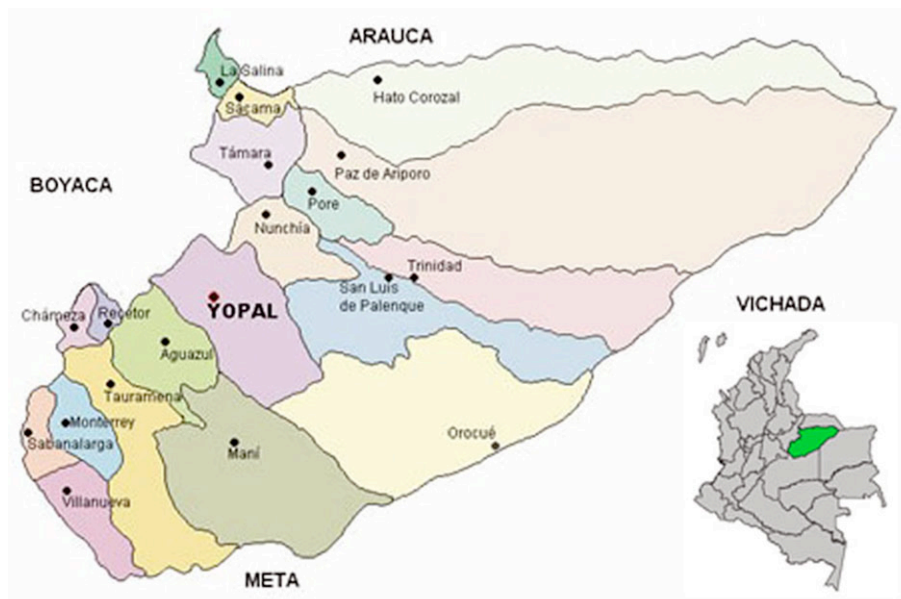


## Situation of Enforced Disappearances in Casanare, Colombia 1997—2005

This report provides quantitative information on enforced disappearances in the department of Casanare, Colombia between 1997 and 2005<sup>1</sup>. During this period, individual disappearances were systematic. 14 out of 19 municipalities in Casanare experienced at least one disappearance in the time frame of this study. The majority of the disappearances were concentrated in the municipalities located in the western Casanare. This report analyzes 512 unique disappearance cases. Two paramilitary groups committed the majority of these cases: the local Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Casanare (*Autodefensas Campesinas del Casanare*, or ACC) and the national United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, or AUC). In addition, there were also reports of individuals missing due to guerrilla action and common crime, as well as enforced disappearances by security forces.



Courtesy of Casanare's Governor Office ([www.casanare.gov.co](http://www.casanare.gov.co)) and the Vice-President's Office for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law ([www.derechoshumanos.gov.co](http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co))

### Description of the situation in Casanare, Colombia

#### *Paramilitary groups in Casanare*

Casanare provides an atypical case of paramilitary violence in Colombia, given that two active and independent paramilitary groups were in combat with each other. Prior to 2003, the ACC, under the leadership of paramilitary commander Hector Buitrago (alias

<sup>1</sup> The 2005 UN Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia states that there were allegations of enforced disappearances committed by paramilitary groups “with complaints of State responsibility through action or omission. The departments of Casanare and Guaviare were also reported to be particularly affected by this practice.” See E/CN.4/2006/9, January 20, 2006, II, paragraph 32.

“Martin Llanos”), had control of the adjacent departments Casanare and Boyacá, as well as the southern *Llanos*, or the savannah departments of Guaviare and Meta. In 2003, the Centauros Bloc of the AUC began to attack the ACC strongholds in an effort to gain territorial control. The AUC was successful at decimating the ACC paramilitary group (they were successful at decimating, does this mean weakening?). From 2003 to 2005, the ACC and the Centauros Bloc AUC engaged in violent disputes to obtain territorial control of Casanare. Attacks on civilians, such as disappearances, were frequently used as a means to “purge” areas of control or prevent expansion of the opposing faction. For this reason, hundreds of individuals who were suspected or accused of belonging to the rival paramilitary group were forcibly disappeared. It is suspected that many of these individuals are buried in clandestine cemeteries located in traditional areas of paramilitary control, such as *haciendas* (large estates, often for livestock or agriculture) or encampments<sup>2</sup>.

