

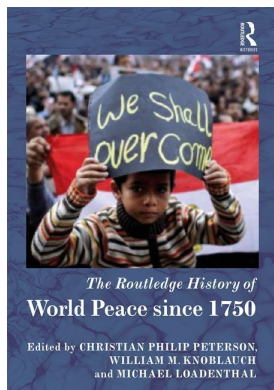
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### Colombia

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## COLOMBIA

### A long journey to peace

*Saul M. Rodriguez*

Since the mid-twentieth century, Colombia has suffered a tough internal armed conflict resulting in nearly 250,000 deaths and six million victims of internal displacement.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, despite an economic stability unusual in Latin America, Colombia remains the second most unequal society in the region. Electoral democracy has been active since the late 1950s. However, low participation in elections is common, and political or human rights activist activities remain dangerous. Violence has become common in this culturally diverse country, one beset by social exclusion, intolerance, and a wealth gap between urban and rural zones.

Recently, there has been a change in the international image of Colombia, due in part to some improvements in economic, political, and social indicators. In response to the increased military confrontation against the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) at the turn of the millennium, peace talks between the Colombian government and FARC have brought the internal armed conflict closer to an end. This is an examination of Colombia's long process towards peace. It begins with some historical aspects of the armed conflict, continues with an analysis of the main efforts aimed at reaching peace during the latter part of the twentieth century, and concludes by showing how the Colombian Government and the FARC reached an imperfect but necessary agreement in late 2016, and that agreement's implications.

#### **A matter of conflict and violence**

Over the past two centuries, Colombia has struggled to build a stable society. Regional discord, socio-economic differences, a precarious economy, a conservative and highly-religious society, and a tendency towards illicit activities are all factors that political leaders have failed to fully address. War and violence seem to be constant in Colombian history. Consider that from 1810 until 1964, Colombia engaged in a dozen postcolonial and civil wars, while an ongoing internal armed conflict that began in 1964 now appears close to ending.

In contrast to neighboring countries, Colombia has faced several difficulties in finding a commodity to help boost the country's economy. Predominantly, coffee is Colombia's largest legal cash crop, but its volatility on international markets has long led to instability and fueled internal violence and poverty. Many nineteenth and twentieth centuries wars were born of disputes between leaders and followers of the traditional political parties: *Liberals* and *Conservadors*, groups guided by diverging views of religion and state organization.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1930s and 1950–1960s, violence sprang from a mixture of partisan divides and economic demands due to the eventual exclusion of whatever party lost political power.<sup>3</sup>

Even after this history of conflict, the roots of Colombia's ongoing troubles began in the late 1940s when Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a Liberal party leader, was assassinated, which unleashed violence between followers of both political parties, leading to more than 200,000 deaths.<sup>4</sup> To de-escalate the violence, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953–1957), who was sponsored by the political elites and charged with pacifying the country, established a strict military rule.<sup>5</sup> He reestablished order in some parts of the territory, but several Liberal Party followers continued to wage war against local authorities under the guise of self-defense. One of the most relevant of these groups was located in the southern mountain region of Tolima. There, the Colombian Armed Forces deployed several units in the Marquetalia Operation of 1964. Their aim was to recover state authority in the zone against a group of radical leftist peasants, who after this event assumed the name FARC.<sup>6</sup>

