

Colombia: Security of Human Rights Defenders and Communities

The work of human rights defenders represents a cornerstone for democracy and the promotion of an equitable and sustainable peace.¹

Being a human rights defender (HRD) in Colombia is a dangerous, often deadly job. Despite positive progress in Peace Talks between the Colombian Government and the left wing guerrilla group the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP, as well as, Peace Talks officially starting with the second largest guerrilla group, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia have been increasing. **This violence spiked between 15 February and 15 March 2016 when 13 HRDs were killed. In addition to this 15 people were killed during the same period in acts of ‘social cleansing’, a strategy used for controlling communities.²**

According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) in Bogota, **729 HRDs were killed in Colombia between 1994 and 2015 and there is near total impunity for these crimes.³** Whilst this equates to an average of 33 killings per year, since the start of the peace process in October 2012, HRDs have been killed in consistently higher numbers. For example in 2015, 63 HRDs were killed and 682 attacked (an increase of 9 per cent on 2014)⁴, including 310 women.⁵ In a public statement in March 2016, the European Union (EU) expressed specific concern for the situation of HRDs in Colombia, highlighting the fundamental role they carry out in democratic societies. HRDs are essential for promoting democracy and building-peace with social justice.

According to the UN OHCHR, attacks and killings of defenders focus principally on four areas:⁶

- Conflicts over land, particularly Afro-descendant and indigenous territories, in the context of opposition to illegal and legal mining and actions to protect their territories
- Defenders demanding justice for the victims: victims’ representatives are targeted, especially those that litigate human rights violations by State actors. Surveillance and information theft against HRDs coincide with key moments in criminal proceedings.
- Social and political leadership
- Peace activists – people and organisations that participated in victims’ dialogues in Havana

The key issue for the security of HRDs is the lack of preventive measures, extreme levels of impunity encountered in the crimes perpetrated

against them mean that there is no real deterrence. Protection measures are mistakenly seen by the State as the first line of defence rather than a response to the failure of prevention. The dangers faced by HRDs in Colombia are related in no small part to the State’s failure to address the issue of impunity for these crimes. In 2015 in spite of the continued increase in attacks against defenders there was only one conviction. This lack of sentencing of those responsible is in direct contrast to the rapid action taken by the State against HRDs.⁷

Criminalisation of HRDs by the State

There were six investigations opened in 2015 against human rights defenders by the Counter-Terrorism Directorate in the Attorney General’s Office, according to the OHCHR these cases were based on inadmissible military intelligence or informants. ‘The damage caused by the National Counter-Terrorism Directorate and military intelligence when they persecute HRDs based only on their legitimate work cannot be underestimated, especially in the context of the peace process.’⁸

David Ravelo renowned human rights defender has been in prison for over 5 years, after a prosecution marred by irregularities. National and international organisations have repeatedly expressed their concern regarding the case.

Violence increases against HRDs in direct contrast to the nation-wide declining trend

The increase in violence against HRDs is in direct contrast to the declining trend of conflict violence for example, in 1999 the annual per capita homicide rates was 62 per 100,000 people by 2014 it had declined to 27 per 100,000 people. The annual number of kidnappings decreased from over 3,000 in 1999 to less than 300 in 2014. Whereas the number of defenders killed in 2010 (before the Peace Talks started in 2012) was 32 in 2015 they numbered 63 (13 per cent increase on 2014). According to the UN OHCHR, from August 2015 Colombia experienced the least intense offensive actions in 50 years of armed conflict. The decline in conflict violence has been due to the peace dialogues, actions such as the FARC’s unilateral ceasefire, and the State’s de-escalation of offensive operations against the FARC.

¹ Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Addendum, Situation of human rights in Colombia, 15 March 2016. Advanced unedited version.

