It also cited the FARC-EP's continuing use of prohibited weapons, including gas cylinder bombs, and its attacks against medical workers and facilities. The FARC-EP's public response to the letter did not counter the substance of these findings, but only attacked Human Rights Watch's integrity as an independent monitor. Later in the year, the findings of Human Rights Watch's letter were incorporated into a report, *Beyond Negotiation: International Humanitarian Law and its Application to the Conduct of the FARC-EP*.

In October, Human Rights Watch issued a report on another critical aspect of the Colombia crisis. Titled *The "Sixth Division": Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia*, and launched at a press conference in Bogotá, the report documented continuing close ties between Colombian military and police detachments, and paramilitary groups. The report received extensive local and international media coverage; the press conference was carried live on Colombian television. Prior to the report's release, Human Rights Watch representatives discussed human rights concerns in meetings with top Colombian officials, including President Andrés Pastrana. Because *The "Sixth Division"* also addressed U.S. policy, its findings were influential with regard to U.S. aid to Colombia, and it was extensively cited during Senate hearings on the issue.

Human Rights Watch celebrated a major victory a month after the release of its March report on free expression in Chile, when repressive defamation legislation

criticized in the report was repealed. The timing of Human Rights Watch's report, and the organization's targeted advocacy—which included an hour-long meeting with Chilean President Ricardo Lagos—were instrumental in creating momentum for the law's repeal. The report, *Progress Stalled: Setbacks in Freedom of Expression Reform*, was a follow-up to a 1998 report on the same topic, illustrating the value of sustained advocacy on a single issue.

The Americas division continued to draw attention to labor rights violations in the region. In April, the division issued a comprehensive study showing how Mexico, the United States, and Canada have failed to fulfill their obligations under the labor side accord of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Released on the eve of the Summit of the Americas in Québec, the report called for the creation of an independent oversight agency to spur remedial action for workers' rights violations.

To facilitate the broad dissemination of its findings in Latin America, the Americas division put a high priority on translating its materials into Spanish (and Portuguese, in some instances) and posting them on the Human Rights Watch website. With materials arranged chronologically by country and by issue, the Spanish-language website, in particular, presented a detailed picture of human rights conditions in the region. Visitor traffic to the Spanish-language pages expanded rapidly over the course of the year, drawn by the comprehensive and timely selection of materials. By year's end, Spanish-language visitors constituted Human Rights Watch's largest non-English audience.

## ARGENTINA

**P**reoccupied by a deep economic crisis, the government of President Fernando de la Rúa did little to promote human rights. An escalation of police abuses in the province of Buenos Aires came to public attention in October 2001, leading to the immediate dismissal of Buenos Aires police and justice officials. The courts made important strides toward bringing to justice those responsible for the gross human rights violations committed during the period of military rule (1976-1983). President de la Rúa scarcely commented on these developments. Instead of supporting these efforts to break impunity, his ministry of defense backed Argentina's increasingly questioned amnesty laws and the government rejected requests for the extradition of former human rights violators to stand trial in Europe.

### HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

Police engaged in operations to combat urban crime committed serious human rights violations. Evidence emerged during the year that the Buenos Aires police