Casanare is a wealthy department with a strong economy based on oil extraction and cattle-ranching. It is also a strategic location for illicit activities such as coca cultivation and drug trafficking. Both the ACC and the Centauros Bloc of AUC had influence in local political and economic power structures in Casanare. The ACC, followed by the Centauros Bloc of the AUC, regularly acted with the support of local officials and security forces, through action (sharing information or providing equipment and training) or omission (failing to initiate or carry out investigations of crimes). However, it is worth noting that this support fluctuated with the encroaching control of the Centauros Bloc. In 2003, the military sided with the Centauros Bloc of the AUC to combat the ACC<sup>3</sup>. This support allowed the Centauros Bloc to assert control of the region, prior to its demobilization in mid-2005<sup>4</sup>.

#### *Problems with records of enforced disappearances in Casanare*

There are no available figures of missing individuals in Casanare. Yet the lack of figures in Casanare reflects a larger problem in Colombia (and a larger problem in documenting violations of human rights): there is not a complete and comprehensive register of enforced disappearances in the country<sup>5</sup>. While there are some national governmental registers of forcibly disappeared individuals, such as the IN ENGLISH? (*Registro Único de Personas Desaparecidas*) housed by the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (*Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses*), these are incomplete. There is also limited information sharing between different governmental institutions, and even between regional and central offices of the same institution<sup>6</sup>. Under-registration of disappearances in Casanare is the norm; a recent 36-page publication released by the Vice-President’s Office for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (*Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario*) on the human rights situation on Casanare in January 2006

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<sup>2</sup> Clandestine cemeteries are not unique to Casanare. The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances’ 2006 report on its mission to Colombia stated that: “Reportedly, thousands of graveyards containing bodies of missing and disappeared persons still exist all over the country. Apparently, information gleaned from the general public about such graves reveals a more widespread pattern than previously known.” E/CN.4/2006/56/Add.1, January 17, 2006, IV D, Paragraph 51.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2005. *Smoke and Mirrors: Colombia’s demobilization of paramilitary groups*. Vol. 17, No. 3. p. 22

<sup>4</sup> El Tiempo [Colombian national newspaper]. “Arranca la desmovilización del ‘bloque Centauros’ de las autodefensas que opera en el Llano.” June 3, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Gómez López, AM and A Patiño Umaña. 2006. “Who is missing? Problems in the application of forensic archaeology and anthropology in Colombia’s conflict.” In *Forensic Archaeology and Human Rights*, Roxana Ferllini (Ed.), Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher (upcoming publication).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

failed to even mention the problem of disappeared individuals in this department<sup>7</sup>, despite existing records of other Colombian governmental agencies.

Between 1997 and 2005, many of cases were recorded as kidnappings rather than forced disappearances. This confusion is common in other parts of the country as well.<sup>8</sup> There are two kinds of kidnappings in Colombia: extortive kidnappings, or those in which a person is apprehended in order to claim ransom, and simple kidnappings, or those in which a person is apprehended for motives that are not economic in nature. Given that a person is a victim of a “simple” kidnapping and is rarely heard from again, the line between simple kidnappings and enforced disappearances is often indistinct. Non-governmental organizations tend to record the missing as enforced disappearances, while governmental organizations record them as kidnappings.

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<sup>7</sup> See Vicepresidencia de la República. 2006. *Panorama actual de Casanare*, January 2006. Available at [www.derechoshumanos.gov.co](http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co)

<sup>8</sup> The 2005 UN Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia states “that not all complaints of enforced disappearances are registered; in many cases they are registered as kidnappings.” See E/CN.4/2006/9, January 20, 2006, II, paragraph 32.