² José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective, Ante ola de asesinatos, exigimos creación de Comisión de Alto Nivel de Garantías de No Repetición, 16 March 2016

³ ONU, En 2015, se superó el promedio de homicidios de Defensores registrado en los últimos 20 años, November 2015

⁴ Programa Somos Defensores, El Cambio, 2015 Annual Report, last accessed on 26 April 2016

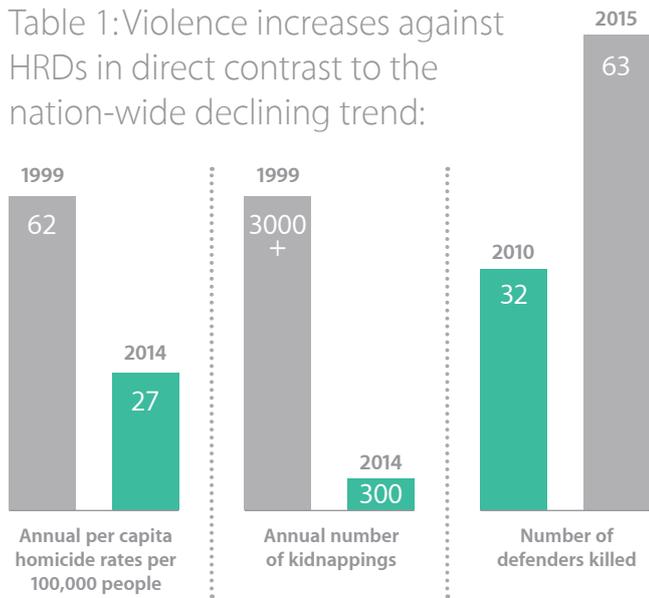
⁵ Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Addendum, Situation of human rights in Colombia, 15 March 2016. Advanced unedited version.

⁶ Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Addendum, Situation of human rights in Colombia, 15 March 2016. Advanced unedited version paras 80-83

⁷ Programa Somos Defensores, El Cambio, 2015 Annual Report, last accessed on 26 April 2016

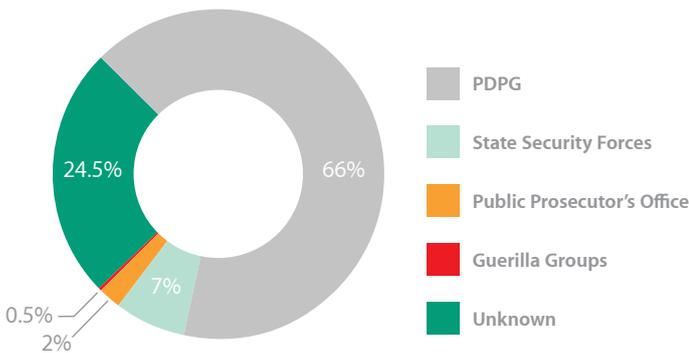
⁸ UN OHCHR Report to the General Assembly, Addendum: Colombia, March 2016 para 85

Table 1: Violence increases against HRDs in direct contrast to the nation-wide declining trend:



In 2008 the International Criminal Court highlighted the appalling human rights crimes committed by all sides: ‘the leftist guerrillas ... the security forces ... and the far-right paramilitary militias. But the latter, whose leaders are drug traffickers or have ties to the drug trade, are blamed by the UN for 80 percent of all killings, while the insurgents are held responsible for 12 percent and the security forces ... the rest.’ Little has changed as far as the ultra-right post-demobilised paramilitary groups (PDPGs) are concerned; they remain the group in 2015 presumed to be responsible for the greatest number of crimes against HRDs (66 per cent).

Table 2: Those Responsible for killing HRDS, percentage of attacks against defenders:



It would therefore be wrong to think that conflict will end with the signing of the Peace Accord. The signing of the Peace Accord is immensely important but it will only remove the left-wing guerrilla groups from the equation. The other armed actor that has relentlessly attacked communities living in areas of economic interest and resisting forced displacement, has been the paramilitary groups and this continues in the same way with the PDPGs. Whilst collusion by the security forces with the PDPGs is not as widespread as it was with the AUC⁹ it still exists many departments of the Colombia and is very far from being over.

