



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Indigenous Colombians nonviolently dismantle military base and capture guerrilla fighters, 2012

8 July

2012

to: 18 July

2012

**Country:** Colombia

**Location City/State/Province:** Toribío

**Goals:**

To remove all armed forces from Nasa indigenous territory.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 032. Taunting officials › Booed the President.
- 168. Nonviolent raids

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 161. Nonviolent harassment
- 168. Nonviolent raids › Demonstrators forced guerrillas to abandon their road blocks.
- 168. Nonviolent raids › Demonstrators took over and dismantled military base.

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 168. Nonviolent raids › Demonstrators detained and later tried guerrilla fighters.
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Human Rights  
National/Ethnic Identity  
Peace

**Group characterization:**

- Indigenous Nasa

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN)

**Partners:**

Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC)

**External allies:**

Witness for Peace

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Nasa Indians

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 1.5 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

The Colombian Military and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Campaigners sentenced four captured rebels to lashings

**Repressive Violence:**

The military forcibly took back their base using tear gas, killing one member of the Nasa guard, and two over the course of the campaign. FARC assassinated ACIN leaders the following month.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

1 point out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

1 point out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The Government and FARC began peace talks months after this campaign, and are ongoing as of April 2013.

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The Colombian military and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas have been at war since 1964. Colombian citizens, especially indigenous, are often caught in the crossfire between the two armies. Both the government and FARC have forced children to fight for them.

In the 1980s indigenous Nasa found violent self-defense counterproductive. Realizing in war-torn Colombia that violence led to more violence, the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN) created the Nasa Guard, a non-violent army that by 2001 had 5,000-6,000 members, to defend themselves. Members of the Nasa Guard wore green bandanas and carried traditional command sticks that symbolize authority but were not used as weapons. The non-violent forces saved many lives by protecting and escorting villagers under attack, and rescued members taken hostage by FARC.

On 8 July 2012, a particularly violent series of battles between FARC and the government forces killed a boy and wounded fifteen in the small town of Toribío, displacing 2,800 civilians throughout Cauca. In response, ACIN published an open letter demanding that all government and guerrilla soldiers leave the territory: “We declare ourselves in permanent resistance until all armed groups and armies leave our homelands... we are not going to leave; those who need to leave are the legal and illegal armed groups who continue to sow death in our territory.”

ACIN argued that the Colombian army endangered them rather than protected them, and that the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples gave them the right to govern their own lands.

On 11 July, the Nasa Guard began to confront the armed forces of both sides removing police trenches from the urban center of Cauca and disassembling FARC missiles. Four hundred Nasa Guard members occupied an army encampment, which was protecting privately owned cell phone towers on the sacred indigenous site El Berlin outside of Toribío.

The president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, visited Toribío to deliver a speech reassuring the local population of the army's control over the region. Contrary to the President's assurance, gunfire of FARC guerrillas shooting at army helicopters could be heard in the background of his television broadcast, and members of the press were stopped at FARC road blocks three miles from where Santos spoke on the way to the event. The crowd booed the President when he announced that he would maintain the presence of armed government forces in the region.

The Nasa Guard escorted villagers to safety away from battles between government forces and FARC, and also destroyed FARC encampments. Ignoring the warnings of the military, 200 indigenous guard members disarmed and salvaged a downed government warplane.

On 14 July, ACIN declared that northern Cauca was in a humanitarian crisis with 118 human rights violations committed. Fifty-four people had died in conflict between 1 January and 30 June 2012 in the region.

On 17 July, 200 Nasa Guard approached the government army's base outside of Toribío and began to dismantle it. They toppled sandbag barriers, filled in foxholes, and tore down barracks. They drove 100 soldiers from the base. Pictures of the Nasa Guard taking down the base and carrying soldiers away from their posts made international news. No one was injured in the non-violent raid.

A government military officer told a reporter after the raid said that he could not use force against the unarmed community. “We

are here to protect them,” he said, “what can we do?”

The Nasa Guard also went on the offensive against FARC, shouting guerrillas at roadblocks back into the jungle and capturing five mortars.

The next day, on 18 July, the government's riot police removed the Nasa Guard from the army base with tear gas, killing one and injuring thirty.

The Nasa Guard captured four FARC fighters as the guerrillas tried to shoot down a government helicopter with a mortar in the hills around Toribío and confiscated their weapons. The men were from the local community. The Nasa guard held a trial of the guerrillas in accordance to the national constitution's rules. The three adults were sentenced to thirty lashes and the 16 year-old to ten, which was then reduced to five. Nasa elders then counseled the men to return the civilian life and released them to their families.

Several months later, the government entered into peace talks with FARC. However, these talks are ongoing and have not yet led to the removal of armies from Nasa territory.

After the campaign public opinion in Colombia was against the Nasa. Only 23% of Colombians polled by the *Semana* magazine approved of them. The Colombian media perpetuated racist stereotypes and accused the Nasa of violence. The Government accused the Nasa of being aligned with the FARC.

ACIN continues to struggle to maintain their indigenous heritage.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The Nasa Guard conducted many hostage rescue campaigns from FARC and escorted villagers to safety from battle many times from when it was founded in 2001 until this campaign (1). Other indigenous groups in Colombia have formed similar organizations to the Nasa Guard for self defense. (2)

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**Additional Notes:**

Here is a link to ACIN's website (in spanish): [www.nasaacin.org](http://www.nasaacin.org).

From August 7 Miami Herald:

"The guard's power caught national attention in 2004 when Vitonas and other leaders were kidnapped by the FARC. About 400 members of the guard gave chase. Acosta, who was part of the rescue party, remembers sleeping against trees and going hungry as they punched deep into the jungle. Soldiers made fun of them for venturing into FARC territory armed with nothing but sticks.

"But eventually, about 150 guard members made it to the guerrilla encampment and freed the hostages. They pulled it off in less than 20 days and nobody was hurt — noteworthy in Colombia, where FARC hostages have been held for more than 13 years and rescue efforts often involve casualties."

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Jonathan White, 20/04/2013

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