## Quantitative analysis of disappearances in Casanare

Between June 2005 and June 2006, EQUITAS obtained data about 512 individual cases of disappeared individuals from six separate sources. Cases were provided by two civil society organizations, Fundación País Libre and the Colombian Commission of Jurists. Governmental sources that provided data were the National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, Eastern Section; General Attorney's Office (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*), Santa Rosa de Viterbo Section; the National Technical Investigation Unit (*Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación Nacional*) of the General Attorney's Office (Bogotá); and Fondelibertad.

### *Analytic Objectives*

- learn the frequency of armed faction responsibility in order to determine if there was a particular armed faction to which most of the disappearances are attributed.
- learn the temporal and spatial concentrations of disappearances in order to determine which municipalities and years had the highest levels of disappearances

Based on a quantitative analysis provided by Benetech of the information available from six sources on disappearances in Casanare, we conclude that the paramilitary groups were responsible for more than half of the reported disappearances with known perpetrators. Furthermore, we can conclude that the years with the highest number of disappearances were 2001 and 2003, and that the most affected municipality was Villanueva and Tauramena in 2001, and Recetor in 2003.

### *Data Sources*

The data for this project comes from the records of the following sources:

- General Attorney's Office, Santa Rosa de Viterbo Section– 273 unique records from February 1997 to March 2005;
- National Technical Investigation Unit of the General Attorney's Office (Bogotá) – 108 unique records from January 2003 to January 2005;
- National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, Eastern Section – 105 unique records from June 2000 to December 2003;
- Colombian Commission of Jurists – 89 unique records from September 1998 to July 2003;
- Fundación País Libre – 13 unique records from November 1998 to January 2005;
- Fondelibertad – 8 unique records from November 1998 to April 2004.

Each data set contained its own set of variables based on the needs of each organization. The datasets were each reduced to a uniform structure, keeping only the following variables of interest:

- Victim's name
- Date of disappearance
- Municipality within Casanare
- Source
- Alleged perpetrator

- Victim's sex

Datasets are partial: they each contain only the data available to that institution. It is important to understand that there are certainly more disappearances than are represented by these four datasets. However, even in this limited form, these datasets offer important insights into the likely statistical patterns of disappearances in Casanare between 1997 and 2004.

Some of the datasets did not contain some variables in the uniform structure. The General Attorney's Office dataset did not have the municipality of the disappearance. The CCJ and the Fundación País Libre did not collect information about the sex of the victim. País Libre did not have information about the alleged perpetrator. The National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences did not include alleged perpetrator. Where the information was unavailable, it was treated as missing in the analysis below.

### *De-duplication*

When information is collected about human rights situations, several different records may describe the same events. That is, there may be the same violation reported by many different sources. When trying to count the total number of abuses, it is critical to distinguish where reports overlap so that violations or victims are not over-counted. Detecting duplicate reporting can be very difficult because the information available to each project may be slightly different, even for the same cases. Duplicate reporting is controlled by matching records from each dataset to the others to identify the duplicated victims. Because human rights data is usually generated by the aggregation of press reports and narrative interviews, duplication is a normal feature of the resulting data. Removing the duplication is a standard step in the generation of all human rights statistics.

In this study, duplicates were identified between all the sources and names were standardized. This resulted in one "clean" data set with unique records of the disappearances reported by one or more of these sources.

The difference in the structure of the raw sources made the de-duplication difficult. Names in some sources contained accents, while other did not. Many of the same names were spelled differently in various places. Some datasets separated first and last names into different variables. Others embedded multiple first and last names in one field.

The following table is meant to show the overlapped reporting of disappearances in the six datasets. Since there are many possible combinations of overlapped reporting between the six different sources, the table provides a 1 if cases appeared in that source and a 0 if cases did not appear in that source. The last column provides total counts for the cases where reporting of disappearances overlapped in the datasets with 1s for that row.