PDPGs generating dangers for HRDs

Increases in the size of the PDPGs has been reported with groups of 200 or more moving around in rural areas, once again uniformed and armed. On 31 March and 1 April 2016, the PDPG called Clan Usuga, declared an armed strike, this affected 36 municipalities in eight departments of Colombia. It brought to a halt the activities of many rural towns as people were ordered not to travel, if they did their vehicles would be burnt, shops were not permitted to open and a curfew was imposed. During the two-day strike according to the State Conflict Analysis Unit (Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos – Cerac) five members of the security forces were killed and 63 per cent of the violent actions carried out over the two days were against the civilian population.¹⁰

Many of the AUC paramilitary bosses that demobilised in 2005 have started to come up for release. This has engender fear in the rural populations and the PDPGs have issued various threats to communities in relation to these bosses, for example, in January 2016, Clan Usuga in the north of Chocó informed the inhabitants of the Curvaradó Community (Afro-descendant community that lives on collectively owned land in northern Chocó) that ‘their mission was to secure the land for those who are in jail.’¹¹ There have been many threats made against this community by the PDPGs and several of their leaders have been killed.

Political opposition generating dangers for HRDs

There is strong opposition to the settlement that is being negotiated in Havana from the Centro Democrático political party led by ex-president Álvaro Uribe Velez and a conservative elite sector of Colombian civil society – many of whom are large land-owners, some of whom have benefited from the forced displacement perpetrated by paramilitary groups. Uribe called for ‘civil resistance against the Peace Accord in Havana.’¹²

In May 2016 the Colombian Government and the FARC announced an agreement to judicially protect the Peace Accord. The judicial protection is designed to prevent future governments from being able to alter the Peace Accord agreed in Havana, following this announcement the Centro Democrático Party condemned this agreement as “coup d’état against Colombian democracy” and the Inspector General Alejandro Ordoñez threatened criminal and disciplinary charges against President Santos.¹³ Congress will have to approved or reject various peace-talks-related bills by the end of June 2016. Final approval of the Peace Accord will be by the Colombian people.

Opposition to Land Restitution

The heart of Colombia’s internal armed conflict revolves around economic interests and land. Millions of Colombians have been forced to flee for their lives, according to official figures as of May 2016, almost 7 million people had been internally forcibly displaced making Colombia the country with the second highest number of internally displaced people in the world after Syria.¹⁴ In 2016 various departments in Colombia experienced waves of violence, for example more than 6,000 people in just two months fled their homes in Chocó (just one of Colombia’s 32 departments). They were escaping armed clashes, as groups fought for territorial control, along with bombing raids by the army of the region; the movement of a further 7,000 people was restricted.¹⁵

⁹ The Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC was a national right-wing paramilitary force that demobilised in 2005, the middle ranking commanders however failed to demobilise. They are the PDPGs that exist today.
¹⁰ “Paro armado del clan Usuga se vivió en 36 municipios del país”: Cerac, 1 April 2016
¹¹ El Espectador, Son cinco los muertos por paro armado del Clan Usuga en noroeste colombiano, 1 April 2016
¹² El Espectador, Uribe convoca a resistencia civil contra acuerdo de paz, 9 May 2016
¹³ Colombia Reports, Colombia’s opponents to FARC peace talks line up for frontal attack, May 15, 2016

At the beginning of April 2016 there were attacks against the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448 of 2011 (Law 1448). The president of the Colombian Federation of Ranchers (Fedegan) stated publicly that Law 1448 was tantamount to a down payment for delivering the Colombian countryside to the FARC guerrilla and suggested that land claimants – that is victims of forced displacement – and those who defend them are guerrillas. He was supported by other cattle ranchers when he stated that they are ‘not willing to budge an inch from their farms’, and ‘that the Victims Law is tailored for the FARC.’¹⁶ The Fedegan president also stigmatised on national television human rights organisations defending land-claimants.

