

Report

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

4676 Admiralty Way, Suite 330
Marina Del Rey, CA, 90292-6601

Threat assessment – ICANN Cartagena Meeting 2010



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Introduction

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a not-for-profit public benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the internet secure, stable and interoperable. ICANN regularly holds meetings around the world, open to participation by local and international attendees. Recent venues for such meetings include: Nairobi (Kenya – March 2010), Seoul (South Korea – October 2009), Sydney (Australia – June 2009), and Mexico City (Mexico – March 2009). In December 2010, ICANN plans to hold a meeting in Latin America. This report provides a detailed assessment of key security threats that ICANN should consider if that meeting is held in Cartagena, Colombia.

Executive summary

Cartagena

- The security situation in Cartagena is generally better than much of the rest of Colombia. The city has historically avoided the worst effects of the country's long-running internal armed conflict. Control Risks does not believe that ICANN's field of work means that its overall threat profile in Cartagena is elevated. Foreign delegates may be targeted on account of perceived wealth, but the risk is no higher than for tourists visiting the city.
- Leftist guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) do not have an active combat presence in the city or in its immediate surroundings. The threat of a major terrorist attack in Cartagena perpetrated by such groups is very low.
- Widespread social or politically-related unrest is rare in Cartagena. The country is facing an election year in 2010, with legislative polls held in early March and the presidential race scheduled for May 30. Control Risks does not expect the fall-out from these elections to result in lingering political tensions; Colombia has a strong democratic tradition and electoral violence is relatively rare.
- Petty, opportunistic street crime such as pickpocketing and mugging is the main security risk to ICANN personnel or delegates. Incidents are more prevalent after dark and can affect areas that personnel or delegates may frequent, such as Cartagena's historic walled city and Bocagrande, where the hotels that ICANN has proposed are located.
- Violent crime is only occasionally a serious security threat for foreign visitors to Cartagena. Crime rates compare favorably with most of Colombia's other main cities, and most serious incidents take place in neighborhoods that ICANN personnel or delegates should have little reason to visit.
- Control Risks believes that crime is not a major problem in the area immediately around ICANN's proposed conference centre, particularly during the day. The center is located next to the walled city and close to piers from where boats to nearby islands depart, meaning that it attracts many tourists. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that crime rates are higher, particularly at night, in the district of Getsemaní, which is also next to the conference centre but on the other side from the historic center.
- The security forces are professional and largely reliable. Given Cartagena's importance as a tourism destination, there is often a visible police presence in the city. However, there are few English-speaking officers.
- Travel to and from the conference center by shuttle bus should not pose a significant risk for delegates. The route taken by the shuttle would not pass through areas where there are high levels of violent crime, and crime figures from early 2009 suggest that carjacking takes place extremely rarely.

Cartagena

Terrorism threat overview

The security situation in Cartagena is generally better than in much of the rest of Colombia. In particular, the city has historically avoided the worst effects of the country's long-running internal armed conflict. This is partly a result of there being a historic walled city, a major tourist attraction, which has meant that successive governments have had an added incentive to install increased security in and around the city. Even during the worst days of the conflict, when few foreign travelers visited Colombia, Cartagena was regarded as an exception to the rule and continued to attract a steady flow of tourists.

Its security from terrorist attacks is also a result of the city's geography. Although leftist guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and – to a far lesser extent – the National Liberation Army (ELN) had an active combat presence throughout the country in the 1990s and early 2000s, their influence in places like Cartagena and much of the rest of the Caribbean coastal region was limited by right-wing paramilitary groups under the umbrella of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). While the paramilitaries were equally guilty of serious human rights abuses and heavily involved in the illegal drugs trade, the AUC nonetheless generally eschewed the major terrorist-style bombings typical of the FARC in the past.

Government figures would appear to bear out this analysis. In recent years, no more than five confrontations between the security forces and guerrilla groups have occurred near Cartagena. Moreover, military successes against the FARC during the course of President Álvaro Uribe's eight years in office, scheduled to end in May, have pushed the group further and further back towards its traditional strongholds including the Arauca department in the north-east, southern departments such as Cauca, Huila and Putumayo, and areas along the border with Venezuela. The already low terrorist threat to Cartagena is diminishing further.

Control Risks believes that it is far too early to forecast the imminent demise of the FARC. Over the last six-to-nine months, the group has shown signs that it may have survived the worst of the government's onslaught – 2008 was the FARC's nadir, with the deaths of its two main leaders and the rescue of its most high-profile political hostage, former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt. The guerrillas certainly do not have the same strength as before – most current estimates suggest the FARC has around 11,000 men and women under arms, down from 20,000 previously – but they remain capable of inflicting significant damage, particularly to the military and key energy infrastructure. Their heavy involvement in the drug trade also gives them the resources to carry on the fight for years to come.

