

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Colombia

CAPITAL: Bogota

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Unitary Multiparty Republic

AREA: 1,138,914 Sq Km (439,735 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION 38,324,400



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Colombia is located on the northwestern corner of the South American continent. It is bound by Panama and the Caribbean Sea to the northwest, Venezuela to the northeast, Brazil to the southeast, Ecuador and Peru to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The country is divided into four topographical regions. (1.) The central highlands which consist of the Cordillera Occidental, the Cordillera Central and the Cordillera Oriental Ranges as well as a massive plateau called the Sabana de Bogota. (2.) The Atlantic lowlands which consist of the plains north of the highlands, although they are connected to them through the Cauca and Magdalena River Valleys, and the isolated mountain systems called the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as well as the semiarid Guajira Peninsula. (3.) The Pacific lowlands which consist of a lowland area called the Serrania de Baudo as well as jungles and swamps. (4.) Eastern Colombia which is east of the Andes and comprises the vast Llanos or plains in the northern area as well as the Selvas or jungle forests in the south. The country drains in three directions by rivers that flow into the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Major Cities (pop. est.); Bogota 5,237,600, Medellin 1,621,400, Cali 1,718,900, Barranquilla 1,064,300, Cartagena 745,700 (1995). Land Use; forested 48%, pastures 39%, agricultural-cultivated 5%, other 8% (1993).

CLIMATE: Colombia has a tropical climate on the coast and a temperate climate on the plateaux. Colombia can be divided into three climatic zones depending on altitude. (1.) Below 915 metres (300 feet) which is a hot zone and comprises 90% of the land area. Average temperature ranges are from 23.8 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) to 26.6 degrees Celsius (80 degrees Fahrenheit) (2.) Between 915 metres (3,000 feet) and 1,980 metres (6,500 feet) which is the temperate zone and comprises only 8% of the land area. Average temperature ranges are from 18.3 degrees Celsius (65 degrees Fahrenheit) to 23.9 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit). (3.) Over 1,980 metres (6,500 feet) is the cool zone comprising the plateaux and terraces of the Colombian Andes. Average temperate ranges are from 12.7 degrees Celsius (55 degrees Fahrenheit) to -17 degrees Celsius (1.4 degrees Fahrenheit). In general, there are two main seasons, (1.) the wet season from March to May and September to November with (2.) the dry season from December to February and June to August, except in the northern plains where there is only one long wet season from May to October. Average temperature ranges in Bogota are from 10 to 18 degrees Celsius (50 to 64 degrees Fahrenheit) in July to 9 to 20 degrees Celsius (48 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit) in February.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Mestizos who account for around 58% of the population and are of mixed White and AmerIndian descent. The Whites or Spanish account for 20% of the population while the Mulattoes, who are of mixed Black African and White descent, constitute 14% of the population. Black Africans account for around 4% while 1% are AmerIndians. There are an estimated 60 Indian tribes scattered throughout the country and the principal ethnic aliens include Jews, Germans, Lebanese, East Indians and Americans.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 29 persons per sq km (76 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 67.2% urban, 32.8% rural (1985). Sex Distribution; 49.6% male, 50.4% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 64.0 years male, 68.0 years female (1989). Age Breakdown; 36% under 15, 30% 15 to 29, 19% 30 to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 5% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 27.9 per 1,000 (1988). Death Rate; 7.4 per 1,000 (1988). Increase Rate; 20.5 per 1,000 (1988). Infant Mortality Rate; 37.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: Mostly Christians with over 95% of the population Roman Catholic while 1% are Protestant.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Spanish and Colombian Spanish is said to be the purest in Latin America while AmerIndian languages are also spoken by some of the ethnic minorities.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 15.3%, primary 50.1%, secondary 25.4%, higher 6.8%, unspecified 2.8% (1985). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 86.7% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In 1946 continuing disputes between Colombia's two major political parties reached a climax. Riots in the center of Bogota left many dead as fighting spread to the countryside and continued until 1956. This period from 1946 to 1956 was called La Violencia (the Violence) when at least 200,000 Colombians were killed. In 1953 the military led by Gustavo Rojas Pinilla overthrew Pres. Laureano Gomez, although the coup was only partially successful in stopping the spiraling violence. In 1957 the Liberal and Conservative parties formed a coalition and from 1958 to 1974 they shared all political offices while the leaders alternated as the nation's President every four years until 1974. The coalition restored the people's confidence in the government and as a result the economy improved. In the late 1970's left wing guerrilla groups caused major national disruptions until 1988 when the April 19 Movement declared a ceasefire in response to a peace plan proposed by Pres. Virgilio Barco Vargas. Since that time the societies threat has come from

