

UN WOMEN  
BACKGROUND PAPER

# GENDER AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN COLOMBIA'S PEACE PROCESS



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# ABSTRACT:

The promises and visions articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent UN resolutions and position papers that recognize the connection between gender equity and women's participation in all aspects of peace processes and peacebuilding on the one hand, and international peace and security on the other, have not been fulfilled. Nonetheless, these resolutions have opened the way for advocacy that has had some successes in specific contexts. Colombia offers one such case.

Through desk research, literature review, and personal interviews, this paper provides an overview of the Colombian internal armed conflict and the peace process currently underway to transform it.<sup>1</sup> It begins with an historical overview of the conflict, and then explores some of its gender dimensions. It analyzes the differential impact of the internal armed conflict on the lives of women and men, LGBTI persons, and boys, girls and adolescents, as well as the intersectionality between multiple components of identity, including gender, class, age, ethnicity, and region. The paper then turns to the peace process. It explores the roles of women in preparing the ground for a political solution to Colombia's internal armed conflict. It considers women's official, semi-official, and unofficial roles

at, around, and outside the peace talks that were launched in late 2012 between the Colombian government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC-EP). This paper underscores the essentially gendered nature of both war and peace. It assesses shifting gender roles and ideologies, and the ways that they intersect with a peace process and transitions in a post-Accord period, particularly in relation to issues of transitional justice. Finally, my paper explores how greater consideration of gendered dynamics, as well as increased participation of women in the peace process and all commissions and bodies created to implement peace accords, will better equip Colombia to address the challenges ahead and will help ensure a more sustainable peace.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFLICT

When peace talks began in 2012 between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), one half-century of internal armed conflict had already left in its wake a death toll surpassing 220,000—more than 80 per cent of whom were civilians. From 1958-2012, five million Colombians were forcibly displaced from 6.6 million hectares of land—an area roughly equivalent to the size of Switzerland—in what was effectively a counter-agrarian reform that consolidated half of Colombia’s land in the hands of 1 per cent of its population.<sup>2</sup> By 2015, the number of internally displaced people (IDP) registered with the Colombian government was 5.859 million, giving Colombia the largest IDP population in the world after Syria.<sup>3</sup> About 58 percent of these IDPs are female.<sup>4</sup>

Colombia’s conflict has varied over time and by geography. What started in 1948 as a partisan conflict exploded into a decade of violence (“La Violencia”) that was resolved with an agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties to create a National Front that gave both parties a shared monopoly on political power and blocked an incipient movement for social change. While the partisan conflict was mitigated in the short term, vast inequities in land tenure and distribution of wealth and resources, combined with the political, economic, and social exclusion of vast portions of the population, particularly rural peasants, led to a surge in organized peaceful resistance through powerful agrarian movements such as the National Association of Peasant Smallholders (ANUC) and the Association of Peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian Women of Colombia (ANMUCIC), as well as the emergence of some 13 guerrilla insurgencies.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1990s, five of Colombia’s insurgent groups—the M-19, Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL), and Socialist Renovation Current (CRS, a section of the National Liberation Army (ELN)—had signed peace agreements with the Colombian government. Of the 4,885 ex-combatants who demobilized from these groups, 1,183 (24.2 percent) were women.<sup>6</sup> Within these groups, demobilized women

averaged about a sixth of the CRS, a quarter of the EPL, and nearly a third of the M-19—although lists of the demobilized frequently omitted the women, particularly if they were part of the political militias and not turning in arms.<sup>7</sup>

Three insurgent groups remain in arms.<sup>8</sup> These include the largely peasant-based FARC-EP (which is thought to have numbered some 18,000 at its height and had about half that number in 2015); the more urban, liberation theology-inspired ELN (thought to be comprised of approximately 1,500 militants down from a high of some 5,000); and a few hundred dissidents who did not demobilize when the EPL signed a peace agreement in 1991, and who operate primarily in the Catatumbo region of the department of Norte de Santander. Women are said to make up about 40 per cent of the FARC and between one-quarter and one-third of the ELN.<sup>9</sup>

Other armed actors in Colombia’s internal armed conflict have included regional paramilitary forces that became consolidated at the national level in 1997 as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The AUC operated purportedly to defend landowners, but also as a counter-guerrilla force, working hand-in-glove with the Colombian military.<sup>10</sup> Members of this paramilitary alliance have

used “dirty war” strategies such as disappearances, killings, death threats, sexual violence, and social cleansing to intimidate social movement leaders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, journalists, and human rights defenders, and to thwart political opponents.<sup>11</sup> These armed groups were heavily financed and backed by drug-trafficking interests, local landowners, cattle ranchers, mining and energy companies, and politicians. The ties between paramilitarism, drug-trafficking, and the State in Colombia have been, and remain, complex and significant.

Between 2003 and 2006, under President Alvaro Uribe, the AUC demobilized some 32,000 members,

about 10 percent of whom were female.<sup>12</sup> The paramilitary demobilization has in turn given rise to new regionally based criminal bands known generically as *bacrim* (*bandas criminales*) that deploy paramilitary tactics of intimidation, terror, social cleansing, and sexual violence to prevent challenges to the status quo. These groups, including the so-called *Paisas*, *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* or *Urabeños*, the *Rastrojos*, *Aguilas Negras*, the *Bloque Meta*, the *Bloque Libertadores del Vichada*, and many other regional variations, were estimated in 2013 to number 3,866 members and to operate in 167 municipalities throughout the country.<sup>13</sup>

# GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT

Experiences of armed conflict are infused with gender dimensions—sometimes obvious and more often hidden.<sup>14</sup> Analysis of the Colombian conflict and the efforts to resolve it reveal a palimpsest of attitudes and social practices related to gender, many of which pre-date the war. Women’s experiences in Colombia have historically been marked by patterns of social and political exclusion, which impact gender roles and relations. In shifting contexts of war and peace within a particular culture, gender attributes, roles, responsibilities, and identities shape, and in turn, are influenced by the norms for engagement in war and peace.