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, many leftist guerrilla groups emerged in Colombia.<sup>7</sup> They demanded radical changes in the redistribution of farm land in rural areas, political participation in decision-making spheres captured by traditional parties, and government support to help impoverished regions. Some of these guerrilla groups, particularly FARC, later gravitated towards producing illegal drugs that flourished in many regions of the countryside. Initially, an international interest for marijuana made Colombia a “promised land,” and during the 1960s and 1970s, a period commonly referred to as the “*Bonanza Marimbera*” (marijuana boom), small mafias mixed violence with effective business practices to capture production, packaging, and distribution of this product.<sup>8</sup> Colombia's geostrategic position as a corridor between South and North America aided local smugglers who quickly became intermediaries in the traffic of cocaine. Harvested largely in Peru and Bolivia and fueled by a massive demand from American consumers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, cocaine made its way north via Colombia. Several organized mafias such as Medellín and Cali Cartels capitalized on this demand and enhanced their illegal businesses, in time promoting not only trafficking but also production of coca and poppy. By the early 1990s, cartels were producing cocaine and heroin to export to the US and Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The reliance on the drug trade had tremendous consequences for Colombia. On the one hand, drug lords reached a privileged position in society, one based on their exaggerated wealth and violent reputations; they soon corrupted several layers of political power. On the other hand, illegal drug production resulted in left-wing guerrilla groups, mainly FARC, becoming protectors of illegal crops while dealing with tense relationships with the drug lords, who paid them “taxes” for their armed services.<sup>10</sup> By the 1990s, the Colombian state deteriorated. Political leaders found themselves deadlocked by the aggressiveness of drug lords, particularly the Medellín Cartel leader Pablo Escobar, who initiated a series of attacks against the Colombian state to avoid being extradited to the United States. He also sponsored the executions of several politicians, including presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán (1990); bombed the national intelligence agency (DAS) building; and approved a terrorist attack against a civilian Avianca jet in 1989.<sup>11</sup> These terrorist acts showed how one man exerted more influence on Colombian institutions than all previous guerrilla groups combined. In response, the governments of the United States and Colombia joined forces to capture this criminal. Escobar was finally killed in 1993 in an assault by the Colombian Police.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the Cold War, a new era seemed to emerge throughout Latin America. Several internal armed conflicts ended in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala,

Honduras, and Nicaragua; simultaneously, other countries such as Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay made the transition from military dictatorship to democracy.<sup>13</sup> Colombia, however, did not transition along similar paths, for three reasons: First, while some guerrilla groups laid down their arms, the most established groups, FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN), remained active; second, drug trafficking fueled internal armed conflict because it provided a sustainable source of income; finally, Colombia adopted a new constitution in 1991 that allowed third political parties, including those comprised of former guerrillas, natives, African Americans, and sexual minorities to participate in democracy.<sup>14</sup> However, due to the intensification of internal armed conflict, citizens found it harder and harder to exercise their rights in peripheral areas of the country. Thus, while other Latin American countries progressed during this decade, Colombia regressed into another period of chaos and violence.<sup>15</sup>

Faced with ever-increasing violence, the Colombian government responded with a double strategy. On the one hand, President Andres Pastrana in the late twentieth century initiated peace talks with the FARC, for which he established the so-called “zona de distension” (Demilitarized Zone) in the southern region of Colombia. On the other hand, he worked to enhance the capabilities of the Colombian military to confront the FARC in case negotiations failed. His plan bolstered numerous areas of the Colombian military and intelligence services. Pastrana also courted US assistance, which responded with “Plan Colombia”, a program intended to support civil and military institutions, particularly in marginal zones where the FARC exerted control.<sup>16</sup> An unexpected result emerged from these factors: Regional rich landowners and drug lords organized, hiring armed groups to fight against the guerrilla forces. These paramilitary forces relied on intimidation, involuntary relocation, and systematic killings to control communities that they considered collaborators of the guerrillas.<sup>17</sup>

Colombia’s peace talks with the FARC abruptly ended in early 2002, at which point Colombian society transformed its hopelessness into political action. Alvaro Uribe, who embodied citizens’ call to action, was elected President on the promise of waging total war against the FARC. His political and military program, known as Democratic Security, promoted the use of armed forces to attack the guerrillas to restore state control and protect the people. He also promised to improve health and education services and halt illegal drug production.<sup>18</sup> This program began to show results in early 2003, thanks to US military support and the massive deployment of the Colombian Armed Forces to FARC strongholds.<sup>19</sup> Uribe’s Presidential term (2002–2010) can best be characterized by two elements regarding internal violence: Empowered civil control over military operations against the FARC, and efforts to demobilize the “paramilitaries” acting under the denomination of United Self-Defenders of Colombia (AUC).<sup>20</sup>