However, the FARC has undergone something of a strategic shift in recent years. Indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets seem increasingly to be a thing of the past. Such tactics outraged and alienated large swathes of public opinion, while also undermining the credibility of the group's efforts to be considered a legitimate political player in Colombia. An overall peace deal between the government and the FARC remains a distant prospect, but the threat of a terrorist attack by the group in Cartagena is certainly even lower as a result of this shift.

Political and socioeconomic threat overview

Neither politically related violence nor broader social unrest have much of a recent history in Cartagena, or in Colombia as a whole. The long-running internal armed conflict has created something of an aversion among wider society to overt displays of political or social tensions. Trade unions and civil society organizations gain little traction with large sectors of the population because of an automatic, and largely unjustified, association that many people make regarding such groups' potential links to the FARC. Their ability to call for major protests is therefore limited, particularly in locations such as Cartagena, which enjoys relative prosperity through its tourism and industrial activities, and which has not been a victim of the social strife

surrounding the armed conflict. Any unrest that does arise tends to be related to extremely localized issues and is easily managed by the security forces.

Control Risks does not expect this situation to deteriorate as a result of political developments in 2010, specifically the national legislative elections that took place in early March, and the presidential election scheduled for May. Perhaps surprisingly given the long-running armed conflict, democratic traditions in Colombia are among the strongest in Latin America, with only one short-lived military irruption into civilian politics since the 1950s. Although voter intimidation and electoral fraud are rife in some rural areas, elections are generally considered free and fair, limiting the potential for losing candidates and parties to increase tensions and stoke violence by crying foul over the results.

Moreover, Colombian politics is heavily consensus-based. Although personal differences between leading political figures often come to the surface, there are few real underlying differences in ideology between the main political parties. Again, this is heavily influenced by the impact of the armed conflict: parties on the left have to moderate their image to gain support because otherwise they would be easily tied to the FARC, irrespective of whether those links actually exist. As a consequence, election campaigns and the subsequent results lack the potency to generate real divisions across the country. This scenario is particularly true of the May presidential election: almost all of the seven main candidates are campaigning on a platform of broad continuity with Uribe's largely successful policies.

Crime threats overview

Common crime

ICANN personnel or delegates face a far higher risk of falling victim to petty street crime, such as pick pocketing, bag-snatching and mugging, than violent crime. This risk is present even in areas that personnel or delegates are likely to visit such as the walled city and Bocagrande, where the hotels that ICANN has proposed are located, particularly after nightfall. Although the police presence in such areas is strong, the comparative wealth of foreigners against much of the local population makes them a prominent target for such types of crime. Nonetheless, in this respect, figures for 2009 are encouraging: Cartagena saw a 42% drop in such incidents in the first six months of the year compared with 2008. Moreover, the adoption of basic security measures will further help to reduce the risk of ICANN personnel or delegates falling victim to such crime. Most visits to the tourist areas of Cartagena pass without incident.

Control Risks does not believe that the location of the suggested convention center in Cartagena places ICANN personnel or delegates at a higher risk of falling victim to crime. The center is adjacent to the walled city and the main pier that tourist boats depart from, ensuring that it receives a steady flow of visitors, particularly during the day, and is well policed. There is a direct pedestrian route between the convention center and the walled city. On a more precautionary note, the more edgy neighborhood of Getsemaní lies directly opposite the most tourist-frequented part of the walled city (*El Centro*), and the convention center lies between the two. Although this area is largely safe to visit during the day, Control Risks recommends that ICANN personnel and delegates take more precautions if visiting at night; in particular, delegates should take taxis to travel even short distances to reduce the risk of falling victim to opportunistic crime. Several poorer neighborhoods with higher crime rates also lie to the east of the convention center and the walled city. However, as the hotels proposed by ICANN are in Bocagrande, at the opposite end of the city from these neighborhoods, there should be little reason to go to these areas.

The security forces in Cartagena are professional and largely reliable, but may not always be efficient. Given the city's importance as a tourist destination, there is often a visible police presence, particularly in heavily visited areas such as Bocagrande and the walled city. ICANN personnel or delegates should report crimes in the first instance to the Tourist Police (identified by green uniforms with white armbands), who patrol those two key areas. Alternatively, they

should contact a local Immediate Attention Centre (CAI), the police stations of the National Police.

Travel around Cartagena, including to and from the airport, and between hotels and the convention centre, is safe, whether in shuttle buses provided by the hotels or in licensed taxis. There has been only one incident of vehicle hijack recorded in the city since 2008. Moreover, travel between these destinations would not entail passing through any areas that would be considered to have high security risks. Control Risks does not believe that ICANN's field of work means that its overall threat profile in Cartagena would be higher than the normal risks faced by foreign visitors to the city.

Violent crime

Cartagena enjoys a mostly deserved reputation as one of the safer destinations for foreign travelers in Colombia. Certainly, violent crime rarely affects foreign visitors to the city. ICANN's conference, which would take place just outside the walls of the historic old town, and its proposed hotels are all in lower-crime neighborhoods. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that Cartagena is far from free of crime: outside of the main tourist areas, crime rates are much higher.