March 2016 saw a sector of Colombian society protesting against a negotiated end to the Colombian armed conflict, and specifically against the Law 1448. Many of those protesting were land owners who had obtained their land as a result of the forced displacement of peasant farmers by right-wing paramilitary groups. They were seen on the marches with T-shirts saying ‘no to land restitution’.

Communities returning to their land

Despite Law 1448, which recognises land ownership and the rights of victims to have their land returned, communities continue to face risks when registering for land-restitution and seeking to return. Peasant farmers and ethnic groups that recover land under this law report a lack of State support over the long term.¹⁷ They also run the risk of being once again dispossessed of their territory due to the continued presence of illegal armed groups (PDPGs as well as guerrilla) and occupiers of the land who took possession once the community had been forcibly displaced – these are known in Colombia as ‘occupiers of bad faith’. The bad faith occupiers continue to have links to the paramilitary groups. In addition, communities face food insecurity due to the lack of access to crop and credits needed to work the land, all of which challenge their ability to remain, as illustrated in the case of Paquemás.



Indigenous Community returned after displacement.



Protester with T-shirt stating: No to land restitution

Case Study 1: Paquemás

Paquemás is a rural peasant farmer community in the municipality of Turbo, in north-western Colombia, who were forced to flee their homes in the context of Colombia's armed conflict. They are seeking land restitution under the Law 1448. In 1994, the then Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform, (INCORA) awarded over 1,000 hectares of Land to 98 families in Paquemás. Between 1995 and 1996 right-wing paramilitaries killed 173 people, forcibly disappeared 30 and 85 families were forced to displace –almost the entire community.

During the conflict many of the peasant farmers have had their land titles stolen or been forced to sign over their title deeds to third parties. One of the inhabitants of Paquemás explains how this happened: he was forcibly displaced by paramilitaries in October 1996, then forced to renounce his land-rights in the land registry (INCORA), if he didn't the paramilitaries threatened to kill his child. His daughter handed over the title deed, to those who had threatened him, and in exchange she was given a post-dated cheque. As soon as she cashed the cheque they were there waiting for her and she was forced to hand over the money. These were two common practices in that part of the country.

Several land titles from Paquemás were revoked and adjudicated to other people using these violent methods, as well as others, such as, falsification of documents and corrupt practices by local authorities.¹⁸

“There have already been various court decisions regarding lands and we are told that we will be given the lands, but we wonder what we will be given if the lands are occupied. We are given a document, not land. We cannot grow crops on a piece of paper”¹⁹

One of the difficulties for this community is that instead of deciding to restore the land to all of the inhabitants of the Paquemás village at the same time there are long delays between each of the family plots being returned. Leaving many of the peasant farmers vulnerable, as those who occupied the land after the forced displacement remain in the area and on the land yet to be restored. The PDPGs are particularly strong in this region of the country and their links to landowners who were behind the forced displacements are well documented.²⁰

¹⁴ UN OHCHR Report to the General Assembly, Addendum: Colombia, March 2016

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Aumenta el desplazamiento forzado en el departamento del Chocó, en el oeste de Colombia, 13 May 2016

¹⁶ El Espectador, La pelea entre Ordóñez y Santos por la restitución de tierras, 10 April 2016

¹⁷ ABColombia, Returning Land to Colombia's Victims report, May 2011

¹⁸ Cited in Pastoral Social Caritas Colombia, Claimants of Land in Vereda Paquemás