During this period, domestic violence increased, and all state rhetoric and efforts aimed to destroy FARC, even as other illegal armed groups continued committing crimes across the country. Blinded by war, the Colombian military illegally assassinated civilians, known as “*falsos positivos*,” and reported them as members of the insurgency killed in combat. Authorities quickly stopped the scandal thanks to Uribe’s local and international prestige; however, it remains a black spot for the Colombian military.<sup>21</sup> Between 2002 and 2008, the Colombian Armed Forces’ offensive against the FARC was relentless. They pursued and attacked Colombia’s southern regions with all possible means, including the Air Force and Police intelligence. However, guerrillas fought back with landmines and sharpshooters.<sup>22</sup> In response, the Colombian Air Force conducted several air raids against high-value FARC targets, which killed top members of the guerrilla group’s high command. These deaths so

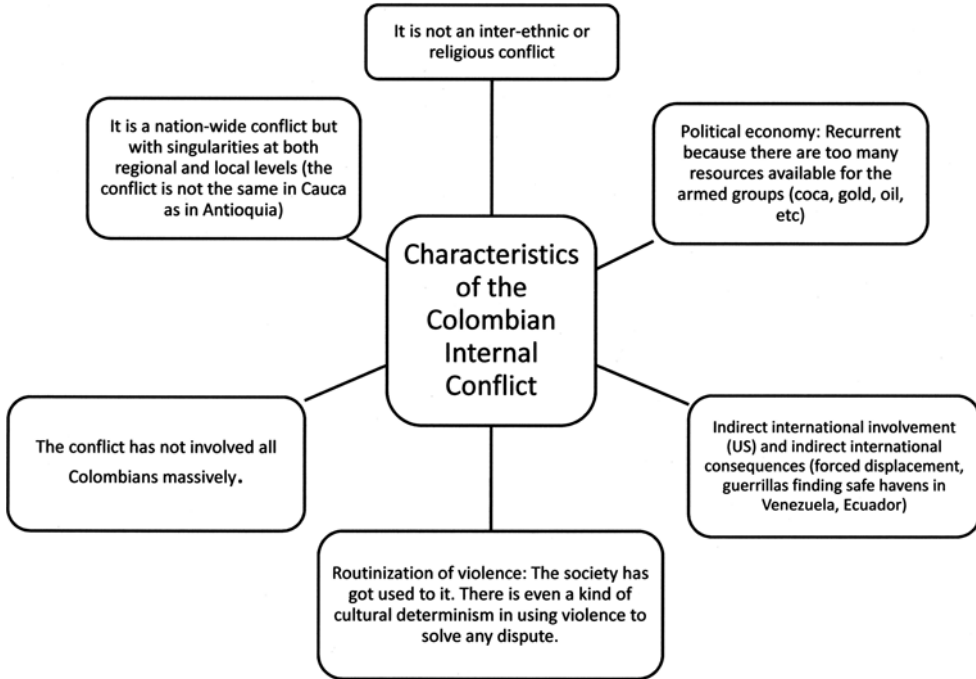


Figure 22.1 Basic characteristics of Colombian conflict

impacted FARC that in late 2012 they engaged in peace talks with newly elected President Juan Manuel Santos.

After 2012, conflict between the Colombian military and the FARC decreased substantially.<sup>23</sup> Official statistics of the Colombian Ministry of Defense show that in 2012 a reported 167 military actions occurred throughout the country; by 2016, however, only 44 were reported.<sup>24</sup> According to Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC) a specialized think tank, after the government and FARC reached a deal to de-escalate hostilities, offensive actions decreased from four in early 2015 to zero in August 2016, with fewer than ten victims related to the internal armed conflict.<sup>25</sup> These statistics suggest an important lesson: The strong actions directed at reducing the FARC’s military capabilities in the early twenty-first century forced them to initiate peace negotiations, which guaranteed the pacification of several regions of Colombia, particularly those where the conflict was more intense.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the accord achieved a momentary peace and reduced violence at a tense and violent time. Figure 22.1 sums up some of the basic characteristics of Colombian conflict over the years.

