



## LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP EDUCATION FUND ACTION AT HOME FOR JUST POLICIES ABROAD

### **Colombia Peace Accord Offers Opportunity for Sustainable Peace**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 25, 2016

**Washington, D.C.**— After more than 50 years of war and four years of negotiations, the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas have reached a peace agreement. This long-awaited accord ends the longest-running armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere and offers the opportunity to implement a sustainable peace. The Latin America Working Group (LAWG), an advocacy organization that has worked closely with Colombian civil society and victims' groups since 1998, welcomes this historic step.

“We congratulate the Colombian government and FARC leadership for reaching this groundbreaking accord,” said Lisa Haugaard, executive director of LAWG. “We also recognize the essential role that victims, women leaders, peace activists, Afro-Colombian and indigenous community leaders, and human rights defenders have played in advancing the peace accords and will continue to play in building peace from the ground up.”

The [human costs of the conflict](#) are devastating. More than 220,000 people —over 80 percent of whom were civilians— lost their lives in the brutal war. Over the course of the conflict, more than 6 million Colombians were forcibly displaced, more than [45,000 were disappeared](#), and countless women suffered sexual violence that often went unrecognized.

Rural, impoverished, and marginalized communities —including Afro-Colombians, indigenous, and women— were disproportionately affected by the violence. These groups have taken the lead in defending the rights of their communities at home and at the peace table.

There are tremendous challenges ahead. The Colombian government has yet to advance on official negotiations with the last remaining major guerrilla group, the ELN, or to successfully dismantle the paramilitary successor groups that continue to intimidate and harm communities throughout Colombia. Without the disarmament of these other armed groups, peace cannot take root.

In the aftermath of the peace accord, risks will continue to be high for the community leaders, social movements, union members, journalists, and human rights defenders threatened during the conflict. The Colombian government must address the risks faced by these individuals and provide adequate protection.

In addition, the Colombian military should transition to a new and more limited role as civilian law enforcement expands in post-conflict zones. During this transition, the Colombian military should not be encouraged to provide training to other nations' militaries or police forces given their poor human rights record during the war, especially the "false positive" scandal in which members of the armed forces extrajudicially killed over 4,000 individuals, mainly poor young men, often for bonuses and days off. Civilian police forces must be trained to respect human rights and should be monitored closely to prevent the excessive use of force, including against social activists.

The Colombian people will be asked to vote in a plebiscite in October to approve or reject the peace accords. At least 4.5 million voters –13% of the electorate– must vote "yes" for President Juan Manuel Santos to be bound to implement the accords. Many Colombians have never experienced a single day of peace in their lifetimes, making some skeptical that peace is possible. However, a [recent poll](#) shows that 69% of Colombians believe that the peace accords are the best way to resolve the war.

Since 2000, the United States has [provided nearly \\$10 billion through Plan Colombia](#) to fund over fifteen years of war. The human toll of this U.S.-funded security strategy was devastating. In the last four years, however, the Obama Administration has chosen the right path in strongly supporting the peace process. Now, the U.S. government has the moral obligation to fund and diplomatically support peace accord implementation.

The implementation of the accords will be an expensive, long-term process. "We urge the international community, and the United States in particular, to [support efforts to implement and monitor the peace accords](#) and to ensure that the victims of violence have real access to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees that the violent past will not be repeated," concluded LAWG's director Lisa Haugaard.

**Lisa Haugaard, LAWG's executive director and expert on Colombia, is available for comment. For an interview, please contact:**

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