

SUMMARY

The High Council for Reintegration (ACR) is a government entity in Colombia responsible for designing, implementing and evaluating state policy on social and economic reintegration of armed individuals or groups outside the law to demobilize voluntarily. In 2007, FTI Consulting was retained by the ACR to develop a communications strategy to counteract misinformation about the organization and a poor reputation about the reintegration policy and to protect the ACR against continuous attacks by the national press.

SITUATION

In August 2002, the Colombian government began implementing the Democratic Defense and Security Policy, which aimed to restore and strengthen the institutional and public order to guarantee the exercise of fundamental rights of all citizens in Colombia.

The policy seeks to dismantle all illegal armed groups through collective and individual demobilization. In the case of collective demobilization, a group could enter into dialogue and demobilization only once. The individual demobilizations were an option available to individuals who chose to leave their groups and enter the demobilization process unless they had arrest warrants for crimes against international humanitarian law.

From August 2002 through March 2008, 46,913 people of different illegal armed groups expressed their willingness to demobilize. Most of these people belonged to the AUC (paramilitary groups), which reached 31,671 men from 2003 through 2006. This demanded from the national government a solid program that received former combatants and brought them back to society.

In September 2006, President Álvaro Uribe created the ACR, within the Office of the President, to coordinate reintegration efforts of the government and appointed Frank Pearl González as High Commissioner for Reintegration. Due to the complex social and public order in the country, the ACR was exposed to a series of negative situations and undermined the organization's credibility and, to some extent, the effectiveness of its work. The press was relentless in its attacks on the organization, and, due to a lack of opinion leaders in support of the program's goals, a strong political struggle prevailed between government and state officials.

STRATEGY

FTI Consulting designed a communications strategy to address the crisis with key audiences, positioning the ACR as a long-term policy aimed at constructing autonomous citizens, a critical component for peace in Colombia.

From 2007 to 2010, the Strategic Communications team created dialogue with all relevant audiences, especially regional representatives, to offer solutions and set boundaries that helped clarify expectations. FTI Consulting created clear messaging that would position the ACR as a long-term solution that would provide consistent, efficient and transparent goals to key stakeholders. Among key stakeholders, FTI Consulting targeted the demobilized individuals who did not have privileges but supported the program's efforts as a vulnerable population. Serving individuals and communities, FTI Consulting began to build an identity for the ACR that would establish the organization as a source of information for the media. FTI Consulting trained spokespersons to deliver the unified message that was shared with leading national and regional directors, editors, journalists and columnists.

Through tactics such as workshops and breakfast and travel briefings, FTI Consulting helped the ACR properly inform reporters about the program's process, the role of the Senior Advisor and status of the reintegration policy. By generating constant and proactive communications, the ACR became the first source of information, and the media began to seek Senior Advisors as the main spokespersons for critical program updates.

FTI Consulting also worked to share the consistent program messaging with representatives from the international community such as the European Union to create allies and third-party validators in organizations.

RESULTS

Due to the FTI Consulting team's work on the assignment, the media, public opinion leaders, and government and state officials now view the ACR as a program essential for building peace in Colombia. The communications program created a direct link to the demobilized individuals and managed to build a belonging with local communities and the greater public. Currently, participants believe in the program's process and value the support they received from the government.

By the conclusion of the campaign, FTI Consulting secured third-party validators to endorse the process, and public opinion gained confidence in the program. By the end of President Uribe's term, the ACR had become one of the most important public institutions in the country.

FTI Consulting worked closely with the Senior Advisor and management team of the ACR to address the crisis and position the organization's progress and results of the reintegration policy that had been achieved from 2007 to 2010 with journalists and public opinion leaders.

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About FTI Consulting

FTI Consulting, Inc. is a global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organizations protect and enhance enterprise value in an increasingly complex legal, regulatory and economic environment. With more than 3,700 employees located in 22 countries, FTI Consulting professionals work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges in areas such as investigations, litigation, mergers and acquisitions, regulatory issues, reputation management and restructuring. The company generated \$1.4 billion in revenues during fiscal year 2010. More information can be found at www.fticonsulting.com.