### **A matter of peace: Negotiating with illegal groups**

Initial attempts to negotiate peace with illegal armed actors in Colombia began in the 1950s during the term of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, a dictator supported by political elites in the hopes of reducing partisan violence between the followers of traditional parties. Notably, Rojas granted political status to Liberal guerrillas, rejecting the label of “*bandoleros*” (common

criminals) and negotiated with them.<sup>27</sup> In 1953, Congress passed several laws to encourage the main guerrilla leaders to accept a peace accord and a demobilization process; many laid down their arms, as did some 20,000 combatants.<sup>28</sup> However, this pact between the government and Liberal guerrillas neglected possible reforms such as land redistribution. Likewise, the State did not guarantee the security of combatants, and many of them were murdered. These actions demotivated dissidents, who refused to abandon their fight against the State.

During the 1980s, as violence erupted, President Belisario Betancur (1982–1986) initiated a peace process with the main guerrilla groups, including FARC. For the very first time, he recognized the deep and local causes of the Colombian conflict, such as poverty and social and political exclusion that fueled conflict. Betancur established a Peace Commission in 1984, comprised of diverse members of Colombian society, to discuss a great national accord; however, the military was left out of this process, due to their disapproval of negotiating with guerrilla combatants.<sup>29</sup> The Colombian government expressed its goodwill towards the guerrillas in the form of amnesty and pardons for political crimes, as well as the release of several prisoners. Moreover, negotiations continued with each guerrilla group to depose of arms in return for negotiations regarding human rights, social movements, and agrarian issues.<sup>30</sup>

Betancur's idealistic perspective was opposed not only by Colombia's political and military sectors, but also by the guerrillas who continued to fight.<sup>31</sup> In 1984, the FARC signed an agreement with the government named "Pacto de la Uribe" (Uribe Pact) for a bilateral ceasefire. Unfortunately, it was short lived, but as a result a political branch of FARC known as Union Patriótica (UP) emerged; nonetheless paramilitary forces killed many of its members.<sup>32</sup> This generated a tense scenario and negotiations ended in 1986 with no accord due to mutual mistrust. Violence continued because neither side had a defined agenda, meaning that several issues were discussed without clear goals and that there never was a coordinated schedule among the actors.<sup>33</sup>

From the end of the 1980s into the beginning of the 1990s, many guerrilla groups volunteered to disarm and participate in a political peace process, a decision influenced by the state's military pressure and the desire by some guerrilla groups to return to civilian life.<sup>34</sup> This breakthrough happened for at least three reasons. First, the next two Colombian governments (those of Presidents Virgilio Barco and Cesar Gaviria) initiated several institutional efforts to take basic healthcare, education, judicial and security services to the most violent regions of the country, a decision that would delegitimize vindictory discourse of the guerrillas. Second, these presidents used the military to prosecute illegal armed groups as common criminals, thus reducing their status and limiting their political participation—in short, forcing them to surrender and demobilize unconditionally.<sup>35</sup> Third, 1990 marked the beginning of a process to establish a Constitutional Assembly, as many guerrilla groups sought to change Colombia's constitution. In this context, president Barco succeeded in getting 800 of the group M-19 to depose their arms; in the early years of President Gaviria's term, numerous guerrilla groups followed suit.<sup>36</sup>

During the early 1990s, several events altered this ongoing pacification process. First, paramilitary forces in association with drug lords assassinated several members of the recently demobilized M-19, including their leader Carlos Pizarro (1990), which greatly upset many citizens; also, Escobar's war against the state peaked. By 1991, President Gaviria had negotiated with Escobar to grant him important concessions in return for his surrender. These included serving time in a jail under his own management, keeping his illegally earned

wealth, and a short-term sentence.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, peace negotiations between President Gaviria and the remaining guerrillas of the FARC and ELN were scattered and, not surprisingly, unsuccessful. Thus Escobar, a criminal without a political cause, received special treatment from the authorities, while the FARC and ELN remained criminals sought by the military. Indeed, Gaviria showed little interest in discussing any political, social, or economic issues with these guerrilla groups. Clearly, he did not consider them to be legitimate interlocutors of society.<sup>38</sup>