The women, peace and security agenda promoted by UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent UN resolutions recognize the links between gender equality and international peace and security. They underscore women’s capacities as peacemakers as well as their vulnerabilities as victims; and they commit member nations to advancing women’s inclusion in peace processes. Nonetheless, the realities of women’s experiences of Colombia’s armed conflict are far more complex than have been acknowledged by these normative frameworks. Women have played multiple, sometimes overlapping, roles related to war and peace in Colombia. Women have been peacemakers and peacebuilders, victims, change agents, and care providers. They have also been combatants and supporters of war, a status that is less publicized but clear when one notes the percentages of women assumed to participate in illegal armed groups in Colombia. Similarly, men have also crossed traditional gender divides that associate men with war and women with peace to become active peacemakers.

War affects women and men in the most intimate aspects of their daily lives. It shapes where they reside, the way they dress, how they walk, where they travel, the crops they grow, the foods they eat, when and where they sleep, and how secure they feel.<sup>15</sup> War experiences differ not only by gender but also by variables such as age, class, ethnicity, race, regional provenance, and religion. Acknowledging the gender-differential nature of women’s and men’s experiences as well as these multiple and overlapping identities—what some scholars have called “intersectionality”—can help illuminate how the experience of conflict is further shaped by one’s multiple identities. It also sheds light on women’s particular roles in conflict and peace, the impacts of violence on their lives, and the ways that cultural norms and ideas about gender contribute to modalities of violence. This analysis provides a basis for anticipating the diverse needs, interests, and contributions of girls, boys, women, men, and LGBTI individuals in a post-Accord period.

## Differential Impacts of the Conflict on Men and Women

The Colombian armed conflict has had different effects on particular populations. These impacts vary by gender and sexual orientation (women, men, LGBTI population), age (girls, boys, adolescents, youth, adults), and ethnicity (indigenous, Afro-descent, native islander raizales, palenquero descendents of runaway slaves, and the gypsy population known as rrom).

The armed conflict has affected men and women in different ways. It has particularly intensified the loss of collective lands of Colombia’s rural ethnic groups, increasing poverty and vulnerability for these groups, and, in some cases, endangering their cultural survival and ethnic integrity.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the conflict has had particular regional inflections,

and rural and urban populations have experienced the war in vastly different ways. In addition, the National Center for Historical Memory groups the major impacts of armed conflict on civilians into four sometimes overlapping categories, namely, emotional and psychological damage, moral damage, political damage, and sociocultural damage.<sup>17</sup> It documents the primary modalities of victimization employed in the last half century. These have included homicides (massacres, selective killings, and extrajudicial executions), forced disappearances, forced displacement (both within Colombia and beyond), kidnappings, sexual violence, torture, death threats and harassment, loss and destruction of property and goods, recruitment of minors, injury from land mines, and attacks on infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

Each of these modalities of violence affects men, women and children in different ways.<sup>19</sup> Males have been more likely than their female counterparts to be kidnapped, tortured, arbitrarily detained, and forcibly recruited by the different armed actors. Male youths constitute the majority of both combatants and non-combatants who have been killed in Colombia's internal armed conflict, and account for about 95 per cent of those killed and injured by land mines.<sup>20</sup> All of the civilians killed in what became known as the "false positives" scandal were young men.<sup>21</sup> In these heinous crimes, Army soldiers lured thousands of young men to Colombian cities with offers of jobs, killed them, and presented them as guerrillas to inflate their numbers of enemy combatant casualties.

Women and girls, on the other hand, are more likely than their male counterparts to be subjected to massive displacement, sexual violence, rape, forced labor, forced prostitution, forced abortions, and enslavement. As survivors, women often assume new roles as widows and single heads of households, and are more likely to be the caregivers for those who are disabled by war, including victims of landmines.

Individuals of every gender have been subjected to death threats, and the criminalization and stigmatization of their social and political activities. Human rights defenders, particularly leaders

of women's and LGBTI organizations, labor and peasant leaders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, journalists, magistrates, and leftist politicians are among those targeted for their work.<sup>22</sup>

The Colombian war has caused tremendous trauma for all, although the psychological impacts—depression, isolation, fear, anger, illness, grief, desperation, and fatalism—may vary by gender.<sup>23</sup> Colombians have also experienced secondary traumas of the war through their relationships to others. This trauma can be particularly intense for women, who make up the majority of the survivors. As Ruby Castaño noted, "We women are the mothers of guerrillas, of military, of paramilitary; we are the origins of life."<sup>24</sup>

As mothers, women are particularly vulnerable to the recruitment of their children by armed actors, particularly when the women are the sole heads of household.<sup>25</sup> While cumulative statistics on the number of widows are not available, in the southwestern department of Putumayo, women's groups note that one out of every 10 women is a widow, and 62 per cent of Putumayan women have lost an average of two children due to conflict-related violence.<sup>26</sup>

Gender inequality and the accompanying social, economic, and political exclusion faced by women is exacerbated by membership in other historically disenfranchised sectors. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women and girls are at particular risk for poverty, displacement, violations of their collective and individual rights, and sexual violence.<sup>27</sup> The National Organization of Indigenous Colombians (ONIC) reported that an increased military presence, such as when soldiers are brought in to protect mega-projects in or near indigenous territories, generates a surge in violent conflict that has a particular impact on indigenous girls and women, including through a rise in prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence.<sup>28</sup> The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that all parties to the armed conflict inflict sexual violence upon indigenous Colombian women as a method of warfare.<sup>29</sup>

## Gendered Impacts of Displacement

Of 5,859,075 displaced persons registered with the national victims' unit in 2015, 39 per cent were women, 35 per cent were men, 20 per cent were boys under 18 years of age, and 19 per cent were girls.<sup>30</sup> Women and children constitute 78 per cent of Colombia's IDP population, and a disproportionate number of the IDP population is Afro-Colombian or indigenous.<sup>31</sup>

Some 97 per cent of all IDPs live under the poverty line without access to basic services including health, security, justice, and education. They are at high risk for disease, malnutrition, and violation of their basic human rights. Driven from their lands by massacres, selective killings, death threats, and sexual violence, displaced women frequently are, or become, sole heads of the household, and must find ways to recompose their lives and their futures. In their new locations, displaced women are exposed to further risk of sexual violence