<b>Fiscalia</b>	<b>Fonde Libertad</b>	<b>CCJ</b>	<b>Pais Libre</b>	<b>CTI</b>	<b>IML</b>	<b>Totals</b>
1	1	0	0	1	0	3
1	1	0	0	0	0	5
1	0	1	1	1	1	1
1	0	1	0	1	1	1
1	0	1	0	0	1	1
1	0	1	0	0	0	18
1	0	0	0	1	1	3
1	0	0	0	1	0	40
1	0	0	0	0	1	4
1	0	0	0	0	0	197
0	0	1	0	0	1	1
0	0	1	0	0	0	67
0	0	0	1	1	0	2
0	0	0	1	0	1	1
0	0	0	1	0	0	9
0	0	0	0	1	0	58
0	0	0	0	0	1	101
						512

After linking the common records between the datasets, there is information about 512 unique cases of disappearances in Casanare between February 1997 to January 2005. It is logically possible (and indeed, likely) that there were some disappearances that were not reported to any of the four sources. The Appendix explains how this might be addressed in future analysis.

### Descriptive Data Analysis

Although an estimate of the total universe of disappearances in Casanare is not possible, the results of this study provide important insight about the *known* cases of disappearances.

#### *Records by source*

As seen in the table with overlap counts in the section above, the General Attorney's Office (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*), an official governmental source, has the most information about the known disappearances – 53% (273/512).

#### *Alleged Perpetrator Responsibility*

<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
Paramilitaries	192	49.23	49.23
Not established	90	23.08	72.31
Guerrillas	85	21.79	94.10
Common crime	18	4.62	98.72

<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
State agents	5	1.28	100.00
<i>Total</i>	390	100.00	

In Casanare, approximately half of reported disappearances are attributed to the paramilitary groups. However, given that the data sources aggregated all the data on various paramilitary groups under the umbrella “paramilitary,” it is not possible to distinguish which paramilitary group in particular may have committed the disappearance.

*Disappearances by Municipality in Casanare*

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Plot</b>
VILLANUEVA	75	*****
TAURAMENA	39	*****
AGUAZUL	37	*****
YOPAL	34	*****
RECETOR	28	*****
MANI	26	*****
MONTERREY	25	*****
NUNCHIA	10	*****
PAZ DE ARIPORO	10	*****
CHAMEZA	9	****
SACAMA	7	***
HATO COROZAL	5	**
PORE	5	**
SABANALARGA	2	*
<i>TOTAL</i>	312	

This table shows more clearly the great difference between disappearances reported in Villanueva with respect to the other municipalities.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
MISSING DATA	263	68.49	68.49
VILLANUEVA	47	12.24	80.73
TAURAMENA	28	7.29	88.02
YOPAL	12	3.12	91.15
NUNCHIA	6	1.56	92.71

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
SACAMA	6	1.56	94.27
MONTERREY	5	1.30	95.57
RECETOR	4	1.04	96.61
AGUAZUL	3	0.78	97.40
HATO COROZAL	2	0.52	97.92
PAZ DE ARIPORO	2	0.52	98.44
PORE	2	0.52	98.96
CHAMEZA	1	0.26	99.22
SALINA	1	0.26	99.48
MANI	1	0.26	99.74
SIN DETERMINAR	1	0.26	100.00
<i>Total</i>	384	100.00	

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cum</b>
MISSING DATA	200	39.07	39.07
VILLANUEVA	75	14.65	53.72
TAURAMENA	39	7.62	61.33
AGUAZUL	37	7.23	68.56
YOPAL	34	6.64	75.20
RECETOR	28	5.47	80.77
MANI	26	5.08	85.75
MONTERREY	25	4.88	90.63
NUNCHIA	10	1.95	92.58
PAZ DE ARIPORO	10	1.95	94.54
CHAMEZA	9	1.76	96.29
SACAMA	7	1.37	97.66
HATO COROZAL	5	0.98	98.64
PORE	5	0.98	99.61
SABANALARGA	2	0.39	100.00
<i>Total</i>	512	100.00	

Of the 14 municipalities where disappearances occurred and for which we have municipality information, approximately 24% (75/312) were reported in Villanueva. As mentioned above, there is 39% (200/512) missing data about municipality given that the largest data source, the Fiscalía, did not provide this information.