In the mid-1990s, calls to defeat guerrilla groups by military means renewed. However, the FARC consolidated their military capabilities and hit governmental targets systematically; they even defeated and seized important units of the Colombian military. Chaos ensued, and by 1999 new peace talks between President Andres Pastrana and the FARC began. One of Pastrana's first actions was to grant political and military status to guerrillas. In one of his most controversial actions, he gave the FARC a territory of 26,000 square miles in the southern zone of Colombia, a region locally known as "Zona de despeje."<sup>39</sup> Peace negotiations were held in this area, which was out of the control of the State. There were many national and international personalities who attended meetings with the FARC. Despite these discussions, real progress was limited because peace talks were held without a formal ceasefire between the parties, and guerrillas used this area to enhance their military power and to plan criminal activities.<sup>40</sup>

This situation, combined with FARC's unwillingness to continue negotiations, damaged public support for this process. In an attempt to revive hopes, by mid-2001 the FARC released some captives, soldiers held for many years in what might be described as concentration camps. Despite this concession, the situation got worse, and finally this latest round of peace talks ended in early 2002 when President Pastrana ordered to retake the distension zone militarily.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, these negotiations failed because neither the Government nor the FARC were interested in abandoning their opposing political views to solve the conflict. Instead, both sides clung to their positions and tried to impose them by military force.

### **Lessons from Colombia's failed peace processes: FARC-Caguan and AUC**

Several lessons can be drawn from Colombia's peace process. First, there were no watchdog groups to supervise the parties as they tried to reach an agreement, in part because civil society organizations were under systematic attack by radical right-wing terrorist groups. Second, the international community, including the United Nations, was only marginally involved in the negotiations. In this respect, neither side adhered to agreed points nor met the standards of international institutions. Third, the negotiation agenda was dispersed and fragmented; many people participated without any real agency. Finally, no conditions regarding FARC's military position or a negotiation timeline were established by parties. In this respect, the guerrillas' recalcitrance prevailed over ever-changing governmental actors with fatal outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

Between 2002 and 2005, President Alvaro Uribe carried out a new peace process with one of the most controversial illegal armed groups, United Self Defenders of Colombia. The AUC was a group of right-wing armed groups accused of committing approximately 60 percent of recent crimes against civil and non-combatant populations, including several

crimes against humanity.<sup>43</sup> This organization was open to negotiations with Uribe because some of its leaders believed that this President would exterminate guerrillas.<sup>44</sup>

By mid-2003, in Santa Fe de Ralito (a town in the Department of Córdoba) the government and the AUC entered an accord to demobilize combatants and gradually dismantle their military apparatus. In this interregnum, 31,671 combatants deposited their arms and returned to civilian life.<sup>45</sup> However, this figure seems to be inflated, as the paramilitary phenomenon covered several parts of the country, and several drug dealers successfully pleaded to decrease their sentences and avoid extradition to the United States. Simultaneously, Colombia's Congress passed a controversial law, the "Ley de Justicia y Paz" (Justice and Peace Act), which allowed top leaders and members of this group to confess their crimes in exchange for a significant reduction in their convictions. However, this never occurred satisfactorily due to the few methods available to induce believable confessions.<sup>46</sup> These negotiations with the AUC became more of a process of disarmament and dismantling than the end for this armed group for a wide variety of reasons. First, despite official data, many units of the AUC kept their military power and capacity to inflict violence. Also, the right of the victims to know the truth had not been honored after several years; only three leaders and fewer than 2,000 members of this illegal group had confessed their crimes, revealing the weaknesses of Ley de Justicia y Paz.<sup>47</sup>

According to the National Center for Historical Memory, which was funded to study the causes of conflict, the process with the AUC was full of irregularities. Among them, the process was not transparent. No official records remain regarding the real number of combatants or accounts of what happened to the victims. Thus, neither civil society actors, people, and organizations that do not belong to government or military groups, nor international organizations (except the Organization of American States) had knowledge of the agreements. In fact, paramilitary combatants received several benefits while their victims never received anything from the State or these illegal armed groups.<sup>48</sup> Finally, several members of the AUC (estimated at approximately 30 percent) went back to their criminal activities.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the Colombian government's inability to negotiate successfully with paramilitary groups led to the nation's current state of affairs.