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence is one of the most extreme expressions of structural violence against women, and forms part of a continuum of violence and power that predates the armed conflict. Gender-based violence both reflects and perpetuates structural inequalities and its pervasiveness is only beginning to be recognized.<sup>38</sup> The full magnitude of the problem is not known. One study by Oxfam-International found that nearly half a million women and girls in Colombia had experienced sexual and gender-based violence, a small fraction of the numbers documented in official statistics.<sup>39</sup> Thousands of cases of domestic violence are reported in Colombia each year; many more are not.<sup>40</sup> Marital rape and abuse is common and widely tolerated.<sup>41</sup> High levels of impunity discourage women from coming forward to denounce violence. For boys and men, the social taboos against reporting sexual

and are often targeted for exercising leadership in their communities.<sup>32</sup> Their children face increased exposure to forced recruitment by illegal armed actors as well.<sup>33</sup>

While forced displacement affects boys, girls, adolescents, adults, women, ethnic groups, and the disabled in differential ways, it places a particularly heavy burden on women and on ethnic communities.<sup>34</sup> Poor, rural women are especially vulnerable as they often lack land titles or collective rights to property.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, women who defend their lands, resist displacement, or seek to return to their appropriated lands have been subject to particular attack.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, displacement of Afro-Colombian and indigenous women has an added spiritual and cultural element, given the centrality of land in their cosmovisions. In some cases, displacement exacerbates the possibility of the group's cultural extinction.<sup>37</sup>

violence are fierce. Silence tends to be the norm, and the tendency for underreporting sexual violence cannot be understated. Consequently, it is difficult to measure and address the magnitude of the problem.

The institutional capacity for addressing sexual violence is likewise inadequate.<sup>42</sup> Those who seek medical support or report abuse to authorities risk further abuse and degrading treatment by medical practitioners and police, who often lack training in established protocols.<sup>43</sup> Sexual violence against males and gender-based violence more broadly has received little attention from the academic community, the policy-making community, or from the wider public. Furthermore, there is a tremendous knowledge gap surrounding the issue of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, and even less public policy to address the needs of these children.<sup>44</sup>

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in a Context of War

War exacerbates pre-existing patterns of discrimination and violence against women. In addition, sexual and gender-based violence impacts the shape of the war itself. Sexual violence or the threat of sexual violence have been prime drivers of displacement

in Colombia's internal armed conflict. One UNHCR report in 2011 found that 17.7 per cent of the IDPs questioned fled their homes because of sexual violence; an Oxfam study found that two of every ten internally displaced women surveyed had fled because

of sexual violence.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, intra-familial violence as well as restrictive gender roles have caused youth to join armed groups.

Conflict-related sexual violence refers to “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is linked, directly or indirectly (temporally, geographically or causally) to a conflict.”<sup>46</sup> Conflict-related sexual violence affects not only the survivors, but their families and their communities as well.<sup>47</sup> In Colombia, women and girls constitute some four-fifths of the victims of sexual violence officially registered with the government.<sup>48</sup> Men and boys represent almost a fifth of the victims of sexual violence. The vast majority of both male and female survivors of sexual violence are minors.<sup>49</sup>

Colombia’s Constitutional Court found in 2008, that sexual violence against women has been “a habitual, extensive, systematic and invisible practice in the context of the Colombian armed conflict.”<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, Colombia’s Attorney General, the Comptroller General, and the Armed Forces took measures to address the issue, and particularly, to improve women’s access to justice in cases of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>51</sup> Still, the Constitutional Court has found repeatedly that sexual violence has continued to be a risk for women in the context of the armed conflict and forced displacement, and that the State should take further legal measures to guarantee women’s rights and reverse practices of impunity.<sup>52</sup>

All of Colombia’s armed actors have engaged in sexual violence against women, but the practice of conflict-related sexual violence nonetheless differs by armed group, by region, and by context.<sup>53</sup> Understanding these variations and the goals, policy and practice of each armed group engaged in violence is an important element for addressing sexual crimes against women.

Post-demobilization groups and other local armed elements are as the primary perpetrators of these crimes, followed by guerrilla groups (FARC and ELN), and then by members of the Colombian armed forces, according to the Office of the Ombudsman.<sup>54</sup> These paramilitary successor groups are increasingly

attacking women leaders and human rights defenders, especially those working with forcibly displaced communities, campaigning for land restitution, or representing survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>55</sup> These threats appear to be of a more political nature, often explicitly related to women’s gender and transgression of traditional gender roles. Likewise, because of their gender, women living near illegal mining settlements under the control of armed groups face heightened risk to sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and trafficking.<sup>56</sup>

Extensive documentation exists of the repertoires of sexual violence used first by the AUC paramilitaries (sometimes in complicity or with acquiescence of State security forces) and then by their successor groups in regions across the country, particularly in the departments of the North Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The patterns share some commonalities, including the goal of expanding and consolidating power by terrorizing communities. In nine of the worst massacres committed by paramilitaries, sexual violence against women was deployed.<sup>57</sup>

In the department of Norte de Santander, Salvatore Mancuso, a member of the central command of the AUC and commander of the Bloque Catatumbo (part of the Northern Bloc), mapped out a strategy to control and occupy the department based on a campaign of terror that included massacres, dismemberment, torture, and sexual violence.<sup>58</sup> In the departments of Cesar and Magdalena, paramilitaries in the fronts under the leadership of “Jorge 40,” used sexual violence to expel the local population from their lands and to punish women who challenged their orders.<sup>59</sup> They beat and otherwise psychologically and physically abused women known to be the girlfriends or partners of guerrillas. Their abuse included multiple group rapes that often led to pregnancies, and the kidnapping of young girls who they kept in farmhouses for months at a time as sexual slaves. Jorge 40’s troops also used sexual violence to obtain information from girls and women they accused of being guerrillas.<sup>60</sup>