¹⁹ ibid

Paquemas families are very vulnerable to being once again forced off their land either from the violence or from the failure or the State to provide what they have agreed, for example there is a dire lack of adequate housing – families are forced to live in temporary structures, delays in delivery of seeds, tools and fertilisers for subsistence crops, threats from those behind their displacement have all caused severe hardship and fear. When they start to cultivate the land, allegedly, the ‘occupiers of bad faith’ have let their cattle loose destroying the community’s crops. The police protection allocated on their return has slowly moved away failing to fulfil the commitments under ‘Plan Retorno’ (the Return Plan) and leaving the communities in a very vulnerable state.²¹

“The people who occupy the land have a lot of power and wealth and in any moment can take action against us. They will not allow themselves to be ousted from it so easily and we feel very vulnerable in front of them. For this reason we avoid going out, we are afraid that something might happen to us” Member of the Paquemas community

In 2014 the community created ASOPAQUEMAS, this association has provided the opportunity for local empowerment of the community. Through ASOPAQUEMAS they have a collective legal identity, giving them access to, and the right to, local participation in decision making bodies, such as the victim’s municipal roundtable and the local committee on transitional justice. In this way their collective voice is heard, which offers the community greater visibility, and with that, protection and security.

If it wasn’t for the accompaniment of this community by ASOPAQUEMAS, the National Secretariat of Pastoral Social of the Catholic Church (SNPS) and the international community – many of the European Catholic International Development Agencies support this community including ABColombia members, CAFOD and SCIAF – it is very unlikely they would have been able to return, or remain on, their land. This national and international awareness and accompaniment of the community is used in a variety of self-protection models adopted by communities during the conflict in Colombia in order to stay on, or return to, their land.



Paquemas temporary housing

Self-Protection models

As a response to the risks faced by communities and the inadequacy of protection measures provided by the State, several communities developed their own protection measures. These self-protection measures were designed to provide greater security for the leaders of the communities (referred to in this document by the generic term HRDs), as well as, the community itself.

The self-protection models were developed by the communities, together with national NGOs that accompanied them in the process. They are based on raising the political costs of killing the leaders and forcibly displacing communities. There were various models but all seek to raise national and international awareness of the community and provided national and international accompaniment. They include: Humanitarian Zones and Spaces (HZs), Peace Communities and Peasant Farmer Reserve Zones. The HZs and the Peace Community also obtained special protection measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The IACHR special protection measures require the Colombian government to respond to the IACHR explaining the actions taken for the community’s protection whenever there were any security incidents by armed actors, legal and illegal, against these communities. One example is the Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space in Buenaventura.

Case Study 2: Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space in Buenaventura

Buenaventura, a town of 40,000 inhabitants, expanded its port with a major injection of foreign investment (FDI) to become the busiest in Colombia. It manages approximately 60 per cent of Colombia’s traded goods. At the same time more than 80 per cent of the population is living in poverty, supplies of electricity and water are unreliable,²² it is one of the country’s least developed cities and suffers from corruption of State institutions which have allegedly been infiltrated by those with strong paramilitary links. The PDPGs exert social and territorial control through terror and widespread human rights abuses. According to official figures (Attorney General’s Office and the Interior Ministry 2015), in the last 20 years Buenaventura has seen, 26 massacres, 160,000 persons forcibly displaced and more than 6,000 people killed, in a struggle for territorial, economic, and social control.²³

The Puente Nayero community asked the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace (Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz -CIJP) to set up a Humanitarian Space, located in the neighbourhood of La Playita. La Playita is a series of waterfront streets where houses are on stilts in the sea with raised walk ways. The Afrodescendent community live off artisanal fishing and logging. The State authorities want to remove these communities from the area to make way for a modern development with hotels and cafés that is being constructed along the whole of the waterfront. This would impact on the community’s traditional way of life and leave them without a viable livelihood.

