

AMERICAS OVERVIEW

The failed coup in politically polarized Venezuela was the most dramatic sign of problems that were increasingly apparent across Latin America and the Caribbean: the fragility of electoral democracy and the weakness of the rule of law. Even though, with the glaring exception of Cuba, the formal trappings of democracy were in place throughout the region, voters seemed to be losing confidence in the ability of elected governments to cope effectively with the challenges of the day. With poverty and inequality on the rise, widespread popular disenchantment with the region's shallow democracies raised serious concern.

Argentina was another extreme case, with three presidents shuffling through the office during a single ten-day period in December 2001, a crisis provoked by the country's near-total economic collapse. Haiti, whose government's democratic credentials were already subject to question, saw increasing political turmoil. Street protests and rioting erupted in both countries, as well as in Venezuela, Paraguay, and Bolivia. The violence and brutality of the police response to such incidents brought deserved attention to the deeply ingrained failings of the region's criminal justice systems.

Unable to bring prosperity to the electorate, some political leaders seemed all too capable of securing financial benefits for themselves. In certain cases, as a commentator observed with regard to Argentina, government officials treated public money as "the spoils of war." For all the talk of anti-corruption efforts, little concrete progress was made in stemming the practice. And it was official corruption that—perhaps more than any other single factor—eroded public trust in government. The region's vigorous press helped to monitor corrupt practices, but its ability to do so was limited in some countries by oppressive criminal defamation laws. In Panama, most notably, government officials retaliated against investigative journalists by bringing many of them to court.

The lack of government transparency that facilitated corruption received increased attention, however, and some countries made progress toward remedying it. In Mexico and Peru, laws on freedom of information were passed that affirmed that information in the hands of the state was, in principle, public. Such laws also established procedures for citizens to seek the release of government documents and fixed penalties for improper denials of access.

In Colombia, the region's only armed conflict and most pressing human rights crisis worsened. Indicating an apparent preference for a more hard-line approach, voters elected President Álvaro Uribe Vélez in May by an unprecedented majority.

Uribe immediately imposed emergency measures that weakened the ability of state institutions to monitor and investigate human rights violations. He also tried to permit warrantless searches and wiretaps and to restrict the movement of journalists, measures ruled unconstitutional by the country's highest court. And in a particularly worrying move, Uribe authorized the army to recruit and arm a force of fifteen thousand peasant allies, raising fears that the army's existing paramilitary allies might simply be "legalized." Although President Uribe and his defense minister announced a zero-tolerance policy toward any collaboration between government forces and illegal paramilitary groups, numerous credible reports of joint military-paramilitary operations and tolerance for paramilitary activities persisted.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP), the country's largest guerrilla group, intensified attacks after the breakdown of peace negotiations in February. In the deadliest incident, in May, guerrillas launched a gas cylinder bomb that hit a church where displaced persons were gathered in Bojayá, Chocó, killing 119, including at least forty-eight children. The FARC also escalated its offensive against the state's civilian infrastructure, killing mayors and other local officials.

Venezuela, though not in a state of armed conflict, was repeatedly on the brink of violence. The continuing political strife, which resulted in an April coup attempt, abated somewhat in the wake of Hugo Chávez's reinstatement as president, but worsened notably toward the end of the year.

President Chávez, a one-time coup plotter himself, was forced from office on April 11 by the military after shootings disrupted a massive protest march. The march, which was called in support of a general strike, involved the participation of labor groups, business organizations, the political opposition, and members of civil society. As some five hundred thousand people headed toward the presidential palace in downtown Caracas, where Chávez's supporters had gathered to oppose the march, marksmen in nearby buildings opened fire. Eighteen civilians died and more than 150 others were injured during the protest. Victims included both government supporters and members of the opposition, as well as a press photographer covering the event.

Late that evening, a group of senior military officers ousted President Chávez and allowed Pedro Carmona Estanga, the head of the country's leading business association, to declare himself president. This rupture of the constitutional order gave way to a broader attack on the rule of law as Carmona dissolved the legislature and the Supreme Court, and revoked the country's new constitution. Although Chávez was reinstated as president on April 14, some forty to sixty people were killed in a second eruption of violence that took place during the weekend he was deposed. Most of the victims were believed to be Chávez supporters who were killed by security forces during rioting in poor neighborhoods of Caracas.