In the Alta Guajira region of northeastern Colombia, the Wayúu Counterinsurgency Front of the Northern Bloc of the Colombian Self-Defense Forces (AUC) carried out a massacre in Bahía Portete, where

they targeted indigenous Wayúu matriarchs who were defending indigenous territorial autonomy and challenging paramilitary dominance in the region.<sup>61</sup> The Front inflicted tremendous cultural and moral damage on the Wayúu, shooting the men, and decapitating the women and slashing their breasts.<sup>62</sup>

In the neighboring department of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Hernán Giraldo ('El Patrón'), head of an AUC successor group called the Bloque Resistencia Tayrona, used selective assassinations and sexual violence against impoverished young girls to consolidate his control over basic services, movement, and infrastructure. Giraldo maintained his control of the region with the complicity of the girls' parents, who turned over their adolescent daughters in exchange for favors, loans, payment, work, or protection.<sup>63</sup>

In the Urabá region in Colombia's western departments of Antioquia and Chocó, Dairo Antonio úsuga David, alias 'Otoniel,' and other members of the Urabeños have recruited and sexually abused dozens of impoverished 12-14 year-old girls with the assistance of a female recruiter.<sup>64</sup> The Urabeños ply the girls with gifts, pay for them to have breast implants and liposuction, and require them to take emergency contraception or have an abortion if they become pregnant. They also give favors and jobs to the girls' families.<sup>65</sup> These measures not only serve the sexual desires of the paramilitaries, but also secure the support of these impoverished communities and help to solidify support for the paramilitary presence in the region. The Urabeños were recently found buying girls from criminal networks that control prostitution in Medellín and Cartagena to serve as sex slaves in rural mining areas in other parts of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Further down the Pacific coast, in Buenaventura, a largely Afro-Colombian port city with some of the highest levels of violence and displacement in the country, armed groups fighting each other for territorial control rape, torture, and kill women and youth to demonstrate their power and as retribution against rival groups.<sup>67</sup>

Paramilitary bosses manipulated gender norms to their advantage in more subtle ways as well, consolidating control by re-signifying festivals, religious celebrations, and sporting events. Marco Tulio Pérez

Guzmán (alias 'el Oso'), the paramilitary commander of the Heroes of Montes de María Bloc, used the local custom of beauty contests to identify the most beautiful virgins in the Montes de María region, and hand-selected from these young girls for his pleasure and use.<sup>68</sup>

Armed groups fight each other for territory, transportation corridors, and illicit crops. In many regions where the State has been historically absent, armed groups have served as its proxy, providing basic services, mediating conflicts, and setting the rules and social codes by which communities live. Their control also extends to the regulation of gender relations and the population's sexuality and affective relations.

Across the North Atlantic coastal region, paramilitaries punished those who challenged patriarchal norms with penalties that were differentiated by gender. Girls and women who engaged in behaviors considered to depart from appropriate female roles, such as being 'bad neighbors', 'bad partners' or 'bad girls,' were subject to public shaming, forced domestic labor, and enslavement.<sup>69</sup> Men and boys who engaged in what paramilitary considered 'undesirable masculinities'—like stealing, using drugs, hunting prohibited animals, or carrying sexually-transmitted diseases—could be punished with torture, homicide or forced disappearance.<sup>70</sup>

In the Putumayo department in southwestern Colombia, paramilitary groups established two different sets of codes of behavior and dress for women that differentiated between appropriate norms for 'decent' and 'indecent' women. If women transgress the particular gender-defined roles they have been assigned (i.e., as mothers or as prostitutes), they could be subjected to hard labor, sexual slavery, forced domestic service, forced disappearance, torture, and even death.<sup>71</sup>

Likewise, in the Putumayo region, the FARC established regulations that reinforce traditional gender roles with a different dimension. There, FARC militants mediate disputes between couples, and set strict protective standards of behavior, including sanctions and even death for men who beat their wives or commit rape.<sup>72</sup>

In general, unlike the paramilitary militias, the FARC has not used sexual violence against women as a means of exercising territorial control and FARC regulations prohibit rape and overt sexual harassment.<sup>73</sup> There are nonetheless reports of the use of sexual violence to forcibly recruit girls and women, and male FARC commanders reportedly abuse their positions of authority to form sexual liaisons with young girls.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the FARC and other insurgent groups violate women's sexual and reproductive rights by imposing and enforcing strict regulations regarding female sexuality and reproductive behavior on their members.<sup>75</sup> The insurgents encourage family planning and prohibit pregnancy. "Girls as young as twelve are required to use contraception, and must have abortions if they get pregnant," notes Human Rights Watch.<sup>76</sup> The Ministry of Defense reported that 43 of 244 demobilized female fighters stated they had been forced to have abortions.<sup>77</sup> Demobilizing female FARC ex-combatants confirm the FARC practice of forced abortions, which FARC leadership cites as necessary during wartime, and part of the code of rules agreed to upon joining the insurgency.<sup>78</sup> Restrictions over sexuality and reproductive rights however sometimes motivate women to leave armed groups.

State security forces have also been found responsible for crimes of sexual violence against women. In July 2010, the Colombian government issued Directive 11, which outlined its official policy of zero tolerance for sexual violence against women. The Human Rights Ombudsman found nonetheless in Cartagena that State security forces have engaged in 'a generalized practice' of sexual abuse that "takes advantage of the conditions of subordination of women, their precarious economic conditions resulting from lack of protection by the State, and the acceptance of

existing ideas in the local culture, such as a woman's body is an object that belongs to men."<sup>79</sup> The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have urged the government to sanction violators and to enforce the policy more effectively.<sup>80</sup> While the Ministry of Defense suggests that the cases of sexual violence are isolated cases of opportunistic behavior, human rights groups and women's organizations link sexual violence by the security forces to military strategies that stigmatize civilians as guerrilla collaborators and seek control of populations and territory through the abuse of power; they underscore the gravity of such crimes, which they consider to be crimes against humanity, given the particular responsibility of the public security forces to protect the population and prevent such violence.<sup>81</sup>

Government structures and protocols can contribute to the problem. In one report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1820, the UN Secretary-General identified three common factors that contribute to and exacerbate sexual violence, namely, inadequate measures to prevent sexual violence and protect civilians; inadequate measures to combat impunity for sexual violence; and inadequate measures to address continuing discrimination against women and girls, in law and practice.<sup>82</sup> In Order 092 (2008), the Constitutional Court forwarded 183 prioritized cases of sexual violence to the Comptroller General for accelerated prosecution. Of those cases where the perpetrator was identified, 58 percent were paramilitaries, 23 percent were government security forces, and 8 percent of those indicted were guerrillas. Five years later, violators had been convicted in only three cases—a 98.8 per cent rate of impunity.

# ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH GENDER EQUALITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Increasingly, research is showing strong correlations between peace, security, and a society's treatment of women. More than levels of wealth, democracy, or ethno-religious factors, the best predictor of a state's peacefulness and stability is how well it treats its women.<sup>85</sup>

Colombia is a pioneer in legislation and jurisprudence with respect to women's rights and, more recently, in developing a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women. On paper, women in Colombia enjoy a broad range of rights that have been the product of decades of struggle. The 1991 Constitution and subsequent legislation and judicial findings recognize women's rights, penalize violence against women and gender-based violence, guarantee women's political participation and leadership roles in peacemaking and peacebuilding, provide equal access to State resources for women, and guarantee women's relief and recovery from the conflict.<sup>86</sup>

Colombian laws on violence against women are consistent with its international obligations in forums such as the United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS). Law 248 (1995) obligates the Colombian State, as a signatory to the OAS Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Sanction and Eliminate Violence against Women, to reduce and eliminate violence against women. Law 294 (1996) characterizes domestic violence as a crime. Law 599 (2000) assigns penalties for sexual violence, and Law 882 (2004) increases those sentences for physical and psychological violence against women. Law 1413 (2010) recognizes women's contributions to unpaid

work, and economic and social development.<sup>87</sup> Law 1257 (2008), promulgated in 2011, is comprehensive in scope across the judicial, health, education and labor sectors and guarantees women a life free of violence.<sup>88</sup> In 2009, Colombia became subject to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court whose Rome Statute is the first international instrument explicitly to consider as war crimes and crimes against humanity sexual and gender-based crimes—including persecution based on gender, as well as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>89</sup>

The Colombian State has designed a progressive normative framework for gender equality and its National Policy for Comprehensive Gender Equity (2012) promises greater attention to violence prevention and the needs of victims of sexual violence.<sup>90</sup> Colombia is also crafting innovative reparations for women victims. The Victims and Land Restitution Law (2011, Art. 114-18) establishes preferential treatment for women seeking restitution after having been expelled from their lands and provides specific reparations for women and girl survivors of sexual violence.<sup>91</sup> Increasingly those seeking to reclaim their lands are calling for a rights-based, as opposed to a paternalistic, approach to reparations.<sup>92</sup>

Law 1719 (June 2014) improves women's access to justice, provides protection for survivors of conflict-based sexual violence, holds that sexual violence can be considered a crime against humanity, and expands the range of punishable offenses in the Penal Code.<sup>93</sup> Decree 1480 (October 2014) established May 25<sup>th</sup> as a national day of dignity for women victims of sexual violence and commits the Colombian government to give an annual accounting every May 25<sup>th</sup> of advances it has made in terms of truth, justice and reparations for victims of sexual violence. The decree fulfilled the collective reparations solicited by journalist Jineth Bedoya, a victim of sexual violence of paramilitary groups.<sup>94</sup>

In Colombia, then, progressive legislation, judicial decisions, and executive decrees back women's rights and promise to address sexual and gender-based violence. Nonetheless, centuries of structural discrimination, mistreatment, and gender-based violence, have been exacerbated by a history of colonialism, racism, homophobia, and poverty. Elite political culture is marked by practices of exclusion and indifference to women's contributions. Strong cultural expectations that women's place is in the home prevail. Patriarchal attitudes that position women as inferior to men, discriminatory practices of exclusion and mistreatment of women, and entrenched gender stereotypes and roles continue to be strong barriers to equality.

## Impacts of the Colombian Conflict on LGBTI Persons<sup>100</sup>

The legal recognition of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals is relatively recent in Colombia. Beginning with the 1991 Constitution and with numerous advances spearheaded by the Constitutional Court, Colombia has taken significant steps forward.<sup>101</sup> However, gender discrimination and prejudicial attitudes toward LGBTI persons, especially trans women, remain deep-seated, sometimes exacerbated by poverty and ethnicity.

In the context of the internal armed conflict, intolerance for gender diversity in Colombia has been life threatening. LGBTI persons have been persecuted, attacked, threatened, forcibly displaced, or killed as a result of their gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>102</sup> Sexual violence against LGBTI individuals is sometimes inflicted as a form of "corrective

Overcoming this legacy has proven difficult so far. In practice, Colombian women have yet to achieve full political participation and economic equality.<sup>95</sup> While at the national level, Colombian law mandates that 30 percent of the Cabinet-level posts be filled by women, female elected representation remains relatively low. Colombia ranks 70<sup>th</sup> out of 190 countries in terms of female political representation in the Congress.<sup>96</sup> In Colombia's Congressional elections in March 2014, women secured 33 seats (19 per cent) in the House of Representatives, and 23 seats (22.5 per cent) in the Senate, which was close to the global average, but under the regional average for the Americas.<sup>97</sup> At the local level, Colombian women are dismally underrepresented. In 2013, they held 9.8 per cent of the mayoral seats, and 6.25 per cent of the governorships, and there were no women elected at all at the mayoral or gubernatorial level in the departments of Amazonas, Arauca, Guaviare, Guainía, Putumayo, Vaupés and Vichada.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, ethnic and gender considerations, as well as lack of access to resources and educational opportunities (particularly in the rural areas), combine to create seemingly insurmountable barriers to the participation of Afro-Colombian and indigenous women in national, regional and municipal elected offices.<sup>99</sup>

violence" or social cleansing, and often forces the displacement of the subjects of such violence, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities in rural areas.<sup>103</sup> The Victims' Unit, which in 2011, created a classification in its registry of victims that allowed for the identification of sexual orientation, has begun reparations processes for 518 LGBTI persons.<sup>104</sup> These numbers undoubtedly are low, given widespread social prejudices and stigmatization against those who self-identify as LGBTI persons. About half of those registered are transgender, the most vulnerable of the LGBTI population; one-third of the registered victims are gay; one-tenth are lesbian; and just under five per cent are bisexuals.<sup>105</sup>