right wing paramilitary death groups who murder anyone trying to oppose the cocaine drug cartels. These squads are believed to be responsible for thousands of deaths each year since the early 1980's. In Aug. 1989 the assassination of a politician provoked the President to declare war on the drug cartels and in Feb. 1990 the Presidents of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru agreed to co-operate in the fight against drug trafficking. In April a third political candidate was assassinated and in May 1990 Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, an outspoken foe of the drug cartels, was elected President. In late 1990 a Presidential decree allowed traffickers to plea bargain if they surrendered so they could be tried in Colombian courts, otherwise, they would face extradition to the US. In Mar. 1991 the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) demobilized, renamed itself Hope, Peace and Liberty and was officially recognized as a political party while in May 1991 the indigenous Quintin Lame group also gave up its arms, although the FARC and ELN acting jointly at times continued their armed offensive campaigns. In June 1991 Pablo Escobar leader of the Medellin cartel and a bloody campaign of terror, surrendered. In July 1991 the State of Emergency imposed since 1984 was lifted and an elected constitutional assembly completed a new constitution after 5 months of deliberation. On October 27, 1991 the ruling Partido Liberal won election and gained a majority in both houses of Congress. In Mar. 1992 peace talks with guerrilla organization held in Mexico collapsed after news that a former minister, Argelino Duran Quintero, held as a hostage died. In April 1992, a state of emergency was declared due to a serious energy crisis resulting from a shortage of Hydroelectric power due to the effects of the El Nino while in the same month Americas Watch described the Colombian human rights situation as "appalling". In May 1992 some of the fiercest fighting erupted with guerrilla groups that resulted in the deaths of around 40 guerrillas and 20 soldiers. On July 22, 1992 Pablo Escobar while awaiting trial at a high security prison escaped fearing extradition to the US with six people being killed during the escape while the government turned down his offer to surrender again under "certain conditions". On Nov. 8, 1992 a state of emergency was declared to combat the increased violence from guerrilla groups and drug traffickers. On Jan. 1, 1993 the government announced a 25% increase in the minimum workers wage while economic activity was steady and boosted by new oil production in the Llanos foothills. In Feb. 1993 the state of emergency imposed in Nov. 1991 was renewed and again in May for another 90 days. In Mar. 1993 the government offered to renew talks with the guerrillas on the condition they agreed to a unilateral cease-fire, which was rejected. On Dec. 2, 1993 escapee Pablo Escobar and a bodyguard were shot dead while fleeing from a roof of a house where hundreds of police and soldiers had trapped them. However, Escobar's rival Cali cartel had increased its illegal drug activities with an estimation that it controlled 80% of all drugs smuggled into the US.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Peso (P) divided into 100 Centavos.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$50,119,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$12,861,000,000 (1993). Imports; USD \$6,485,200,000 (1992 est.). Exports; USD \$7,263,200,000 (1992 est.). Tourism Receipts; USD \$705,000,000 (1992). Balance of Trade;

USD \$ -2,640,700,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 9,558,000 or 34.3% of total population (1985). Unemployed; 4.3% (1985).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are the USA, Germany, Venezuela, Japan, France, Ecuador and the UK.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Bananas, Cassava, Cattle, Coal, Coffee, Copper, Cut Flowers, Emeralds, Gold, Iron Ore, Maize, Nickel, Oil and Natural Gas, Platinum, Potatoes, Rice, Silver, Sugar, Sorghum, Soya Beans, Timber.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Beverages, Cement, Chemicals, Food Processing, Iron and Steel, Mining, Oil Refining, Paper, Plastic Resins and Manufactures, Textiles and Clothing, Tourism.

MAIN EXPORTS: Cement, Chemicals, Coal and Coke, Coffee, Cotton, Cut Flowers, Emeralds, Fruit and Vegetables, Fuel Oil, Ferronickel, Machinery, Plastic Resins and Manufactures, Pharmaceuticals, Printed Matter, Sugar, Textiles and Clothing.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 3,236 km (2,011 mi) (1990), passenger-km 141,357,000 (87,835,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 390,744,000 (267,621,000 short ton-mi) (1990). Roads; length 106,218 km (66,001 mi) (1986). Vehicles; cars 936,000 (1989), trucks and buses 364,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 103 (1990), deadweight tonnage 540,790 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 3,935,160,000 (2,445,194,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 672,149,000 (460,355,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 45 with a total circulation of 1,910,020 (1994). Radio; receivers 5,400,000 (1994). Television; receivers 5,500,000 (1994). Telephones; units 3,827,900 (1993).

MILITARY: 146,400 (1994) total active duty personnel with 82.6% army, 12.4% navy and 5.0% air force while military expenditure accounts for 2.6% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).