ELN and Paramilitary Fighting Displaces Hundreds of Colombians

07/03/2017



As the FARC begins to disarm, other paramilitary groups continue to fuel violence across the country.

Hundreds of Colombians were displaced in the country's northwest over the weekend as fighting erupted between members of the National Liberation Army, ELN, and Colombia's paramilitary group, Gaitanistas Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AGC, commonly known as "Los Urabeños."

RELATED: Colombia Pardons First FARC Troops Under Amnesty Law

According to reports, a group of around 200 "Urabeños" attempted to push out ELN forces from the Baudo region in the northwestern Choco province. They arrived in the Peña Azul community on Saturday by boat and started firing indiscriminately into the community while screaming that they had come to kill ELN troops.

Over 300 people were displaced by the fighting, including children and elderly, and fled north to Pie de Pato, according to AFP.

While it was unclear if there were any civilian casualties or injuries from the fighting, the ombudsman of the Choco department, Luis Enrique Murillo, warned that there were still eight families from Peña Azul who could not leave the community and whose location remained unknown.The region has been known as a stronghold of Colombia's second-largest rebel army,

the ELN, who have recently been seeking a peace deal with the Colombian government similar to the one reached with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, the country's biggest rebel group.

"Los Urabeños" evolved from the officially disbanded "United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," or AUC, a right-wing group that supposedly demobilized between 2003 and 2006 during the government of former President Alvaro Uribe.

RELATED: Indigenous Bari Campesinos Face Colombia Paramilitary Violence

While peace between the FARC and the government was reached in November and the rebel group continues to demobilize, other paramilitary groups continue to operate throughout the country with deadly consequences.

The current government under Juan Manuel Santos has claimed that paramilitary groups do not exist and have demobilized. Yet paramilitary groups continue to wreak havoc in the vacuums created by the FARC, leaving rural leaders and human rights defenders vulnerable, partially with the lack of state protection.