### **The end of the journey? The peace agreement between the government and the FARC**

As Minister of Defense and later as President of the Republic, Juan Manuel Santos led an intense military campaign against the FARC that resulted in the killing of several of its high-ranking members. Then, on September 4, 2012, he abruptly announced the beginning of peace negotiations.<sup>50</sup> His declaration astonished many because Santos was the symbolic figure of the "Democratic Security," meaning that no one expected him to give the FARC a negotiated treatment. This announcement marked a mid-term process of rapprochement between the parties that began in early 2011, when Santos first officially recognized FARC as a legitimate political group.<sup>51</sup> While previous administration refused to admit the existence of an internal conflict in Colombia, now the FARC and the government were willing to entertain a dialogue to end the violence. According to "Centro Nacional de Consultoría," 82 percent of the Colombian population supported the beginning of peace talks by the end of 2012.<sup>52</sup> This time, attempts at achieving peace paid dividends, both because the government soberly recognized that the FARC posed the most dangerous threat against the State, and because



this time both actors tried to avoid past mistakes—such as an unrealistic agenda of negotiation, indefinite periods for negotiations, and the non-participation of armed forces and victims.

The initial negotiations began secretly in Cuba and Norway in early 2012. Both countries provided diplomatic support in the hopes of shielding leaders on both sides from internal political pressures.<sup>53</sup> It was a sensitive operation, one that yielded an agreement to discuss six crucial issues: 1) Integral rural development; 2) Political participation; 3) Ending the violence; 4) Drug-trafficking; 5) Victims' rights; and 6) Implementation, verification, and ratification of the agreement.<sup>54</sup> The peace talks started in Havana on November 19, 2012. Their main goal became discussing these points and efforts to avoid recurrence in the future. The Government delegation was led by Humberto de la Calle, and the FARC delegation was led by "Ivan Marquez."

The process advanced between 2012 and 2016 in fits and starts. The FARC secretariat decided to keep a unilateral ceasefire in several opportunities, and during this time it had several clashes with the Colombian military—violence that, at points, stalled negotiations. Eventually, both sides overcame these difficulties to address common goals, thanks in part to international pressures and the secrecy provided by Havana. Thus, between 2013 and mid-2014, negotiators successfully compromised on points related to rural problems, political participation, and the management of the drug trade. However, issues related to the victims, the construction of positive peace, and the ratification of peace accords were more sensitive topics, due to former President Uribe's Centro Democrático party and its strong opposition to such initiatives. To break the impasse, victims testified to express their feelings about truth and reconciliation in Havana; they also expressed their support of the talks and a desire to achieve an accord. As a result, both sides jointly created a historical commission in August 2014 to address the causes of the conflict.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of 2014, peace negotiations had reached a point of no return. The FARC declared a total and definitive ceasefire, and by early 2015 the US Government appointed Bernard Aronson as Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process.<sup>56</sup> This was a major diplomatic endorsement because of the important role that the United States played in the Colombian conflict and its commitment to brokering peace. In 2015, Santos announced the end of air strikes against the FARC, and General Alberto Mejía, Chief Commander of the Colombian Army, proclaimed that the military would begin to restructure its doctrine to confront new challenges in a post-conflict Colombia.<sup>57</sup> By mid-2016, issues related to the end of the conflict, the measures to compensate the victims (truth, restoring their lands, subsidies), and the ratification of the peace accord were finally completed and approved by both sides.

In January 2016, the United Nations Security Council sent a political mission to Colombia to address the post-conflict scenario. One month later US President Barack Obama, during the celebration of the 15th Anniversary of Plan Colombia, stated his intention to support the Colombian peace process and the post-conflict era with \$450 million per year, in a diplomatic initiative to be renamed as "Peace Colombia."<sup>58</sup> One month later, to counter the local opposition against the peace talks, President Santos established a "Pact for Peace," a group formed by different political and social sectors interested in consolidating a sustainable peace accord. On June 23, 2016, Santos and the top-leader of the FARC, Rodrigo Londoño (a.k.a. "Timochenko") signed a bilateral ceasefire in Havana in a public event attended by several international personalities. It was the first tangible act of positive peace among the parties. Following this euphoric moment, the ceasefire began on August 29.