In Haiti, although events were less dramatic, a similar level of political polarization was evident. The political opposition, already skeptical of continuing promises made by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was further embittered by the violent events of December 17, 2001. Taking advantage of reports of a coup attempt (later shown to be unfounded), gangs of youths—members of the so-called popular

organizations aligned with the party of President Aristide—embarked on large-scale reprisal attacks against the opposition. Burning the headquarters of political parties and destroying the homes of opposition leaders, the gangs roamed through cities and towns unhindered by the police.

Haiti's underlying political stalemate stemmed from legislative elections held in 2000 that were plagued by fraud. Although international negotiators continued their efforts to facilitate a solution to the impasse in 2002, the lack of progress discouraged donor states, leaving hundreds of millions of dollars in international aid frozen. President Aristide complained vociferously of the aid suspension, but showed little inclination to take the concrete steps needed to resolve the situation.

Massive political protests in Argentina, a symptom of the country's ruinous economic conditions, led President Fernando De la Rúa to resign in December 2001. Two more presidents followed in quick succession, until finally the Congress elected Peronist Eduardo Duhalde to the presidency. Nationwide, at least twenty-three people were killed during the violent clashes and rioting that accompanied the protests. The economic crisis brought with it a sharp increase in violent crime and kidnappings. Police brutality, an already chronic problem, worsened.

Police violence raised serious concern in other countries as well, particularly Venezuela, where high rates of violent crime led to public indifference to abuses against suspected criminals. "Social cleansing"-type killings by Venezuelan police were a grave problem, especially in the provinces. In the state of Portuguesa, a self-styled "extermination group" composed of off-duty members of the state police and National Guard was responsible for killing alleged street criminals and drug-users.

In the English-speaking Caribbean, where violent crime rates were also extremely high, several states persisted in efforts to strengthen the death penalty. These states—notably Barbados, Belize, and Jamaica—sought to evade certain rulings of the Privy Council, the London-based appellate tribunal, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that hindered their application of the penalty. In December, for example, Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson announced during a nationally televised speech that he would seek a constitutional amendment to reinstate hangings. Earlier, Patterson had asserted that the Privy Council was "making it impossible for the [death penalty] to be carried out." He was referring to the fact that in Jamaica, as in other Caribbean countries, the death penalty existed as a legal punishment, but its application had been narrowed by several appellate rulings.

One such ruling was handed down in March, when the Privy Council, upholding an earlier decision of the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeal, struck down the mandatory death penalty that existed in seven Eastern Caribbean countries. In October, the Privy Council overturned the death sentences of two men convicted of a 1999 killing in Trinidad. As of November, legislatures in Belize and Barbados, reacting against such rulings, were considering proposed constitutional amendments to restrict appeals in capital cases.

Guatemala and Cuba remained the only Spanish-speaking countries in the region to apply the death penalty to normal crimes, although several other Latin American states reserved the right to execute persons convicted of treason during wartime or of other extraordinary offenses. In Guatemala, however, President Por-

tillo announced a moratorium on the application of the death penalty, and, at this writing, neither Guatemala nor Cuba had carried out any death sentences in 2002.

Prison conditions in Latin America were generally abysmal, with many prisons overcrowded, understaffed, decaying, and dangerous. A riot in La Vega prison, in the Dominican Republic, left twenty-nine inmates dead on September 20. Most of the victims died of smoke inhalation, the result of a fire that prisoners lit to protest a weapons search. The overcrowded and badly managed facility, built for three hundred people, held nearly twice that number at the time of the riot. In January, twenty-seven prisoners in Brazil were killed during a riot in the prison of Porto Velho, in the state of Rondonia, and. In Peru, the inmate population of the remote Challapalca high security prison, located at fourteen thousand feet in the Andes, doubled from fifty to more than one hundred over the course of the year. Due to its oxygen-thin air, isolation, and freezing temperatures, Peru's human rights ombudsman and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had repeatedly called for the prison's closure, saying it posed unacceptable health hazards to both inmates and staff.

Throughout Latin America 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: employers were able to violate workers' rights with impunity. In Colombia, where the defense of labor rights was an extremely dangerous activity, union leaders and members were frequently killed.

In an encouraging sign of progress, several countries took meaningful steps toward accountability for past abuses. In Mexico, for example, the government made the historic decision to publicly acknowledge acts of political violence committed by its security forces during the 1960s and 1970s, and to try to bring to justice those responsible for such crimes. President Vicente Fox, in November 2001, announced the creation of a special prosecutor's office that was charged with this task. In Argentina, a number of senior military officers implicated in abuses committed during that country's "dirty war" were in detention or under house arrest, including former military ruler Leopoldo Galtieri. As of November, however, the Argentine Supreme Court had yet to rule on appeals of two federal court decisions striking down the country's amnesty laws, a ruling that would be critical to the success of efforts to establish accountability.