Statistically, as far as violent crime such as murder and kidnapping is concerned, Cartagena is comparable to the six other biggest cities in Colombia. In the first six months of 2009, the murder rate stood at 25.5 murders per 100,000 inhabitants; only the capital Bogotá, of the six major cities, had a lower rate, at 17.9 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. The Cartagena figure did, however, represent a 21% increase on the same period in 2008. Nonetheless, violent crime against foreign visitors to the city is extremely rare; most such incidents take place in low-income neighborhoods that ICANN delegates will have little reason to visit.

Kidnapping

While 23 kidnaps were recorded in Bogotá in the first half of 2009, only two cases were recorded in Cartagena. Although the overall number of kidnaps in the country remains comparatively high, the total has been in decline for several years, and cases involving foreign personnel or travelers are increasingly rare. Control Risks believes that the risk of foreigners being kidnapped remains highest in isolated rural areas, where guerrilla groups continue to operate and use kidnapping as a potential source of revenue through ransom payments or as a political bargaining tool. Foreign travelers to Cartagena do not face the same threat of kidnapping.

No official statistics are available for express kidnapping, but anecdotal evidence suggests that Cartagena does not suffer seriously from this problem, particularly regarding foreign visitors. Nonetheless, ICANN personnel and delegates are recommended to ensure that they always travel in official taxis or transport provided by the convention center or hotels to reduce the risk of falling victim to unscrupulous or illegitimate taxi drivers.

Security recommendations

The Cartagena Conference Center is located within the 'old city', which is the main tourist part of Cartagena. The majority of hotels used for conferences are within the walls of the old city and in the peninsula neighborhoods of Bocagrande and El Laguito.

General event and transport security recommendations

- The international airport is close by to this zone of main activity – only a 10 minute taxi ride – however the taxi situation is less organized than in Bogota. The taxi rank is not particularly well managed and organized transport vendors do not have a presence in the arrivals hall, however Control Risks is not aware of a particular problem with

passengers being mugged or experiencing other criminal activity on a regular basis during taxi journeys from the airport or elsewhere. Scams exist as in any other major tourist area.

- In an ideal situation the transport of incoming delegates would be managed centrally from a management and efficiency perspective more than for any other reason. This may be achieved through the provision of a privately-organized shuttle minibus service for a 24-48 hour window as delegates arrive, or potentially through a number of the hotels at which delegates are expected to stay. A transport coordinator could be placed in the arrivals hall to manage this process.
- Control Risks recommends that incoming groups of executives are greeted by select security and/or logistic staff inside the airport, or immediately at the exit gate. Incoming executives should be aware of who is meeting them at the airport (photos, names and cell phone numbers should be provided prior to the event).
- Greeting staff should *only* display initials of incoming executives if both parties are not familiar with one another (the above protocol should eliminate this requirement). All executives should be escorted to a waiting vehicle at the closest point near the airport exit gate.
- Protocols for the use of taxis (should travelers choose this option) should be disseminated.
- Attendees should ensure that 'time windows' are arranged and adhered to, particularly at night. This makes controlling people's movements easier. Guides of where to go and where not to go would also help avoid unnecessary security incidents for the attendees.
- Basic contingency plans should also be arranged (i.e. emergency contact numbers should be available to all personnel).
- All travelers should avoid walking the streets alone outside the walled city at night and should restrict their movements to within tourist areas where visible state security resources (i.e. police and army) are located.
- Cartagena has many narrow streets with no opportunities for escape routes, this becomes to the criminal's advantage late at night.
- As a general rule, all travelers should not walk the streets after 2300hrs, since state security resources maintain a low presence and criminal entities may take advantage of this.
- All travelers should avoid bars which have public touts (or "spruikers") standing outside encouraging them to enter. Many of these bars attract high levels of local prostitutes, some who intend to rob tourists by drugging them in the bar or in their hotel rooms.
- It is no known whether an offer of support has been offered by the local police department. While relatively reliable, and particularly in the case of events such as the one ICANN is planning, Control Risks believes that this area of support is best analyzed in more detail as plans develop further.

Security recommendations for personnel

- When traveling to and from the conference, and on the street, attendees should not take any more valuables than are required.

- Wallets should be 'sanitized' in order to provide little incentive for criminals in case of an incident. Sanitization means removing any information which may allow somebody to assess your identity, status and possible wealth.
- Attendees should keep personal valuables to a minimum when traveling on the street. Only take copies of personal identification.
- Although violent street robberies are rare inside the old city and in Bocagrande, they *do* occur. In the case of a robbery, do not resist. Try to act calmly and deliberately. Do what you are told.
- Avoid aggressive eye contact and try to obey all reasonable instructions (or orders).
- If you are being abducted, do not resist. You are worth more to a criminal entity alive than dead but the criminal has little to lose if there is a struggle. Most victims of violent crime in Colombia are killed resisting to armed criminals.
- Play down your importance and hence your value.
- Do not antagonize the offenders by arguing with them.
- Fight for your life, but not your possessions.