











Short Briefing and Recommendations for the United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Colombia in Geneva, May 2018

Colombia will engage in a third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in May 2018, the UK made some important recommendations to Colombia during the first and second review process. These covered issues such as, tackling poverty specifically amongst vulnerable groups, security for human rights defenders (HRDs), to tackle impunity, forced displacement, illegal armed groups and human rights issues in the military justice system. All these areas are referred to in this document.

This document is designed to provide the UK with recommendations, drawn from ABColombia and its member organisations, The Gaia Foundation, War on Want, and the Colombian Caravana of Lawyers Group, following discussions with our partners in Colombia. We would ask that the UK make these recommendations to the Colombian government during Colombia's UPR process in May.

Peace Process

It is pertinent to highlight the important achievement of a Peace Accord between the FARC guerrilla group and the Colombian Government signed in November 2016, along with, the completion of the disarmament of the FARC and its transition to a political party, all of which constitutes a significant step forward from Colombia's last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2013.

On 8 February 2017, the Government of Colombia officially initiated peace negotiations with the ELN, the second largest of the Guerrilla Groups (currently suspended), in Quito, Ecuador. They are also engaged in confidential talks with one of the largest of the neo-paramilitary groups the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC)*. However, with the elections in March and May the conclusion of both of these talks is in the balance. In addition to the Political Party of the FARC has had to suspend its campaigning due to the level of violence it has experienced, and other left-wing candidates have had their political campaigns effected for similar reasons.

Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Even though Colombia accepted 33 recommendations on HRDs in the 2013 UPR, the situation for those who defend human rights has become even more critical. Since 2013 most of the killings have been concentrated in rural areas and carried out against three groups of defenders:

- (i) land and territorial rights defenders, mega-project opponents and environmentalists;
- (ii) victims and the organisations that accompany them;
- (iii) peacebuilding activists and those who lead processes for social and political capacity-building.

In 2017, according to Somos Defensores, 106 HRDs were killed in Colombia. Front Line Defenders, 2017 Report documented 312 HRDs killed globally. This means that for every three HRDs killed globally one of them was Colombian, making Colombia the most dangerous country for HRDs to carry out their work. According to a recent presentation to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights impunity for crimes against HRDs is over 90 percent. HRDs UN Verification Mission to Colombia 2018 report

expresses concern for the growing number of murders of social leaders, HRDs and land restitution advocates.^{iv}

Just over a year ago the Colombian Government put into place a stabilisation plan called Plan Victoria, this however failed to produce results. Therefore in 2017 the Government announced various additional actions, such as, the Horus Plan, which aims to establish a more permanent and visible presence of security forces in some sensitive areas, strengthening of the Early Warning System (Decree 2124 of 2017), collective protection schemes for communities (Decree 2078 of 2017), and the establishment of a special investigation unit of the Attorney General's Office, focussed on killings of HRDs. However, Colombia's downfall has always been implementation. The UN Secretary-General emphasised this when he stated, in reference to these new measures, "[they] will make a difference if applied with determination and the necessary resources".

The UK in the last UPR of Colombia made two recommendations on HRDS: "Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute those responsible for threats or violence against human rights defenders, trade unionists, community leaders and journalists"; and to "deepen its engagement with and support for civil society actors, human rights defenders and minority groups, and ensure their safety, with specific mechanisms in place if necessary, including through supportive public statements on the important role they play in democracy". If these recommendations are to be fulfilled then the emphasis must be placed on implementation, sufficient resources and political will to ensure effective implementation rather than continuously producing new plans.

