



**10 YEARS AFTER CAGUÁN:  
LESSONS FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA TODAY**

Bogotá and Washington

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## **10 Years After Caguán: Lessons For Peace in Colombia Today<sup>1</sup>**

Several years ago, our institutions (the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Georgetown University, the Universidad de los Andes, and the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP) came together to develop an agenda of research and reflection on Colombia's long history of peace processes and to draw lessons from past experiences to reach peace in that country.

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 marks the tenth anniversary of the breakdown of talks between the Colombian Government under President Andrés Pastrana and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC-EP. These talks were held in a large, demilitarized zone (*zona de despeje*) that included the municipality of San Vicente de Caguán, the site of the negotiations. For ten years, Colombian society has lived under the long shadow of "Caguán," whose main legacy has been the rejection of dialogue as a preferred path to peace. It is now time to resume the conversation, to analyze and debate the errors of Caguán, and to attempt to identify the lessons that can be gleaned. Colombians have already shed too much blood and paid too high a price in suffering and destruction. It is time to build alternatives for the future of the country.

We present below ten lessons to stimulate further reflection.

### **LESSON 1:**

**One can reject elements of the negotiation model used with the FARC in Caguán without rejecting outright the option of a negotiated solution.**

Ten years after Caguán, Colombia is still a country at war. The FARC and the ELN are weakened, yet they have joined forces and have adapted their tactics to new Colombian realities. Their capacity to attack is still considerable, as is their ability to recruit new combatants. At the same time, the Colombian Armed Forces have developed a noteworthy offensive capacity. Nonetheless, after six decades, neither side has been able to win the war. What is urgently needed is a political solution that can lead to a lasting peace agreement and to reconciliation among all Colombians.

### **LESSON 2:**

**A peacemaking policy must rely on the lessons left by previous peace processes in**

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<sup>1</sup> The lessons presented here were collectively elaborated by the following U.S. and Colombian institutions:

- The United States Institute of Peace (USIP);
- The Center for Latin American Studies of the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University;
- The Research Program on Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding of the Department of Political Science, Universidad de Los Andes;
- The Program for Peace of the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP).

### **Colombia, particularly those that have not been successful.**

In successive negotiations over the past thirty years, Colombian governments have failed to build on the lessons of earlier peace processes. This has led the country to repeat some of the same mistakes made in earlier processes. For example, the administration of President Andrés Pastrana repeated the failures of cease-fire agreements signed during the Presidency of Belisario Betancur, when it established the *despeje* zone in Caguán without clearly establishing the rules of the game or the manner in which compliance would be verified.

#### **LESSON 3:**

**Successful negotiations are not viable amid an escalation of the armed conflict and an increase in violations of International Humanitarian Law.**

During the Caguán process, both the armed conflict and violations of International Humanitarian Law reached the highest recorded levels in contemporary Colombia. In the agreements signed in Caguán (especially the Agreement of San Francisco), both sides agreed to reduce violence as a condition for continuing the peace process. To guarantee the conditions for a successful negotiation, both sides will need to be prepared to move towards some form of truce. They will need to define the ideal moment and means for negotiating an eventual cease-fire.

#### **LESSON 4:**

**A comprehensive peace policy is needed that goes beyond a simple negotiation between the government and the insurgents.**

First, a strategy of security and peace must consider all the factors and dynamics of violence in the country. Besides guerrilla violence, it must consider other factors of violence, such as the continuing violence of paramilitary groups and of newer groups that have emerged since the demobilization of the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). It must address the issue of drug trafficking, whose resources finance the conflict and fuel criminality. Finally, it must consider the role of the Armed Forces and the Police in the context of a post-conflict society, when the necessities of the country should shift more towards the need for citizen security.

Second, a peace strategy needs to include civil society more broadly. While the objective of a negotiation is to dismantle all the illegal structures of violence and to restore the State's monopoly over the legitimate use of force, there are structural issues that will impact the eventual consolidation of peace in the country that must be discussed not only with the insurgency but also with the relevant sectors of society, particularly in the regions. Such issues include themes such as property and the use of land, the environment, social inclusion, and political participation. In synthesis, one of the lessons that can be learned from Caguán is that a policy is needed that can link the negotiation of peace with armed actors to the construction of peace with society in general (peacemaking + peace building). Since the conflict manifests itself in different ways throughout the country's regions, processes that promote both national and regional dialogue on conflict and peace will be needed.