Types of victimizations of LGBTI persons vary, and displacement is the most commonly reported

violation. Of the total LGBTI victims registered, 70 per cent report forced displacement from their homes by armed groups, 12 per cent have been intimidated and received death threats, 8.91 per cent have lost a family member to homicide, and 2.71 per cent have suffered from a terrorist act. Nine LGBTI persons have been sexually abused and five were forcibly disappeared.<sup>106</sup> An undocumented number of LGBTI individuals have committed suicide as a result of being persecuted.<sup>107</sup> Armed groups sometimes target LGBTI persons and leaders of organizations that educate and defend their rights, like Caribe Afirmativo and Colombia Diversa.<sup>108</sup> Transgender women in Colombia face particularly severe discrimination by State and private actors in accessing health, education, and government services.<sup>109</sup>

The manipulation of gender norms and ‘social cleansing’ operations conducted by the paramilitary

AUC and its successor organizations have affected LGBTI individuals in particularly insidious ways, often making communities complicit in the physical and emotional persecution against homosexuals and other LGBTI individuals who fail to conform to traditional gender stereotypes.<sup>110</sup>

In one particularly grotesque incident, a paramilitary commander organized two days of boxing matches in May 2003 in the largely Afro-Colombian town of San Onofre, a town known for producing three world boxing champions. There the commander forced 16 gay youths, under threat of death, to fight each other in the boxing ring or to leave town. The matches proved traumatic for the gay participants, who were roundly ridiculed and humiliated by the townspeople; several of the youth were forced to abandon the town and at least one committed suicide.<sup>111</sup>

## Impacts of the Colombian Conflict on Girls, Boys, and Adolescents

In addition to its differential impact on women, men, and LGBTI persons, Colombia’s armed conflict has had particular effects on girls, boys, and youths. In the last decade, international protections and norms, including a range of UN resolutions such as UNSCR 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009), have sought to institute greater protections for children in the context of armed conflict and to document and address the use of child soldiers.<sup>112</sup>

The rules defining minors are contradictory. International humanitarian law permits the recruitment of children at age 15, but the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2000), ratified by Colombia in 2005, sets the standard at 18 years of age.<sup>113</sup> Illegal recruitment of minors carries a 6-10 year jail sentence under Colombian law, and is prohibited by the Geneva Conventions, the Statute of Rome, and the International Convention of Human Rights.<sup>114</sup>

Within and against those norms, each of Colombia’s armed groups sets its own policy and practice. Since 1982, FARC regulations have limited youth recruitment to those between 15-30 years of age. In the context of the peace process, on February 12, 2015, the FARC raised its minimum recruitment age by two years to 17 years of age, and, one year later, to 18 years

of age.<sup>115</sup> Until 1996, when it increased its official minimum age for recruitment to 16, the ELN allowed children under 15 to participate in ‘revolutionary activities’ but not ‘hostilities.’<sup>116</sup> Colombian military service is obligatory for all males and begins at age 18, though recently new provisions were promoted to respect the rights of conscientious objectors.<sup>117</sup>

In Colombia, young people fight on all sides of the war.<sup>118</sup> Children and adolescents, particularly in some coca-growing regions, such as Putumayo, are at high risk of forced recruitment.<sup>119</sup> Almost half of FARC members are said to have been recruited at a young age. A study done by Human Rights Watch in 2003 put the total number of child soldiers in FARC, ELN, and paramilitary AUC conservatively at 11,000 youth.<sup>120</sup>

Much of what we know about youth recruits comes from those who have left armed groups. Between 1999 and January of 2015, the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar/ICBF), the government entity responsible for serving the needs of minors who leave the war (desvinculados), served 5,708 minors; 277 of these children demobilized in 2014 alone.<sup>121</sup> Twenty-nine per cent of the demobilized children were girls, and the remaining 71 per cent were boys.<sup>122</sup> According to ICBF, 60 per cent of the minors had left the FARC, 20

per cent had been with the paramilitary AUC, 15 per cent were with the ELN, and just under 5 per cent demobilized from criminal bands.<sup>123</sup> By May 1, 2015, 7,750 individuals had registered with the government's victims' unit as victims of forced recruitment by armed actors.<sup>124</sup>

Reasons for joining armed groups—and for leaving them—are infused with gender dimensions. Domestic and intra-familial violence is one of the leading push factors that cause both girls and boys to leave home to join armed groups and gangs.<sup>125</sup> Push and pull factors for joining these groups can differ for boys and girls, however, motivations may vary for joining different groups as well. For boys, joining armed groups—both the military as well as illegal armed groups—provides one of the few rites of passage available for marking the transition into manhood. Participation in armed groups offers boys opportunities to earn income, independence, and status, as well as to gain access to education, food, camaraderie, and recognition.<sup>126</sup>

Girls respond to an overlapping set of push and pull factors. Domestic abuse and the lack of meaningful options for girls are among the main push factors women cite for joining the FARC.<sup>127</sup> Girls in some regions join the insurgency as an alternative to prostitution or coca production.<sup>128</sup> For some girls, joining an armed group has provided a way to break with restrictive gender expectations, and offered new leadership opportunities that were not accessible in the broader Colombian society.<sup>129</sup> Other pull factors for girls include educational opportunities. One FARC commander told me that she wanted to join the FARC at age 13 in order to learn to read, but the FARC told her she had to wait until she was 14.<sup>130</sup>

Since peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC began in 2012, criminal bands have surpassed the FARC as the main recruiter of minors; half of *bacrim* members are under age 18. The Defensoría del Pueblo calls *bacrim* “the primary risk factor for recruitment and illicit use of boys, girls, and adolescents.”<sup>131</sup> The office has documented situations of risk of childhood recruitment in 26 of Colombia's 32 departments. Of the 138 cases where the recruiting group is known,