In Chile, although courts made significant progress in prosecuting members of the military implicated in the "disappearances" committed during the Pinochet era, General Augusto Pinochet himself escaped justice. Disagreeing with many legal experts, Chile's Supreme Court held that the "moderate dementia" Pinochet was deemed to be suffering from was sufficient to satisfy the statutory requirements for terminating proceedings in the notorious "Caravan of Death" case.

Peru's truth commission held public hearings in cities and rural areas all across the country, beginning in April. The hearings, which were televised, were devoted to first-hand testimonies regarding massacres, extrajudicial executions, rapes, and

other abuses committed in Peru from 1980 to 2000. Also in April, as the result of negotiations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the attorney general named a special prosecutor to investigate and prosecute hundreds of forced disappearances, killings, and other crimes, mainly committed during the 1980s. The special prosecutor was also mandated to exhume and identify human remains in the more than five hundred clandestine burial sites believed to exist in Peru.

In Central America, too, the gross human rights violations of past decades continued to receive attention, with exhumations of mass graves taking place in a number of countries. In Panama, in April, a government-sponsored truth commission issued its final report on abuses committed during military rule. In Guatemala, the country with the most tragic past record of large-scale killings and massacres, the intimidation of witnesses, justice officials, and human rights defenders was a serious problem, hindering the quest for accountability.

Another important milestone in the push for accountability in Latin America was the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which entered into force on July 1. The ICC was designed to prosecute individuals accused of committing genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Several Latin American countries ratified the ICC treaty over the course of the year, namely, Ecuador, Panama, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay, Honduras, and Colombia. Although there was considerable regional support for the court, many countries—including Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, and Nicaragua—had yet to join the ICC at this writing.

By implementing appropriate national legislation, several countries showed that they took seriously their obligation to ensure the effective functioning of the ICC. On September 25, for example, Brazil adopted the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court as national law. Argentina and Ecuador made progress with draft implementing legislation, while Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela were starting the implementation process.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

The human rights movement in Latin America and the Caribbean showed impressive grassroots strength, while benefiting from acknowledged legitimacy at the governmental level. Numerous local and regional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were dedicated to the defense of human rights, including concerns such as women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, and free expression. Made up of talented and committed activists, lawyers, 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. Attesting to their expertise and ability, a number of Latin American human rights defenders played high-profile international roles at the United Nations and other fora.

In several countries, however, including Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, 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. In the first eleven months of 2002, sixteen defenders were reported killed there. Government investigators handling prosecutions of paramilitary leaders were also at risk, as were witnesses in such cases.

In Cuba, unlike other countries in the region, human rights monitoring was not recognized as a legitimate activity, but stigmatized as a disloyal betrayal of Cuban sovereignty. Cuban human rights defenders continued to work under extremely difficult conditions, facing surveillance, harassment, and possible criminal prosecution.

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

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations

Given world attention to other regions, human rights conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean were not extremely prominent on the United Nations's agenda, although specific problems and situations received attention.

James LeMoyné, the special adviser on Colombia to the U.N. secretary-general, was a frequent visitor to Colombia over the course of the year. He played an extremely active role in trying to salvage peace talks between the Colombian government and the country's largest guerrilla group, although the talks ultimately failed.

In both Colombia and Guatemala, the United Nations maintained a long-term human rights field presence. In Mexico, the government agreed in July to the opening of an in-country U.N. human rights office. The U.N. verification mission in Guatemala, 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 that documented abuses committed by all parties to the country's armed conflict. There were moments of high tension between the office and the Colombian government, notably after the office raised questions regarding the role of the Colombian army at Boyajá, the site of a large-scale killing by guerrillas. 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.

For the tenth time in eleven years, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution on human rights in Cuba. The language of the resolution was weaker than in the past, but, notably, the resolution was sponsored by Latin American governments. Ignoring strongly worded Cuban denunciations, a large majority of Latin American states with seats on the commission voted in favor of the resolution.