These national and regional dialogues could model a process of democratic inclusion that recognizes the impact of violence in the regions, helps to articulate more coherent relationships between the regions and the center, and lays the foundation for inclusion within future mechanisms for peace.

**LESSON 5:**

**The Colombian government and the guerrillas need to recognize what is possible and what is viable in the context of the current conflict.**

The military and political balance of power has changed since 1998, when the Caguán process began. Today, it is likely that a more limited and focused negotiating agenda will be needed compared to the one developed in Caguán. While negotiations today are unlikely to consider a maximalist agenda, however, they are also unlikely to be limited simply to the demobilization and disarmament of the guerrillas. The challenge will be to realistically assess the possibilities and limits of a process needed to end the conflict so that society will not continue to bear the mounting costs of a protracted and degraded conflict. Minimally, issues that have already been recognized as priorities by President Santos should be considered, so that an agenda of reforms will serve as the basis for a political solution to the conflict. These issues include human rights, international humanitarian law, and the humanitarian crisis that is affecting certain regions; the agrarian situation; the problem of land ownership and rural development; ways to increase social and political participation; and matters of truth, justice, and the reparation of victims. A realistic agenda should also initiate timely discussions about when and how to reach a ceasefire as well as issues of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, known as DDR in the specialized literature.

**LESSON 6:**

**Civil society must be pro-active, and must participate as an independent and autonomous actor; it must not leave the peace process solely in the hands of the government and the insurgents.**

The large peace movement that was created in Colombia during the nineties, and that culminated in ten million votes for the Citizen's Mandate for Peace, legitimized the initiation of a peace process with the FARC in Caguán. Nonetheless, this mobilization diminished during the process and civil society organizations left the peace negotiations in the hands of the government and the guerrillas. In a future dialogue, civil society must maintain an active, critical, and vigilant role throughout the process. Moreover, the national media has a particular responsibility to inform the public in a professional and independent manner, recognizing the complexity of the process, and reporting on the advances towards peace as well as on acts of war.

**LESSON 7:**

**All sectors are needed in the construction of peace in Colombia, and the support of women is indispensable.**

Caguán failed to take advantage of the full participation of women or of their role as

peacebuilders. In the past decade, the United Nations has recognized the importance of including women in peace processes and in the implementation of agreements. A series of resolutions of the U.N. Security Council--UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009) and UNSCR 1960 (2010) --has already underscored the issue of violence against women as an international security issue. These resolutions have established the importance of women's participation in all stages of conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in peace and reconciliation processes, and they reinforce the commitment established in both Colombian and inter-American law.

#### **LESSON 8:**

**Peace in Colombia is an issue for Colombians, but it is also a legitimate issue for the international community, which can play an important role in a peace process.**

Many of the themes discussed in the Caguán dialogues and which could be issues for future peace process have global dimensions. The issues of illegal crops as well as global political and economic contexts affect the paths toward peace or war in Colombia. Trying to resolve these issues without the participation of the international community makes no sense.

Today Colombia's internal armed conflict continues to have repercussions on the international environment. Beyond the humanitarian crisis which has led to the forced internal displacement of millions of Colombians, the conflict has generated a refugee crisis and the spread of violence to neighboring countries. These problems affect the international community and their solution must begin with achieving peace in Colombia, which today is a necessity for the region and for the entire world.

#### **LESSON 9:**

**The idea of peace and a political solution to the conflict must be cultivated and nurtured in order to legitimize and sustain the process of negotiation.**

After nearly a decade of denying the existence of an armed conflict and ignoring the deep roots of the conflict, it is important that the President, public opinion makers, academics, researchers, businesspeople, and community leaders begin to engage in dialogue and debate on the possibilities and limits of a political and negotiated solution to the conflict. A successful peace process requires consensus and support from all sectors of society. Before a new process can begin, this public support must be cultivated if a durable and definitive political solution is to be reached after more than six decades of continuous violence.

#### **LESSON 10:**

**The past is prologue. Each peace process is built on the foundations laid by previous experiences.**

Constructing a historical memory of the peace process in Caguán will help ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Doing so can help create new visions of the future. Identifying these lessons requires dialogue, study, analytical and

critical capacity, and freedom of discussion. Only when society fully comes to terms with the experience of the Caguán -- a difficult but illuminating task -- will Colombia be able to take what could be a first step towards national reconciliation.

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