65 are former paramilitaries, 51 cases are FARC, and 22 are cases of risk of recruitment by the ELN.<sup>132</sup>

Once they join the ranks of an armed group, youth, particularly girls and young women, are often entrapped in high-risk activities, including illicit drug and arms trafficking, human trafficking, prostitution, and illegal mining operations. Youth, especially impoverished rural peasants with few economic alternatives, provide illegal armed groups with a vulnerable work force in all phases of drug trafficking including illicit crop cultivation, cocaine production, and distribution of drugs. They are charged with harvesting coca leaves in fields that are often planted with landmines to discourage manual eradication. Girls and women often smuggle coca paste or cocaine—hidden in the most inner recesses of their bodies—across the border at great risk to their health and lives.<sup>133</sup>

The overlap of age and gender makes young girls particularly vulnerable in the newly emerging conflicts around illegal mining operations. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, visited Colombia in 2015 and found that members of non-State armed groups and criminal gangs are forcibly recruiting 12-15 year old children to serve as sex workers for mining operations and replacing them with other children when they become ‘too used’ or ‘too sick’.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, sexual exploitation of girls is taking on new forms. In the port city of Buenaventura and the western department of Risaralda, ‘express kidnappings’ of young girls were recently documented by the Defensoría del Pueblo.<sup>135</sup> In this phenomenon, illegal groups kidnap girls and adolescents for a few hours at a time for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Boys, girls, and adolescents in Colombia suffer the ravages of war in an abundance of other ways, both directly and indirectly. They are killed by clashes between armed actors and killed or crippled for life by landmines.<sup>136</sup> Colombian children suffer directly when their parents or relatives are killed or threatened, or when their families and communities are displaced. An untold number of children are born of sexual violence, and many are sexually abused themselves. All of these groups suffer rejection and stigmatization by the broader Colombian society.

Both the State and family members often fail to protect children or have shown themselves unable to do so. While schools should provide safe spaces for education, as a result of the war, classes are often suspended, buildings are destroyed and used for military purposes, and armed groups sometimes threaten or attack teachers.<sup>137</sup> The Colombian Ministry of Defense has engaged children in civic-military activities in violation of the Child Protection Code (Law 1098 of 2006).<sup>138</sup> Overall there is widespread impunity for violations against children.<sup>139</sup>

Children are both victims of war and, as soldiers of the State and as participants in insurgencies and other illegal armed groups, perpetrators of war. Although beyond the scope of this paper, recent UN Security Council

resolution 2250, adopted unanimously in December 2015, begins to open the door to thinking about youth not merely as victims and perpetrators of violence, but also as a key part of the solution.<sup>140</sup> The resolution underscores the critical role of youth as agents of change in the prevention and resolution of conflict. In Colombia, those under the age of fifty have yet to know peace in their lifetimes, but they are the generation of hope who will be called on to break the cycle of conflict. There is an urgent need to do psychosocial work and undertake peace pedagogies with young people in order to break these generational patterns of hatred and vengeance.<sup>141</sup> Some youths have already begun embarking on this path.<sup>142</sup>

# WOMEN AND COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESSES

Colombia has experienced numerous peace processes, some of which resulted in the demobilization or disarmament of armed groups. Other peace processes, particularly with the FARC and the ELN, have been incomplete. In past peace processes in Colombia, women have rarely held roles on negotiating teams, yet with each new process they have built on what came before, found ways to pressure for their interests and influence the process, and gotten closer and closer to the peace table.

Only a handful of women have been engaged as negotiators at Colombia's peace tables. In the years from 1990-1994, the Colombian government signed peace accords with the EPL, PRT, MAQL and CRS and carried out dialogues with the Communist Party and the Simón Bolívar Coordinating Group.<sup>143</sup> In agreements reached with these groups, only one women guerrilla was a signatory; the remaining signatories—including negotiators, witnesses, and guarantors—were all men.<sup>144</sup> Likewise, women were absent from the talks that led to the demobilization of the paramilitary AUC in 2004.<sup>145</sup> In the various talks and exploratory dialogues with the ELN that took place from 2005-7 or in the current ones taking place since 2013, women have had virtually no visible role.<sup>146</sup>

Similarly, in the four sets of peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC over the course of the last three decades, few women have been given seats at the table. In the last peace talks with the FARC from 1998-2002, the government of President Andrés Pastrana named María Emma Mejía as one of its principal negotiators; she was a signatory on several accords reached during those talks.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, an important role tangential to the table opened when the negotiating team named Ana Teresa Bernal, former director of REDEPAZ, to coordinate the thematic committees to channel civil society inputs into the process.<sup>148</sup>

Mejía and Bernal used their positions to open the process to more women. They urged the FARC to incorporate a woman on their team as well, and the

FARC soon named Mariana Páez to their negotiating team.<sup>149</sup> Together, the women organized a public hearing on economy and employment. Six hundred women, representing a vast spectrum of Colombian society, participated in the hearing, which took place at the site of the talks in Caguán on June 25, 2000, coordinated by REDEPAZ, the National Network of Women (Red Nacional de Mujeres), and the Association of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Peasant Women of Colombia (ANMUCIC). The main goals of the hearing were to give visibility to gender inequality, to demand women's representation at the peace table, and to give the women's movement a role in the negotiating process.<sup>150</sup> The meetings delivered on the first goal of making the issue of gender inequality more visible. Securing a greater role for women and the women's movement in the peace process however proved difficult in the short term, as high-level government authorities did not even attend the hearings. While the hearing and women's engagement in it demonstrated the tremendous depth, diversity and convening capacity of women and introduced new forms of mobilization marked by ritual, symbolism, and creativity, the peace talks themselves were already entering into crisis and new resources from Plan Colombia would favor a military solution in Colombia.<sup>151</sup>

Other developments in the international sphere would nonetheless provide Colombian women with supportive new frameworks for their peacemaking efforts. With the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the Colombian government

took on the three-fold commitment to “the *prevention* of violent conflict, the *protection* of all civilians, and the *participation* of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding,” and Colombian women sought to hold them accountable to their international commitment.