²⁰ See ABColombia Report, Returning Land to Colombia’s Victims, May 2011 www.abcolombia.org.uk/subpage.asp?subid=399&mainid=23

²¹ Information given in interviews to CAFOD and ABColombia in April 2016

²² The Economist, Butchery in Buenaventura, 25 March 2014



The Puente Nayero Community

This Humanitarian Space has offered the population protection from extortion and widespread violence. One of the community leaders' sons, 15 year old Christian David Aragón Valenzuela, was killed on 19 July 2015 as he returned to the Humanitarian Space with his friend, Sol Angel Mina, who was badly injured. This was a warning to his father. However, in general safety has increased for the people living here and others in Buenaventura see them as a beacon of hope for a different future. It is these beacons of hope – ways of understanding peaceful resistance to violence - that will be essential to the peace-building process following the signing of Peace Accords with the guerrilla.

Inclusion across a whole range of policy areas is going to be essential if Colombia is to achieve a sustainable peace.

Buenaventura is a relatively straight forward example of how development could be inclusive. The communities are proposing that instead of displacing the Afro-Colombian community to make way for an ultra-modern tourist resort along the waterfront, the Puente Nayero Community be included as an historical part of the city with their artisanal fishing houses on stilts. A small investment in providing services (water, sanitation etc.), repairing and brightly painting their houses would provide an attractive tourist area and an additional source of income for the community.

UK, Ireland and the EU

There are various ways in which the UK, Ireland and the EU have engaged with Colombia in supporting the Peace Talks, and improvements in security for HRDs and communities.

Ireland

Northern Irish politicians are playing an important role in the peace process in Colombia. Various cross-party delegations of politicians have gone to Havana and to Colombia. Many of these delegates were involved in negotiating the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. In addition to this they visited Washington to encourage the US Administration to support the Colombian Peace Process. A key factor given the geostrategic importance of the USA for Colombia. Ireland is also contributing to the EU Trust Fund.

EU Trust Fund

The European Union (EU) announced in June 2015 that it would create an EU Trust Fund to support the Colombian peace-building process once the Peace Accord had been signed. It is designed to complement Colombia's investment in peace-building. The EU has also appointed a Special Peace Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process, former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore, whose previous experience is with the Northern Ireland peace process.

The UK and the EU Trust Fund

The UK has contributed £1.2 million to the EU Trust Fund. The Trust fund's overall objective is to support the implementation of the provisions established in the Peace Accord reached between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. The EU Trust Fund will support development at the local level, and it clearly identifies rural development as a key objective in line with the territorial focus of the peace agreement.²⁴

The UK was also instrumental in moving a resolution at the UN Security Council for a UN mission to verify an eventual ceasefire and disarmament process in Colombia. The UK has contributed £4.2 million to the UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Post-Conflict.²⁵ The UN Fund will be managed by a tripartite steering committee, co-chaired by the Government and the United Nations, with the participation of international donors, the private sector and the Colombian civil society. This Fund will target projects set out in the 'Rapid Response Strategy for Post-Conflict', which seeks to generate tangible peace dividends to boost public confidence in the peace process. The Fund will also support initiatives to improve access to justice and strengthen local government.

UK and British Business

In addition to this, the UK has sought to involve the British Business community in Colombia in supporting peace. In May 2016 approximately 20 companies signed the Declaration of Members of the British Business Community, where they pledged to support peace and respect human rights in Colombia. The support that they were offering is aligned to the Colombian government's Business and Human Rights National Action Plan and the peace-building process. The Minister for Trade Lord Price, asked the companies to "support the peace process, not only because a prosperous and stable Colombia is of general interest, but also because there are things that only companies can do."²⁶ However it is not clear that

²³ ABColombia Article, The tragedy of Buenaventura: Colombian congressman asks British politicians for support, June 2015 <http://www.abcolombia.org.uk/subpage.asp?subid=594&mainid=23>

they were committing to anything beyond what is already expected of them. Respecting human rights is a legal requirement and one that citizens should expect of companies. It is early days yet with respect to the declaration, however, pledging support to the peace process should mean that companies are willing to go that extra step, this will be essential for Colombia. Mining concessions granted to companies, in part due to the lack of an adequate land register, have been granted on land belonging to communities that were forcibly displaced. Much of that land is collectively owned by Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples and their whole way of life and culture is based on their territory, therefore it will be essential that companies hand back this land in order not to benefit from past human rights abuses.

