

Men's quarrel for a no man's land

This investigation documents the relationship between violence and land ownership in an enormous and isolated region in the east of Colombia. First, this special report displays an unprecedented investigation on the history of war in Vichada, one of the biggest departments in the country, since the early 80s to nowadays, explaining which illegal groups arrived to this territory and their motivations: political persecution, cocaine trafficking and land ownership.

The second part of the special report deeply analyzes how Cargill, a multinational corporation, came to own a huge amount of land in the region. The media outlet Rutas del Conflicto (Routes of Conflict) found that family members of the former partners of Victor Carranza, head of the emerald market in the country, got their hands on free land that was destined to poor farmers. Carranza had been accused several times of creating and supporting paramilitary groups before his death. In 2012, this land was sold by the former partners of Carranza to Cargill for more than US\$6 million. There is evidence that this case is just one of several in the region, in which emerald businessmen, drug traffickers and paramilitary leaders have used a similar strategy to obtain benefits from the farms that, supposedly, should just be given to poor farmers.

Additionally, this investigation documents how rich, Colombian businessmen paid low prices for more than 15 thousand hectares to underprivileged farmers who suffered more than 20 years of paramilitary and guerrilla violence, including several massacres and hundreds of murders. These farmers denounce that they sold their properties because of the effects of the armed conflict. Some farms were bought by the businessmen for prices between US \$30,000 and US \$50,000, and in about 18 months, they sold these properties to Cargill for prices between US \$300,000 and US \$850.000.

There is evidence to prove that there are numerous cases in this region that involve more national and international companies buying land in similar situations.

-Oscar Parra Castellanos