As of this writing, six countries in Latin America—Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica,

Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru—had issued standing invitations for visits of U.N. human rights monitoring mechanisms. Mexico, for example, hosted two such visits during the year: the February fact-finding mission of the special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, and the August mission of the representative of the U.N. secretary-general on internally displaced persons. In September, Haiti hosted the visit of Louis Joinet, the U.N.'s newly-appointed independent expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti. Cuba, which in past years had allowed only a select few U.N. human rights representatives to visit, lobbied to weaken the U.N.'s monitoring mechanisms at the April session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Organization of American States

The Organization of American States (OAS) expended significant diplomatic energies in trying to contain the twin political crises in Venezuela and Haiti. On April 13, in the immediate wake of President Hugo Chávez's ouster in Venezuela, the OAS Permanent Council held an emergency meeting as contemplated under the terms of the newly created Inter-American Democratic Charter. At the close of the meeting, the Permanent Council issued a resolution condemning the coup and stating that the events in Venezuela justified the charter's application—a decision that could have led to the application of sanctions had Chávez not been reinstated as president. OAS Secretary General César Gaviria traveled to Venezuela several times over the course of the year, attempting to facilitate a political dialogue between the opposing forces and avoid a deepening of the crisis.

In Haiti, OAS Assistant Secretary General Luigi Einaudi worked to effect a negotiated resolution to that country's political crisis, undertaking several missions to the country. The OAS Permanent Council, at a January meeting, also examined the Haitian situation. Concerned about the violent and systematic attacks on the political opposition that took place on December 17, 2001, the Permanent Council issued a resolution calling upon the Haitian authorities to carry out a thorough investigation of the attacks. In March, at a follow-up to the January meeting, the OAS and the Haitian government signed an agreement to establish an OAS Special Mission to Haiti. The mission, which began functioning the following month, was designed to help address the country's failings in the areas of democracy and human rights.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an OAS human rights body, sent fact-finding and advocacy missions to several countries in the region, including Venezuela, Haiti, and Argentina. In October, the commission held hearings regarding the situation of people living with HIV/AIDS. One hearing provided a general overview of human rights issues pertaining to the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the others covered the denial of access to anti-retroviral medication to people in Ecuador, and a similar case in El Salvador. Throughout the year, the commission issued recommendations to Latin American governments regarding specific human rights cases.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the OAS tribunal whose jurisdiction covered human rights—and whose rulings had binding force—issued several important decisions. In August, for example, it ordered Venezuela to pay compen-

sation amounting to U.S. \$1,559,800 to the relatives of thirty-seven people killed by security forces during a February 27, 1989 popular revolt.

Europe

The European Union (E.U.) supported efforts to address the region's most pressing human rights and humanitarian problems, including, most notably, the armed conflict in Colombia. Among other forms of help, it provided financial support for the Colombian peace process and for humanitarian assistance to displaced persons. When peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP broke down in February, however, the E.U. adopted a noticeably harder stance toward the FARC-EP. In June, after sustained debate and significant pressure from Colombia's then-President Andrés Pastrana, the E.U. added the FARC-EP to its blacklist of "terrorist" organizations.

As of November, Cuba remained the only Latin American country lacking an E.U. cooperation agreement covering trade and development. Although the Cuban government and E.U. representatives engaged in discussions regarding such an agreement, Cuba was unwilling to implement the reforms necessary to satisfy the E.U.'s "common position" on Cuba, which made full economic cooperation contingent on steps toward greater democracy and respect for human rights.

European courts, via efforts to extradite suspected perpetrators of gross human rights abuses, played a useful role in pressing for accountability for such crimes. In January, for example, Swedish courts sought the extradition of former Argentine naval officer Alfredo Astiz, known as the "Angel of Death" for his activities during Argentina's period of military rule. The Argentine government rejected the extradition request, however, asserting the principle of territorial sovereignty.

In May, the second Summit of Heads of State and Government of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union (E.U.-LAC) was held. Participants at the summit condemned human rights abuses and agreed to cooperate more closely to protect human rights and strengthen the rule of law.

United States

The U.S. government devoted relatively little high-level attention to Latin America, reflecting a shift in priorities dating from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Scant progress was made toward deepening bilateral relationships in the region, disappointing countries like Mexico, which had hoped to negotiate a joint migration policy that would include protections for Mexicans living in the United States. To the extent that Latin American countries remained on the U.S. foreign policy agenda, U.S. officials concentrated primarily on counter-narcotics and trade policy, with human rights issues being of secondary importance.