Unfortunately, we have seen these new mechanisms undermined by statements, such as that made by the Colombian Minister of Defence Luis Carlos Villegas, who stated in December 2017, that the vast majority of killings of HRDs in Colombia was due to "problems in their personal lives" or their "involvement in illegal economic activity". These statements constitute a denial of reality and amount to nothing less than a smear campaign against HRDs. The Attorney General recognised a "somewhat systematic approach to these killings [of HRDs]," on 19 December 2017, which shows movement, away from the Statement made by the Defence Minister. However, the lack of Government acceptance that these killings are systematic means that the crimes are investigated on an individual basis. If investigated collectively, analysing the patterns of killings could lead to the identification of the authors as well as the perpetrators of these crimes, some of whom are powerful politicians and business leaders. Only then will an effective deterrent be established.

Impunity for crimes against HRDs

Investigating collective cases and tracing patterns would also help to speed up the process of prosecution of those responsible. Although the Prosecutor General announced "considerable" progress in 45 cases involving killings of HRDs. in However, only five of these cases have been prosecuted and 13 remain on trial. Somos Defensores recorded 509 cases of threats and attacks against HRDs between 2016 and 2017, 85% of these cases have not been processed resulting in extremely high levels of impunity for crimes against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats and attacks against HRDs. in the process of threats are processed resulting in the process of threats.

Where crimes have alleged been carried out by neo-paramilitary groups, the State investigations are frequently slow and ineffective, even when there is convincing evidence available. This appears to be exacerbated by the refusal of the State to recognise the existence of neo-paramilitary groups. This denial leaves HRDs and rural communities in a highly vulnerable situation.

Recommendations

 That the Colombian Government ensures that there are sufficient resources assigned to the Special Unit in the Public Prosecutor's Office on crimes against Human Rights Defenders; that the Colombian Government ensures that this Special Unit traces the patterns of killings of Human Rights Defenders in order to identify and prosecute not just the perpetrators but also the authors of these crimes.

• That Colombia invites the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders to Colombia on an official visit.

Enforced Disappearances

In addition to the extremely high level of impunity for crimes against HRDs, other examples of high impunity rates include enforced disappearances. This practice in Colombia was wide-spread. To give a sense of the enormity of the crime, Colombia's enforced disappearances between 1970 and 2015 amount to more than Argentina, Chile and Uruguay added together^{ix} with the Historical Memory Centre in Bogota having documented 60,630 people as enforced disappearances.* The slowness of the legal process is demonstrated by the fact that Attorney General's Office opened 12,056 cases of enforced disappearance between 2012 and April 2016. As of May 2016, 97.9% were at the preliminary investigation stage and only 0.89% at the prosecution stage.^{xi} Impunity remains extremely high.

The National Centre of Historical Memory reports that the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (rightwing paramilitaries) and Security Forces are jointly responsible for 74.3% of victims of targeted killings and 80% of the victims of massacres where the responsible actor was identified.^{xii} This responsibility rises noticeably to 83.9% in cases of enforced disappearance.^{xiii}

Recommendation:

 That Colombia recognises the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and examine communications – from or in favour of victims – as well as from other State Parties

Extrajudicial killings

The Public Prosecutor's Office registered over 4,000 investigations into cases of extrajudicial killing. However, these cases continue and in 2015 there were 65 new cases, 16 of which were 'false positives'.xiv In 2017, killings of small-scale farmers during military operations were reported. The military were also accused of killing 2 FARC ex-guerrillas during the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities. As of December 2016, there were 2,315 open investigations into extrajudicial killings and only 133 persons convicted. This is particularly concerning given that security forces are responsible for the protection of citizens. It is essential to prosecute and to remove from the security forces, both the executors of the crime and those with command responsibility.

The ICC Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) in their December 2017 report, identified 29 commanding officers reportedly in charge of divisions and brigades between 2002 and 2009 under whose command high numbers of 'false positives' killings were allegedly committed. The OTP only focuses on those allegedly most responsible for the most serious crimes. The Colombian authorities have instituted proceedings against 17 of the 29 commanders identified, however, the OTP has yet to receive "any detailed information [...] on the cases being reportedly investigated and on whether concrete and progressive investigate steps have been or are being taken".

Recommendation

• Ensure that the investigation and prosecution against commanding officers in the Security Forces for 'false positive' extrajudicial killings are prioritised and adequately resourced.

