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THE CRISIS IN BUENAVENTURA

Disappearances, Dismemberment, and Displacement
in Colombia's Main Pacific Port

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Colombia has the second largest population of internally displaced people in the world. In no other municipality in Colombia is forced displacement happening on a greater scale today than in Buenaventura, a largely Afro-Colombian port on the country's Pacific coast. In 2013, violence drove over 13,000 people from their homes in Buenaventura, more than in any other municipality in the country.

Human Rights Watch visited Buenaventura in November 2013 to investigate what was causing such massive displacement. We found a city where entire neighborhoods were dominated by successor groups to the paramilitaries (formally demobilized a decade ago) — known as the Urabeños and the Empresa — who routinely engage in horrific acts of violence against anyone who defies their will.

The Crisis in Buenaventura describes how the successor groups have “disappeared” scores—and possibly hundreds—of Buenaventura residents over the past several years. They dismember people and dump the body parts in the sea or bury them in hidden graves, according to residents and officials. In several neighborhoods, residents report the existence of *casas de pique*—or “chop-up houses”—where the groups dismember their victims alive.

Authorities have consistently failed to take the necessary measures to protect residents from violence by successor groups and ensure justice for the abuses against them. People living in parts of the city where the groups are strong said the police presence in their neighborhoods is scarce. Prosecutors have not obtained a single conviction in any of their investigations into disappearances and cases of forced displacement in Buenaventura.

The Crisis in Buenaventura outlines basic steps the government should take to curb the abuses against Buenaventura’s population. These include creating a special team of prosecutors to investigate disappearances in the city and ensuring the police maintain an uninterrupted presence in the neighborhoods where successor groups are most active.



Boys observe a crime scene at the José Hilario López market in Buenaventura. November 2013.

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