

Box 4.10.1 Colombia

The Organization of American States (OAS) continued to operate its Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (known by its Spanish acronym, MAPP) throughout 2007. First deployed in 2004, MAPP is mandated to help verify the demobilization of the right-wing United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). While the mission has achieved considerable success in its demobilization efforts—over 30,000 paramilitaries and some 18,000 weapons had been demobilized and surrendered by early 2007—in the second half of 2007 the OAS strongly warned that, if this process is not followed by a strong reintegration process, the demobilized ex-combatants may revert to violence, dragging Colombia back into widespread conflict.

Following a critical assessment of MAPP's performance by the OAS in late

2005, and growing criticism from Colombian nongovernmental organizations that the mission lacked the resources to go beyond basic demobilization verification, MAPP received enhanced funding, allowing it to grow from forty-four civilian staff in 2005 to eighty-three by the end of 2006. The enhanced mission strength yielded a heightened MAPP presence and activity in the field, bringing the demobilization process of the mission's mandate near completion in the first half of 2007.

In his ninth quarterly report to the Permanent Council on MAPP, OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza commended the mission and Colombia for their benchmark progress in demobilizing the AUC, but also warned of the immense challenges that will result from this successful phase. Focusing largely on evidence collected by MAPP, Insulza stressed

that the reintegration process had progressed at an alarmingly slow rate, resulting in the regrouping and rearming of demobilized combatants into new armed groups and gangs, and thus posing a serious threat to the peace process as a whole. Observations from MAPP's regional offices and mobile teams showed that the demobilized are not only relapsing into their violent past, but also operating in increasingly complex and clandestine frameworks.

The difficulties experienced in the reintegration process have exposed weaknesses in Colombia's institutions and in MAPP's ability to mount a successful reintegration program. The Colombian authorities and the international community therefore need to increase their efforts to address the question of reintegration if the modest gains registered through the demobilization efforts are to be sustained.