In Colombia, U.S. anti-drug efforts were increasingly assimilated into U.S. anti-terrorism efforts, which meant, in practice, counter-insurgency. The country's main guerrilla forces and its umbrella paramilitary alliance were both included on the State Department's official list of terrorist groups, and both were accused by U.S. officials of involvement in drug trafficking. Colombia remained the world's

third largest recipient of U.S. military aid, after Israel and Egypt, receiving \$374 million in military aid in 2002. In a new development, the U.S. lifted restrictions that had prevented the funding from being allocated to combat illegal armed groups, thus permitting direct U.S. funding of Colombian efforts to fight guerrillas and paramilitaries.

U.S. aid legislation included human rights conditions that required the Colombian military to take effective steps to break ties with paramilitary groups, suspend from duty officers implicated in gross human rights violations, and cooperate with civilian authorities in prosecuting alleged human rights abusers. Despite clear evidence that Colombia had failed to comply with a single one of the statutory requirements, the conditions were not enforced. The U.S. State Department certified Colombia's compliance with the conditions in May, thereby releasing 60 percent of the funds available, and again in September, releasing the remaining funds. The certification decisions sent a clear and disturbing message to the Colombian military that there would be no consequences for flouting the law's human rights requirements.

Nevertheless, in November, the State Department suspended an air force unit from receiving U.S. funding because of evidence that the unit was implicated in an indiscriminate attack near the town of Santo Domingo, Arauca, in 1998. U.S. pressure also led to the resignation of Navy Admiral Rodrigo Quinoñes, one of the most senior Colombian officers linked to support for paramilitary abuses.

Another major focus of U.S. policy in Latin America was trade. In August, legislation on Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), known as "Fast Track," was passed, granting the president the power to negotiate trade agreements that would not be subject to amendment by Congress. The TPA legislation included a set of objectives to guide the negotiation of future trade accords, including an objective that such accords should protect workers' rights. Armed with TPA, the Bush administration sought to conclude a free trade agreement with Chile by the end of 2002, as well as to negotiate another trade accord with five Central American countries, and, ultimately, a hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Unfortunately, there was no indication that U.S. trade negotiators intended to push for strong protections that would require parties' labor laws to meet international labor standards.

In negotiating trade agreements, the United States also continued to promote strict patent protections for pharmaceutical innovations, thus undermining access to essential HIV/AIDS medicines. U.S.-backed patent provisions in the draft FTAA went beyond existing World Trade Organization (WTO) rules in their protection of pharmaceutical patents. These protections restricted the ability of prospective member states to make full use of indirect price controls, such as compulsory licensing, contained in the WTO's Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS). The United States also sought to include such "TRIPS-plus" proposals in its bilateral agreement with Chile, as well as in the multilateral accord being negotiated with a block of Central American countries. These proposals undermined the 142-country consensus reached at the WTO's Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, regarding the appropriate balance between intellectual property right protections and public health concerns.

Cuba remained the exception to the U.S. government's region-wide push for

strengthened trade relations. Although a number of U.S. political leaders traveled to the island, including former President Jimmy Carter in May, Bush administration officials remained adamantly opposed to any softening in the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba.

The U.S. government described the promotion of democracy as a central pillar of its policy in the region. In April, however, when Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was temporarily ousted in a military coup, U.S. officials failed to immediately condemn the interruption in the constitutional order and instead publicly blamed the Chávez government for provoking the crisis. Only after other governments in the region denounced the coup did the United States join them in supporting an OAS resolution condemning it.

The Bush administration sought to undermine regional support for the International Criminal Court, threatening to cut off military aid to countries that supported the court.

On a bilateral basis, in contrast, the U.S. government did make some significant contributions toward promoting accountability for human rights abuses. In August, the State Department released 4,677 declassified documents containing information on human rights violations that took place in Argentina during that country's period of military rule. Many of the documents proved highly relevant to cases under investigation in the Argentine courts. In Guatemala, the U.S. government provided assistance to local efforts to investigate and prosecute past abuses, supporting the work of forensic teams exhuming clandestine cemeteries and of NGOs involved in human rights prosecutions. In Colombia, Department of Justice officials administered a \$25 million program to strengthen the capacity of the attorney general's Human Rights Unit by funding satellite offices, providing the office with training and equipment, and working to improve the security of threatened prosecutors and witnesses.

THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The Americas division of Human Rights Watch kept abreast of human rights developments around the region through close contact with local advocates, frequent country visits, and intensive monitoring of the news media and other sources of information. The division sought not only to identify pressing human rights problems but also to understand the root causes of violations and develop effective strategies for addressing them. These strategies involved targeted advocacy with policy-makers, careful coordination with local NGOs, and outreach to the broader public via the media and the Internet.