UK, EU and Irish policies: negative impacts

The UK is promoting trade with Colombia by investing £1 million in Prosperity Fund programmes.²⁷ In 2014 the UK ratified a Bi-lateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with Colombia, as well as, signing the EU Free Trade Agreement with Colombia and Peru. Although the UK has funded and does support land restitution to the victims in Colombia, both of these agreements could have negative impacts on the realisation of the rights of the victims to land restitution. The UK BIT includes the controversial Investment to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism and the EU Agreement a Chapter on Investment.

In 2016, four investors are using FTAs to bring complaints against the Colombian Government e.g. the Colombian Government is being sued for US \$16,500 million under FTA with the USA.²⁸ The areas from which communities have been displaced are often rich in minerals and natural resources. Since many mining concessions have been granted in these territories there is the potential for even further litigation against the State.²⁹ So whilst on the one hand the UK, EU and Ireland are strong supporters of the Peace Process, there are policies that they have adopted which could well impact on the rights of communities and create a regulatory chill as far as the Colombian Government is concerned in the areas of human and environmental rights.

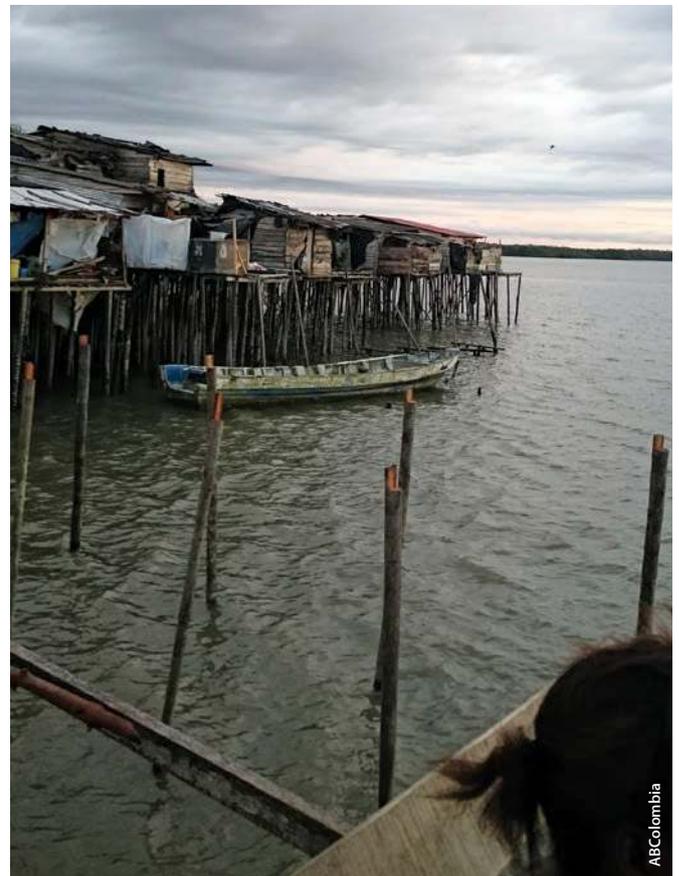
The EU-Colombia FTA

In the Irish Parliament the committee responsible for evaluating trading agreements – the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation³⁰ – voiced its concerns regarding the implementation of the EU FTA agreement with Colombia given its ongoing human rights record. Despite concerns that the human rights mechanisms within the treaty would not adequately safeguard human rights the treaty was approved.³¹

Financial and Political Support for Human Rights Defenders

HRDs and CSOs in Colombia are essential for sustainable peace-building and for the construction of democracy with social justice. Since the start of the peace talks several international NGOs (INGOs) have pulled out of Colombia and the EU has identified that the Trust Fund will run only until 2020. Building peace in Colombia will require at the very least commitment to funding Colombia over the medium term.