Women and Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)

On 13 January 2018 Blanca Nubia Díaz, WHRD, in Bogota was sedated, kidnapped, threatened and her hair cut. The threats were specifically related to her campaigning work. The cutting of her hair was also clearly a gender-based attack.**

Over the last five years, women's movements have gained visibility, particularly due to their work during the negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian Government, which achieved important results such as, the exclusion of amnesties and pardons in cases of sexual violence committed in the context of the armed conflict and agreements which will address some of the inequalities faced by women. In a society strongly characterised by patriarchy, strengthening of the role of women and greater publicity has contributed to an increase in threats and aggressions against them. Children of WHRDs are also threatened, as was the case with the daughter of Maria Leonilda Ravelo Grimaldo, who had a gun pointed at her by two men on a motorcycle^{xvi}

Women and Sexual violence: Despite the Colombian Peace Talks and the reduction of combat violence, women have experienced an increased level of conflict-related sexual violence from 149 (2000-2009) to 400 women per day (2010-2015);^{xvii} every day, 21 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are victims of sexual violence.^{xviii} A recent survey indicated that sexual violence towards women and girls was increasing outside of the conflict. This is concerning, because it suggests a 'normalisation' and deeply entrenched level of violence towards women that is likely to continue in post-conflict. The lack of prosecutions of members of armed actors, both legal and illegal, created by Law 975 of Justice and Peace of 2005, means that effectively for this crime there has been legislative immunity which can translate into a "licence to rape". According to UN Women, '[t]ransitional justice can provide an opportunity to transform both inadequate laws and harmful social norms, by ensuring that the gravity of sexual violence is registered on the historical record and in the public memory [...] For peacebuilding and reconciliation to take root, justice must be done, and be seen to be done, for sexual violence survivors.' There is concern in Colombia that the impunity created by the Justice and Peace Law will be repeated due to the victims' fear of reporting and the lack of confessions by the aggressors.

In addition, Legislative Act 01 of 2017 on Command Responsibility presents obstacles for victims of sexual violence to access justice. The standard of knowledge to hold commanders criminally responsible under international humanitarian law is, if they knew or had reason to know and should have known about the crimes. Command responsibility amended by Congress and that is now enacted into law, departs from the definition under international law and as a result could obstruct efforts to hold military commanders accountable to the extent international law requires.

In the report of the Public Prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, there was ongoing investigation into paramilitary commanders in relation to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as FARC and ELN, but her report states that, "there was no specific information on on-going or completed investigations or prosecutions against State agents made available." This is especially concerning since the impact of the State Security Forces' involvement in sexual violence has a particularly devastating effect, because they are mandated to protect the civilian population. When sexual violence is committed by the Security Forces, the civilian population are left with no authority to whom they can turn for justice. It is therefore, essential that those in the security forces responsible for this crime, are prosecuted, along with the paramilitaries and the guerrilla.

Recommendation for UK to make to the Colombian State during the UPR process:

 To ensure effective implementation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz-JEP) specifically in cases of conflict related sexual violence. By strengthening measures to prevent, sanction and eradicate violence and discrimination against women exacerbated by the armed conflict, including concrete efforts to fulfil the commitments made in the Peace Accord to: investigate, sanction and provide reparation for

- human rights violations against women who have suffered from conflict related gender-based violence.
- Enhance access to justice for victims of gender-based violence in the framework of the ordinary justice system.

Business and Human Rights

One of the major areas of controversy in terms of human rights and economic, social and cultural rights in Colombia is the extractives industry. Colombia's economic development policy has as one of its major locomotives pushing economic growth over the next decade that of hydrocarbons and the extractives industry. However, this policy has resulted in over 115 social conflicts arising from the implementation of mining, energy and petroleum projects in which local communities were not consulted. These conflicts have resulted in the forced displacement of indigenous, Afro-Descendant and peasant communities, death threats and the assassination of leaders who oppose these projects; judicial persecution of social and environmental leaders. Areas where large-scale investment projects are being developed in Colombia have been the scene of drastic changes to local productive processes and subsistence economies. Among other consequences, food sovereignty has been threatened and social protest movements have been criminalized. Paradoxically, the areas where minerals, energy and hydrocarbons are exploited are also the regions most afflicted by poverty, forced displacement, and the persecution and assassination of those who protest against these extractive projects.