### Disappearances by Year

Year	Freq	Plot
1997	18	*****
1998	41	*****
1999	35	*****
2000	45	*****
2001	140	***** ****
2002	48	*****
2003	101	*****
2004	51	*****
2005	16	*****
<i>Total</i>	495	

In 2001 and 2003, there is a substantial difference in the quantity of disappearances reported relative to the other years in our reference frame. 28 % (140/495) of the total in the database reported occurred in 2001. Another 20% (101/495) of the cases took place in 2003. There are 17 cases which have no information for the year the disappearance took place.

### Municipality by Year

Municipality	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	-	Total
MISSING DATA	18	32	28	34	67	15	1	3	1	1	200
AGUAZUL	0	1	1	0	6	9	5	7	6	2	37
CHAMEZA	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	2	0	0	9
HATO COROZAL	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	5
MANI	0	0	2	2	2	3	11	4	0	2	26
MONTERREY	0	0	0	0	1	6	2	9	3	4	25
NUNCHIA	0	0	0	1	3	3	1	2	0	0	10
PAZ DE ARIPORO	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	4	0	0	10
PORE	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	5
RECETOR	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	1	4	28
SABANALARGA	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
SACAMA	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	7
TAURAMENA	0	5	2	0	19	9	2	0	1	1	39
VILLANUEVA	0	0	0	4	37	2	19	9	1	3	75

Municipality	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	-	Total
YOPAL	0	1	2	0	4	1	18	6	2	0	34
<i>Total</i>	18	41	35	45	140	48	101	51	16	17	512

Of the reported cases of disappearances that contain municipality and year information, 51% (37/73) of the cases in 2001 occurred in Villanueva, and 26% (19/73) in Tauramena. Together, these two municipalities experienced 77% (56/73) of the known disappearances in 2001. In 2003, 23% (23/100) of the disappearances were concentrated in the municipality of Recetor.

#### *Municipality and Alleged Perpetrator*

Municipality	State agents	Common crime	Guerillas	Paramilitaries	Not established	-	Total
MISSING DATA	0	6	26	94	71	3	200
AGUAZUL	0	1	14	3	1	18	37
CHAMEZA	0	0	2	0	1	6	9
HATO COROZAL	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
MANI	0	0	1	10	2	13	26
MONTERREY	0	0	0	8	5	12	25
NUNCHIA	0	1	6	2	0	1	10
PAZ DE ARIPORO	0	3	4	2	1	0	10
PORE	0	0	3	2	0	0	5
RECETOR	0	0	0	0	0	28	28
SABANALARGA	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
SACAMA	5	0	2	0	0	0	7
TAURAMENA	0	0	13	13	2	11	39
VILLANUEVA	0	2	1	53	1	18	75
YOPAL	0	6	8	4	5	11	34
<i>Total</i>	5	19	85	192	89	122	512

Of the cases reported in Villanueva, 71% (53/75) of the disappearances are attributed to the paramilitaries. Of the cases attributed to the paramilitaries with municipality information, 54% (53/98) took place in Villanueva.

#### *Alleged Perpetrator by Year*

Year	State agents	Common crime	Guerillas	Paramilitaries	Not established	-	Total
1997	0	2	4	2	10	0	18

<b>Year</b>	<b>State agents</b>	<b>Common crime</b>	<b>Guerillas</b>	<b>Paramilitaries</b>	<b>Not established</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Total</b>
1998	0	2	10	16	12	1	41
1999	0	2	7	14	7	5	35
2000	0	0	2	12	24	7	45
2001	0	0	19	92	13	16	140
2002	0	0	5	12	9	22	48
2003	5	11	15	20	5	45	101
2004	0	2	17	20	5	7	51
2005	0	0	6	3	4	3	16
MISSING	0	0	0	1	0	16	17
<i>Total</i>	5	19	85	192	89	122	512

In 2001, the majority of disappearances were reported, and 66% (92/140) of the cases that year attributed the crime to the paramilitaries. In this year, paramilitary activity makes up almost 50% (92/192) of all the reported disappearances in the time periods spanning 1997-2005 in Casanare.

