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## Americas: September 11 Led to Freeze in U.S. Refugee Admissions; Displacement Continued Unabated in Colombia

Washington, D.C.—Following the September 11 attacks on the United States, the United States, Canada, and Mexico intensified efforts to harmonize their procedures on access to immigration and asylum. They began discussions on a proposed “North American Security Perimeter.” All three countries took new measures—or intensified existing methods—to turn away undocumented migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees.

After the September terrorist attacks, Mexico detained a number of immigrants from the Middle East. Mexico detained approximately 85 percent

of asylum seekers who filed applications in 2001, up from 60 percent from 2000, and deported at least 1,000 migrants to Guatemala after determining that they had transited through Guatemala. The United States finances the deportation of nearly all extra-regional migrants from Guatemala in an attempt to prevent them from reaching the U.S. border.

Central America continued to be a popular route for migrants from areas outside the region seeking to reach the United States. In Guatemala, extensive border and interior enforcement by immigration agents trained by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was aimed at stopping smugglers. However, only undocumented migrants—and no smugglers or traffickers—were arrested or deported.

In the Caribbean, more Haitian asylum seekers and migrants left their country due to increasing violence. Governments throughout the region interdicted thousands of Haitians and returned them to Haiti. Haitians applied for asylum in increasing numbers in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Cuba, and other countries.

The United States dramatically changed its policy regarding Haitian asylum seekers in December. The INS began detaining Haitian asylum seekers as a matter of policy—even after establishing that the asylum seekers had a “credible fear” of persecution. Before December, the Miami INS office routinely released asylum seekers who passed their credible fear interviews—including 96 percent of the asylum seekers from Haiti.

In South America, conflict in Colombia between paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the armed forces intensified in 2001. Violence associated with the conflict left 3,700 civilians dead and forced more than 342,000 people to become newly displaced during the year in 2001. Another 3,041 people (eight per day) were kidnapped during the year. More than 70 percent of all reported kidnappings in the world in 2001 were in Colombia.

Altogether, some 2.45 million Colombians were internally displaced—the world’s second largest internally displaced population—and 23,200 others were refugees and asylum seekers in other countries at the end of 2001.

In February, President Andres Pastrana raised hopes for peace when he met with the leader of the nation’s largest guerrilla group. However, the visit did not yield concrete results, and at year’s end the peace process appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

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The *World Refugee Survey 2002* contains reports on refugee situations in 15 countries in the Americas. The 290-page annual report reviews refugee conditions and government policies affecting refugees and displaced persons in 133 countries worldwide.

*The U.S. Committee for Refugees is a nonprofit humanitarian organization that works for the protection and assistance of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons around the world.*

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