Communities are using their legally constituted right to Popular Consultations as means of defending their economic, social and cultural rights. Similarly, indigenous, afro-descendant, Raizal and ROM^{xxiii} peoples are using the Free, Prior and Informed Consultation established in the ILO Convention 169 when investment projects are developed in their territories.^{xxiv}

Also, laws on mechanisms for citizen participation, state that the decision taken by the inhabitants of the municipalities will be binding.*** However, major obstacles have been put in place seeking to restrict this legitimate process of exercising their rights by the Minister of Mines and Energy of Colombia, Germán Arce, when he issued a statement threatening disciplinary sanctions to the councillors of the municipalities who approve the ban on industrial mining and the exploration of hydrocarbons in their territories.

The UN Working Group in a recent report stated that a general feature of the cases presented to the Working Group, was "a lack of human rights due diligence in the form of adequate prior consultation with affected communities, leading to 'lose-lose' situations of social conflict, human rights abuse, reputational damage for companies and financial losses for investors."**XVI

Finally, the Working Group makes the following recommendation: "The Working Group [...] found a lack of practice or tradition for dialogue with communities in the context of large-scale projects ... Consultations must be undertaken as early as possible in the process of project design and must leave open the option that some projects may not be viable."

Recommendation for UK to make to the Colombian State during the UPR process:

 To ensure there are adequate resources for Popular Consultations (Consulta Popular) and Free, Prior, and Informed, Consent (ILO Convention 169) processes, in order that they can promote and strengthens citizen participation and inclusive development. As well as, respecting and implementing the outcomes of the popular consultations that have been held so far, like that in Cajamarca. Design and develop mechanisms to ensure that communities and stakeholders receive, as
early as possible, all relevant information regarding mining and other large-scale projects
including impact assessments in order that they can make informed decisions in prior
consultation processes and leave open the option that some projects may not be viable.

Conflict, Poverty and inequality

Colombia remains the most unequal country in the region in terms of access to land, with 81% of land concentrated in the hands of 1% of the population. The issue of property distribution is intrinsically linked to the social inequality that persists in the country. In rural areas there are particularly high poverty rates (38.6% live in poverty) in inadequate services and limited economic opportunities. Land distribution and social inequality have played a central role in the Colombian conflict.

Poverty levels increased in 2016 after a period of reduction between 2002 and 2015. Although the Government prioritised measures to address poverty, inequality and access to basic services, xxix the lack of compliance with commitments in respect of these priorities led to mass protests in 2017 in the Pacifica Coastal region e.g. in Chocó and Buenaventura. XXXX National statistics show 62.8% (2015) of the population of Choco living below the poverty line in a department where 95% of the inhabitants are ethnic minorities, the lack of action on the part of the State to implement commitments made to address health and education and other basic needs has led to the conclusion that structural racism exists in this region. XXXXI

The sustainability of the Peace Process requires addressing several challenges: social exclusion, unmet basic needs, social and environmental impacts of extractives, lack of local infrastructure, and the concentration of land and disputes over territories. Quick and effective interventions aimed at strengthening the presence of local State institutions are also needed.**xxxii

Displacement and Land Restitution

"If we do not have land, we do not have peace."