## Appendix: Estimates of the Total Number of Disappearances

Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE) is a statistical technique that uses the pattern of overlap among multiple, independent data-gathering projects, or systems, in order to make inferences about how many violations are unknown. That is, how many disappearances were never reported to any project? Unfortunately, the existing data is inadequate for MSE, as explained below.

In order to make statistical inferences using MSE, it is necessary to:

- Identify overlapping reports
- Control for bias and variation in coverage rates
- Estimate the total magnitude

In this study, overlap rates between the various sources were too low to do any type of estimation. Furthermore, these four datasets could be considered as only two independent systems. The difference in the reporting density in two sources (and CCJ) varied tremendously from two other sources (Fondelibertad and País Libre). Note that the first two sources are much larger than the second two, and that the cases País Libre reports are unreported in any of the other three sources.

Considering the four sources as separate and independent for the purposes of MSE would create statistical bias producing over- or under-estimation. When one or more of the datasets contributes such a small number of records, the overlap rate can be too great or too limited. As noted above, Fundación País Libre has no overlap with other sources. Conversely, when the overlap is too great because one source contains another source (or nearly so), the sources cannot be considered as separate.

Substantial additional information will be required to understand the statistical pattern of disappearances in Casanare.

## About the Authors

### *EQUITAS*

EQUITAS (or the Colombian Interdisciplinary Team for Forensic Work and Psychosocial Assistance) is a neutral, independent, and autonomous non-profit Colombian organization, whose humanitarian and scientific mission is to help Colombian families search for individuals missing due to the country's social and armed conflict, as well as provide psychosocial support to affected families in an effort to recover their social fabric.

Based in Bogotá, EQUITAS works on cases located in various parts of Colombia that are at different stages in the investigative process, and range from individual disappearance cases to large-scale massacres and clandestine gravesites. Although EQUITAS has been involved in locating and recovering remains, our organization has been mostly carrying out preliminary work, helping collect background information, collecting ante-mortem information, identifying potential burial sites, and providing counsel to organizations regarding forensic investigation procedures. Parallel to these activities, EQUITAS has met with family members, explain the forensic work that is required for each case, and initiate community-based activities to deal with disappearances and grief. In doing so, EQUITAS constantly interacts with governmental and non-governmental entities, as well as international institutions such as the International Committee for the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights.. More information on EQUITAS' work is available at [www.equitas.org.co](http://www.equitas.org.co) or at +57 1 637 5717.

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### *Benetech*

HRDAG is a program of Benetech, a nonprofit based in Palo Alto, California, that develops sustainable, technology-based solutions to address pressing social challenges in areas such as human rights, disability, education, and literacy. The Benetech Human Rights Program's goal is to redefine the debate about large-scale human rights violations with scientifically defensible analysis, using science and technology to substantiate human rights arguments and support the human rights community's efforts to establish the truth about past atrocities, promote accountability for the violence and to advocate for a world in which there are fewer abuses.

The program brings 15 years' experience in more than a dozen countries, conducting and publishing statistical analyses of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other large-scale human rights abuses. Its analysis has helped support the argument that genocide was committed in Guatemala, reveal that Slobodan Milošević's defense theories about what happened in Kosovo were inconsistent with empirical data, and to demonstrate that the Peruvian civil war was approximately 2.5 times more severe than the capital elites in Lima ever imagined. By putting science at the service of these societies, the Benetech Human Rights Program has helped write the history of the past to improve the prospects of the future. More information on Benetech and the HRDAG program can be found at [www.benetech.org](http://www.benetech.org) or by calling +1 650 475 5440.

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