Among the issues the division addressed in 2001 were accountability and child soldiers in Colombia; the protection of human rights defenders in Guatemala; the political crisis in Venezuela; freedom of association and child labor in Ecuador; the treatment of Haitian immigrants and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic; freedom of expression in Chile; accountability, press freedoms, and political prisoners in Mexico; human rights prosecutions in Argentina; and the treatment of political dissidents in Cuba.

Over the course of the year, the Americas division fielded investigative and advocacy missions to Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. With the information collected during these trips, the division prepared detailed reports, briefing papers, and other materials to document the problems under review. To facilitate the broad dissemination of its findings, the 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.

Besides disseminating information via written materials, Human Rights Watch directly addressed high-level government officials and representatives of relevant regional and international bodies. 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 a major focus of the Americas division's energies during 2002. 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. Human Rights Watch conducted two research missions to Colombia. During the first mission, researchers collected the testimonies of former child soldiers, and held meetings with NGOs and others with expertise relevant to the issue. The second visit gathered material for a report on the record of Colombia's attorney general's office, in particular investigations of alleged human rights abuses by high-ranking military officers and paramilitary leaders. The resulting report, *A Wrong Turn: The Record of the Colombian Attorney General's Office*, found that Attorney General Luis Camilo Osorio had undermined key investigations and contributed to a climate of fear within the Human Rights Unit. A Human Rights Watch delegation released the report at a press conference in Bogotá on November 8, after meeting with the Colombian president, the attorney general, and others.

In Guatemala, the Women's Rights Division released a report in February documenting persistent sex discrimination and abuse in Guatemala's largest female-dominated labor sectors—export processing plants and domestic labor. The Americas division conducted an advocacy mission in August to press the government to take more aggressive steps to protect human rights defenders, who had been subject to numerous acts of intimidation during the course of the year. It also pressed for progress on judicial cases involving egregious human rights abuses committed during Guatemala's civil war, which ended in 1996.

In Ecuador, the Americas division released a report in April documenting harmful child labor and obstacles to unionizing in that country's banana sector. After the release, Human Rights Watch pressed the government to enforce child labor laws while urging the banana industry to respect those laws. In July, the banana industry signed an agreement to eliminate illegal child labor in the sector within roughly one year, and in October, the government created a new System of Child Labor Inspection and Monitoring. Human Rights Watch applauded these initiatives, while expressing serious concerns about their implementation. Human Rights Watch also pushed for greater respect for workers' right to freedom of association

and was disappointed by the banana industry's lack of response to these concerns. As a condition for receiving enhanced tariff benefits under the U.S. Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA), the government of Ecuador committed to take steps to improve respect for workers' right to organize, but the commitment was expressed only in vague and general terms.

Concerned about the racist treatment of Haitian immigrants and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic, a Human Rights Watch delegation traveled to Santo Domingo in April to release a new report on the topic. The report described how Dominicans of Haitian descent are systematically denied Dominican citizenship, despite the Dominican constitution's conferral of citizenship to persons born on Dominican soil. As a result, the report explained, many Dominicans of Haitian descent live a precarious existence, perpetually at risk of expulsion from their own country. The report also documented the myriad due process violations that "Haitian-looking" people are subject to during deportations. In a meeting with Dominican President Hipólito Mejía, the Human Rights Watch delegation recommended a number of reforms to help prevent future abuses.

In Chile, Human Rights Watch continued to press the government to move forward with legal reforms aimed at scrapping the country's repressive laws on "insult to authority" (known as *desacato*), which place journalists and others at risk of incarceration when commenting on governmental policies. The Americas division obtained commitments to make the issue a top legislative priority from both Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and the chair of a congressional committee due to initiate the debate on a reform law.

ARGENTINA

Argentina was gripped in 2002 by the worst economic, political, and social crisis in its recent history. Half the population was living below the poverty line, according to government statistics, and unemployment stood at 22 percent. Argentines of all social classes took to the streets to protest when the government blocked the withdrawal of bank deposits. Social unrest and crime escalated.

Under these very difficult conditions, the human rights situation deteriorated on most fronts. Police violence, already a serious problem, continued unchecked. Journalists covering public protests suffered numerous attacks and threats, even as the press remained vigorous and independent. Although confidence in the judiciary was low, a few judges took positive steps to pursue investigations of the grave and systematic human rights violations committed during the country's period of military rule.