Edilia Mendoza, Colombian Rural Women's Platform for Policy Advocacy,

Forced displacement and land grabs have been a central part of the Colombian conflict: as of 31 December 2016, over seven million people (7,246,000) had been internally displaced. Land remains at the heart of the struggle for peace with 56,000 displaced in the first six months of 2017 due to violence and conflict. In the first two months of 2017, Chocó department saw some of the most intense conflict; clashes between the ELN and neo-paramilitary groups led to the displacement 3,549 people on the Colombian Pacific Coast. XXXIII The Colombian State is seen as largely absent in rural areas like Choco and failing to provide adequate protection for the civilian population. Other communities are confined in their territory due to hostilities, landmines and other threats. The possibility of return to their land is obstructed by armed groups fighting for control of areas previously held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Some land cannot be restituted because it is being used for large-scale agriculture and mining, or has been contaminated by illegal mining and for others the lack of promised resources and security mean they are threatened and newly displaced. In September 2017, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)xxxiv concluded that there was a lack of guarantees for the application of human rights due diligence in respect to the use of land by businesses; the ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples was not being effectively implemented prior to a large-scale project; and that the government need to be able to guarantee the effective functioning of mechanisms and registers established for land restitution.

People have been displaced and dispossessed of nearly eight million hectares of land (Dec 2016).xxxv Therefore the Land Restitution Law 1448 (2011) is an important piece of legislation. It has an implementation period of 10-years.xxxvi After over six years of implementation only 3.2 % of land has received a judicial sentence for restitution. Civil Society Organisations are therefore asking that the

implementation period be extended. This, and the full implementation of the Agrarian Chapter of the Peace Accord which contains elements that will help to support sustainable returns.

Colombian women lack equality when it comes to land. They play an essential role in agriculture however, this is not matched by equality of access to land. Only 26 percent of landholdings are run by women, these tend to be smaller than their male counterparts (less than 5 hectares), they also have less access to machinery, credit and technical assistance. The Agrarian Chapter in the Peace Accord prioritises women in the areas mentioned, however, most of the legislation for enacting the Agrarian Chapter has not been processed through the fast track-mechanism. It will now have to be processed through ordinary procedures, and as such, is unlikely to be enacted before the end of the electoral cycle in May 2018. This is particularly worrying given that some of the presidential candidates have stated that they will not enact into legislation all aspects of this chapter.

The CESCR also expressed concern at the limited progress made in applying Constitutional Court decisions in favour of indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples, that order the implementation of ethnic protection plans for indigenous peoples identified as being at risk of physical and cultural extinction, and for Afro-Colombian populations identified as extremely vulnerable.**

The Government has the opportunity now with the Territorial Focussed Development Plans (PDETs) outlined in the Peace Accord to directly incorporate the protection plans developed by communities into the PDETs and to ensure that these have sufficient resources to be implemented as part of its commitments in the Peace Accord. These plans have been waiting to be implemented and are crucial to the survival of these communities.

Recommendations

- That the Colombian Government extends the period of time to implement the Land Restitution Law 1448
- That the Colombian Government ensures that the ethnic protection plans for indigenous peoples that are at risk of physical and cultural extinction and populations of African descent that are extremely vulnerable own development plans are incorporated into the PDETs
- That the Colombian Government fully implements the Agrarian Chapter of the Peace Accord which prioritise access to land and resources for rural women from marginalised and vulnerable groups.

End notes:

 $\underline{\text{http://www.fiscalia.gov.co/colombia/noticias/resultados-historicos-eninvestigaciones-por-homicidios-de-defensores-dederechos-humanos/}$

Somos Defensores cited in https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/en_-_n1745936.pdf

ii Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2017, 22 January 2018

iii 165th Session of the Inter-America Commission of Human Rights, *Investigaciones de graves violaciones de derechos humanos y la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz en Colombia*: Between 2009 -2016 there was approximately, 90 per cent impunity rate in relation to the crimes against HRDs.

