



## A Wake-Up Call: Colombia's Peace at Risk

### What U.S. Policymakers Can Do to Help Preserve Colombia's Peace

#### Executive Summary

Two years after the signing of Colombia's peace agreement, the Colombian government's lackluster implementation of the accord and declining international attention threaten the construction of peace. The FARC guerrillas were successfully demobilized and violence levels dropped in many parts of Colombia. However, plans to increase the government's presence in conflict zones, reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life, and dismantle other illegal armed groups are proceeding too slowly. Commitments to address the needs of the rural population for land have stalled in Colombia's legislature and victims' rights are far from their promised place at the center of the agenda. Many areas of the countryside are still in conflict, and violence will surge if commitments to address the root causes of the conflict are not fulfilled. The most visible symbol of the peace accord's troubles is the assassination of 164 human rights defenders in 2018.

If implemented well, this peace accord would end the Western Hemisphere's longest running conflict—a war that has cost the lives of over [261,000](#) people and forced nearly 8 million to flee their homes, a level of internal displacement on the order of Syria. The accord offers a roadmap to modernize and incorporate abandoned rural areas, sustainably tackle illicit drug production, trafficking and organized crime, and address deep-seated issues that fuel violence and inequality.

The United States played a critical role in advancing the peace process in Colombia. Today, however, while aid for peace accord implementation continues, U.S. diplomatic support for peace accord implementation has diminished, replaced with a focus on counternarcotics and the crisis in Venezuela.

This **Wake-Up Call** outlines the promises of and challenges for peace in Colombia and recommends ways the United States can contribute to sustainable solutions. If U.S. policymakers act boldly to encourage compliance with the accords, it is not too late to preserve Colombia's fragile peace.

#### Recommendations for U.S. Policy

- U.S. diplomacy should focus on encouraging full implementation of the peace accords. Specific obstacles should be raised and advances praised on a regular basis by the U.S. Embassy and State Department, as well as by Congress. The State Department should encourage the Colombian government to ensure that the Truth Commission, Search Unit for the

Disappeared, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as well as other initiatives to carry out the peace accord, are funded and supported. Consolidating peace should remain a major focus for U.S. diplomacy towards Colombia.

- U.S. support via USAID for peace accord implementation should continue with an increase in support for civil society organizations. USAID should support the Truth Commission, the Search Unit for the Disappeared, and victims' initiatives for truth and justice. It is vital to support USAID's programs directly funding Afro-Colombian and indigenous organizations to consolidate peace and advance development plans of their own design.
- U.S. diplomacy and members of Congress should make a sustained effort to urge the Colombian government to fully implement the accord's Ethnic Chapter, with attention to the rights to collective territory and collective protection. Similarly, U.S. diplomacy and members of Congress should encourage full implementation of all the gender provisions of the accord.
- U.S. diplomacy should encourage the Colombian government to dismantle the paramilitary successor networks involved in drug trafficking and organized crime, which also fuel violence against defenders. This includes regularly convening the National Commission of Security Guarantees, implementing the 660 Decree, and ensuring the Attorney General's special unit is dismantling paramilitary successor groups—all accord-mandated mechanisms designed to protect communities and human rights defenders at risk.
- U.S. diplomacy should urge the Colombian government to improve its protection of human rights defenders and social leaders, encouraging the government to ensure prompt and effective investigations of attacks and threats against them, including uncovering those who ordered these crimes. U.S. diplomacy should encourage the National Protection Unit to significantly improve its individual and collective protection measures.
- The State Department and USAID should encourage the Colombian government to implement the accord's commitments to rural conflict zones. This includes ensuring individual and collective land titles are issued and land is provided to victims of displacement, small farmers, and Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, as well as ensuring the Congress refrains from passing measures undermining these goals. It also includes ensuring that the government funds development plans created by local governments and communities (PDETs).
- The FARC's placement on the U.S. terrorist list should be reconsidered in light of its demobilization and the group's general compliance with the peace accords. In the meantime, U.S. regulations should not be applied in a way that undermines U.S. support for reintegration and alternative development.
- The U.S. National Security Council should issue an interagency executive order for declassification of documents for Colombia's Truth Commission.
- The U.S. Congress should condition any military aid on progress in ensuring justice for grave human rights violations by Colombian security forces, dismantling paramilitary successor groups, protecting rights defenders, and respecting the rights of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Congress should press the State Department to enforce the conditions.
- The U.S. government should take advantage of the opportunities provided by the accords to carry out eradication and crop substitution with community support. The United States should focus on working with communities to eradicate and replace coca and should encourage the Colombian government to fulfill its commitments to those who have signed eradication agreements. The aerial spraying program, which damaged human health and the environment and failed to sustainably eradicate coca, should under no circumstances be revived.
- The U.S. government should support UN efforts to verify and encourage compliance with the accords, including by supporting and consulting with the UN Political Mission and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Colombia.
- The United States should not draw Colombia, itself still in conflict and not yet recovered from decades of war, into conflict with Venezuela. The U.S. should value and support Colombia's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan refugees within Colombia. However, assistance should not contribute to escalating tensions at the Colombia-Venezuela border.