Then, on September 26, in Cartagena (Colombia) the representatives from FARC and the Colombian Government signed the final peace agreement which featured the following points:

1. The FARC would depose its armaments, decree a definitive ceasefire, and renounce its intentions to attain power through violence.
2. The FARC would join the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to respond for their crimes and confess all actions related to those crimes, as well as tell the truth of what happened to the victims.
3. An integral solution for drug-trafficking would be created, including pursuing major criminals and helping farmers to abandon these activities, with the FARC renouncing to participate in these operations.
4. Integral rural development with lands and technical support would be given to poor peasants through a Land Fund.
5. Democratic participation would be increased through guaranteeing honest and safe conditions for political opposition.
6. The People would ratify the agreement with the support of international observers.<sup>59</sup>

Many experts and politicians considered these acts premature because the people had not yet ratified the accord in the polls, as ordered by the Constitutional Court. Thus, the plebiscite took place on October 2, with unprecedented results. More than half of the electors rejected the agreement with the FARC, in part because of a smear campaign by Centro Democrático, which consisted in saying that Santos would hand the country to the FARC or that it would covert the society in a pro-gay community.<sup>60</sup> While these arguments helped make many wary of the peace process, after two months of mutual recriminations, Colombian civil society through large peace demonstrations such as *Campamento por la Paz* (Peace Camp), an initiative to support reconciliation, pushed the Government and the FARC to reach a new accord with slight amendments. This was completed in early November and celebrated with a low-profile ceremony. Congress ratified the agreement on November 30, 2016.<sup>61</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Colombia is a rare case. A quasi-democracy with a mid-range economy, it was home to the only internal conflict remaining in the western hemisphere in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For this reason, several countries, including Cuba, Norway, Venezuela, Chile, among others, attempted to help end the conflict with FARC through negotiation, and not military means. Even in the face of his failure in the polls to gather support for the peace agreement, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize due to his enormous efforts.

Let us not be naïve. Assassinations and drug violence continue to plague Colombian society. We must remember that peace is much more than an agreement. In this respect, the now classic study by Galtung (1967) reminds us that “peace is something more than just absence of organized group violence, peace also contains an element of equality, of absence of exploitation.” Moreover, features such as “economic growth and development, equality, justice, freedom of action and pluralism” are necessary to guarantee a peaceful scenario.<sup>62</sup> In this respect, this is only the beginning for Colombia to start to build an inclusive democracy,

establish rule of law across the country, create a competitive free market economy, and tout a transparent public administration without corruption. Historically, many governments pretended that peace only meant the destruction of specific illegal armed groups; meanwhile several causes of conflict such as inequality, exclusion, insecurity, intolerance, low levels of justice and a lack of confidence in institutions remained. Thus, this is only the first step towards lasting peace. The real test will be for Colombian society to accept FARC not as an armed group but as a political force, one with a place in a diverse democracy. Indeed, and perhaps the most importantly for the near future, a strong nation-building process will be necessary, one that alleviates old resentments and allows for constructing a new society free from the failures of the past. That will require involvement from all sectors of society and a new social contract that breaks with a history of conflict and violence. To do so, governments, institutions, and civil society must work to build a new mentality of faith in a lasting peace. But, before that, the most urgent next step is to continue negotiations with the ELN, the other remaining guerrilla group, while repressing other illegal armed groups that generate violence.

Doubtless, the recent peace process with FARC reveals several useful lessons for activists and governments to recognize. First of all, the example of Colombia illustrates that the peace process can move forward despite the existence of opponents, although a defined agenda and a clear timeline helped to convince some critics to participate. International support may be necessary in situations where intergovernmental organizations with diverse political ideologies fail at negotiating. Closed-door negotiations in a host country—in Colombia's case, both Cuba and Norway—could be beneficial. Military de-escalation should be gradual, steady, and done in good faith; compensation for victims and a will to confess crimes is also important. The end of conflict should be a goal of national consensus. Finally, society should recognize that peace is not just an end goal, but an ongoing process.

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