^{iv} UN Verification Mission to Colombia <u>https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/90-day-report-secretary-general-security-</u>council-un-verification-mission-colombia

v (writer's emphasis)

vi General Prosecutor's Office, Public Statement, 11 July 2017,

vii Cited in Individual Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Colombia by Colombian Caravana UK Lawyers Group For consideration at the 30th Session of the Working Group in May 2018, 5 October 2017

^{ix} Semana, Informe Especial: 60.630 desaparecidos, 19 Nov 2016 http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/desaparicion-forzada-en-colombia-investigacion-completa/505880

[×] Antioquia, la región con más casos de desaparición forzada

- xiABColombia, Enforced Disappearances Continue in Colombia, 2016
- xii Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, ¡Basta Ya! Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad. Resumen. Bogotá: November 2013 p.96 and 98. Cited in Coordination Colombia Europe United States (CCEEU), El Fuero Penal Militar Frente Al Proceso De Paz, September 2015
- xiii Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. Basta Ya. Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad. Bogotá: Julio de 2013 p.33
- xiv Colombian Army brigades executed civilians and presented them as killings in combat of rebel fighters.
- xv Organizaciones de la Sociedad civil Internacional rechazan los hechos de violencia en contra de la lideresa Blanca Nubia Díaz y exigen al Estado colombiano esclarecer los hechos y sancionar a los responsables, January 2018.
- xvi Frontline Defenders, Annual Report 2017 p7
- xvii Survey of the Prevalence of Sexual violence against women in the context of the Colombian Armed Conflict 2010-15 http://humanidadvigente.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Encuesta-de-prevalencia-de-violencia-sexual-CSCG.pdf
- xviii Corporación Sisma Mujer: La erradicación de las violencias contras las mujeres: un paso definitivo hacia la paz Informe Especial, Boletín No. 11, 25 November 2016.
- xix Report of the UN Secretary-general on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence 15 April 2017
- xx International Criminal Court, Report on Preliminary Examination Activities, 2017 para142
- xxi UN Security Council, Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General, January 2012.
- xxii Mario Alejandro Pérez-Rincón, Characterizing Environmental Injustices in Colombia: a study of 115 cases of socioenvironmental conflict, 2016
- xxiii Romany Peoples
- that the results of Popular Consultations are mandatory, "The popular consultation is a manifestation of political content with full legal consequences, as [it represents] the people pronouncing themselves on an important question ... The ruler is obliged to incorporate the result into the national, regional or local legal system ..."; Additionally, there are quite a few recent Constitutional Court rulings that make it clear that the fundamental right to citizen participation established in Colombia's Constitution must be guaranteed These include: C-389/2016

http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2016/C-389-16.htm; T-704/16

http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2016/t-704-16.htm; SU-33/17

http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2017/su133-17.htm

- xxv Law 134 of 1994, article 55 and statutory law 1757 of 2015.
- xxvi UN Working Group
- xxvii Oxfam, Colombia's challenge: addressing land inequality and consolidating peace, July 2017
- xxviii Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics, 2016

http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/condiciones_vida/pobreza/bol_pobreza_16.pdf

- xxix https://soundcloud.com/lsepodcasts/the-legacy-of-peace-audio
- xxx https://colombiareports.com/colombia-poverty-and-inequality-statistics/
- xxxi Comunicado público Respaldamos la movilización del Pacífico por la vida digna y la paz Bogotá, 24 de mayo de 2017
- xoxii IACHR Report, 2016, Chapter V1, Follow-Up on Recommendations made by the IACHR in its Country and Thematic Reports, Follow-up on Recommendations Made by the IACHR in the Report Truth, Justice and Reparation: Fourth Report on The Human Rights Situation In Colombia
- xxxiii UNHCR, 'Forced displacement growing in Colombia despite peace agreement' (10th March 2017), available at http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2017/3/58c26e114/forced-displacement-growing-colombia-despite-peace-agreement.html (accessed 10th July 2017).
- xxxiv Point 17
- xxxv http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/colombia/
- xxxvi An extension for its implementation is being considered.
- xxxvii Oxfam, Colombia's challenge: addressing land inequality and consolidating peace, July 2017
- xxxviii Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Colombia, 26 Sept 2017: pt.17