The international community should focus their financial and political support on grassroots organisations and CSOs that are already protecting rights and building peace at the local level. CSOs are fundamental to the promotion of democracy, good governance and vital for the construction of policies on development with social justice. They are key to the provision of collective organisation and access to technical skills that are required to balance the inequality of power and facilitate dialogue between victims and the State and between citizens and corporations.



Artisanal fishing community of Puente Nayero

²⁴ EU Commission Implementing Decision on the establishment of a European Union Trust Fund for Colombia, 22 March 2016, C(2016) 1653 final

²⁵ Foreign Secretary visits Colombia to reaffirm UK support for peace process, 27 April 2016

²⁶ UK Embassy in Colombia Facebook video

²⁷ Foreign Secretary visits Colombia to reaffirm UK support for peace process, 27 April 2016

²⁸ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

²⁹ For more information see ABColombia Report Fuelling Conflict <http://www.abcolombia.org.uk/>

³⁰ Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Political Contribution on the Proposal for a Council Decision on the Conclusion of the Trade Agreement between the European Union and Colombia and Peru, December 2014.

³¹ Joint agency submission to the Irish government, Standing Up for the Human Rights: why Ireland should not ratify the EU Trade Agreement with Colombia, April 2014.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the UK and Irish Governments and the EU

In addition to its support of the Colombian government, International Cooperation should focus on strengthening Colombian civil society and the prevention of other theatres of conflict.

- Financial support should focus on NGOs that promote human rights and democracy by: enabling victims to claim their rights to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition; monitor compliance with the Peace Accord; participate in the construction of public policies and projects that help to overcome the social, political and economic inequalities. Funding to NGOs should be:
 - independent (without the condition of work or the State or other actors)
 - accompanied by political support. This support is key to shielding civil society organisations (CSOs) and HRDs from physical and political attacks by those who see their interests affected by this work.
- A rural development strategy will be vital to the success of Colombia's Peace Accord. Therefore, support should be increased to CSOs working to build peace from the grassroots.
- Support the presence of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human in Bogota over the long-term. It has played a key role in observing the human rights situation in Colombia because of its legitimacy and Independence, the Office must play a key role in offering technical support and monitoring the peace-building phase in order to ensure that human rights are promoted and democratic and participative structures created at the local, regional and national levels.
- Contribute to the demilitarisation of civilian life and the promotion of a sustainable peace, by addressing the structural causes of conflict.
- Promote and support the effective demobilisation of the post-demobilised paramilitary groups that are still active in the country and that are presumed to be responsible for the greatest number of crimes against HRDs.
- Implement an annual monitoring mechanism that examines the impacts on human rights, land restitution and the Peace Accord of the UK-Colombia Bi-lateral Investment Treaty. The results should be recorded in the UK FCO Annual Human Rights Report. In this way both human rights and business commitments are brought together in one monitoring mechanism.
- Promote and support the Colombian Governemnt to ensure that the occupiers of 'bad faith' are evicted and prosecuted in order to help create a more secure environment for land restitution claimants.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Human Rights Unit in the Attorney General's Office to move forward on the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for crimes against human rights defenders, including land restitution leaders and claimants.
- Ensure that the EU consults with civil society organisations regarding the EU Trust Fund's design and priorities.

ABColombia is a group of leading UK and Irish organisations with programmes in Colombia. We work on questions of human rights, development and forced displacement. ABColombia's members are CAFOD, Christian Aid (UK and Ireland), Oxfam GB, SCIAF, and Trócaire. Amnesty International and Peace Brigades International are observer members.

ABColombia develops the collective advocacy work of members. Our members work with around 100 partner organisations in Colombia, most of them with little access to decision-making forums nationally or internationally.

www.abcolombia.org.uk

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