In a new post-1325 context, Colombian women established the Women’s Initiative for Peace (Iniciativa

## Peacebuilding In the Midst of War

When peace talks between the Pastrana government and the FARC finally collapsed on February 20, 2002, disillusionment was widespread. Presidential elections shortly thereafter ushered in Alvaro Uribe on campaign promises to defeat the guerrillas militarily. Those who continued to favor peaceful solutions were widely dismissed as guerrilla-sympathizers.

Many women’s organizations nonetheless continued to insist on the need to find political solutions and to prepare the ground once again for future negotiations. In the absence of peace talks, they worked quietly in the regions to address the growing violence, and they organized regional and massive national marches to keep their demands for peace in the public eye.<sup>154</sup>

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Colombia topped the charts as the most dangerous place in the world to be a journalist, labor leader, or a human rights defender. Women documented, publicized, and denounced the increase in human rights violations under President Alvaro Uribe’s ‘democratic security’ program. They challenged the broader costs of militarization and budget priorities that favored defense and security at the expense of other social needs. Using their socially sanctioned roles as mothers, women were well placed to critique the lack of jobs and opportunities that left youth vulnerable to recruitment by the armed groups, prostitution, and drugs; and they sought solutions to the problems presented by Colombia’s illicit economies. In the coca-growing region of Putumayo, which was the target zone for Plan Colombia, women called for alternative development options and charged that the aerial fumigation of illicit crops was destroying food crops as well as coca crops, and contributing to greater poverty and hunger.<sup>155</sup>

de Mujeres por la Paz) and coalitions like the “1325 Coalition” and worked to ensure women a place at future peace tables.<sup>152</sup> They secured inclusion in the National Development Plan of a provision requiring “the promotion of direct and autonomous participation of women’s organizations in different national and local dialogues and political negotiation processes related to social and armed conflicts.”<sup>153</sup>

Women have sought to keep the plight of victims and the impact of the war on civilian populations in the public eye and to build support for a negotiated settlement and to “humanize” the war. The IMP and ASFAMIPAZ developed a campaign known as ‘Operation Siriri’ to pressure the government and the armed actors to seek humanitarian agreements with the insurgents. Relatives of those who were kidnapped and held by guerrilla insurgents have traveled around the world seeking the release of their loved ones.<sup>157</sup> Ruta Pacífica supported the diplomatic efforts of Senator Piedad Córdoba to lobby for a humanitarian accord, a role that was consecrated by President Uribe who appointed her to facilitate an accord in 2008. Córdoba played a critical and widely unrecognized role in opening communications between the FARC, civil society, and the government in search of a political solution to the conflict. She facilitated the release of more than a dozen hostages, gradually helping to build the confidence needed for the peace talks that were launched in 2012.

At the regional level, the Pacific Route of Women (Ruta Pacífica de la Mujer) and the Women’s Association of Eastern Antioquia (Asociación de Mujeres del Oriente Antioqueño/AMOR) negotiated local-level ceasefires that held for several months in a limited area. Women, particularly women of a variety of faith traditions, played a quiet but significant role in mediating conflicts in their communities. In Arauca, Sur de Bolívar, Putumayo, Cauca, Montes de María, Magdalena Medio, Antioquia, and throughout the country, women dialogued directly with armed groups to secure the release of hostages, to prevent violence and displacement, to recover children recruited by the armed actors, to protect their communities, and to secure basic necessities.<sup>158</sup> They navigated

their way through occupied territories and persuaded the insurgents to lift road blockades and to allow the passage of food, medicine, and people through insurgent, paramilitary, and military checkpoints.

Women have increasingly articulated the particular impacts of the war on children, women, and more recently, LGBTI persons. They have raised awareness about the extent of sexual and gender-based violence and its impact on the victims, their families, and their communities. In their efforts, women have both contributed to and drawn on international human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as the norms, conventions, and laws favoring women's rights. In addition, women's groups have increasingly sought to create global alliances and engage international support in their struggle.

## Women and the Peace Talks with the FARC

President Juan Manuel Santos assumed office in August 2010, promising that he held the key to peace and would use them when the moment was propitious. Following a year-and-a-half of quiet confidence-building measures and six months of secret exploratory talks in Cuba, the newly elected president and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño (aka Timoleón Jiménez, aka "Timochenko") announced that the Colombian government and the FARC would begin peace talks in October 2012—the first attempt in more than a decade.<sup>160</sup>

When the peace table was launched in Norway as announced, men occupied all of the seats, with the exception of the one held by the Norwegian moderator. Formal talks opened in Cuba the following month. Each side was permitted up to ten negotiators, including five "plenipotentiaries" with full negotiating power, and a team of up to 30 total members. In Havana, all of the plenipotentiaries and all but one of the negotiators on both sides were men. The exception was Tanja Nijmeijer (aka Alexandra Nariño, the "Dutch guerrilla"), who briefly joined her nine male colleagues at the table. It was a bit of a shock given all of the progress in national and international normative frameworks demanding women's inclusion in peacemaking and all of the work of Colombian women and their allies to prepare the way for peace talks.

Colombian women pressured for and obtained visits to investigate women's rights in Colombia by UN Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy (2001), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Susana Villarán, 2005). They participate regularly in hearings of the Inter-American Court for Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission for Women at the Organization of American States, as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the treaty body for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and other mechanisms available to them at the United Nations.<sup>159</sup> They also worked to secure the 2012 visit to Colombia of Margot Wallström, the then UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Although the scenario has improved over time, with considerable efforts on the part of Colombian women's organizations, for the most part, women have continued to be unrecognized and undervalued partners for peace.

Women's minimal presence as lead negotiators is misleading, however. At the table, around the table, behind the table, and at side tables, women are having their say and shaping the path to peace. From civil society as well, Colombian women have accompanied and advanced the peace process, shaped public opinion, supported a negotiated solution to the conflict, generated analysis and organized inputs, and built their capacity to engage. Women's organizations have repeatedly insisted that the parties cannot leave the table until an agreement is reached to end the conflict, and they continue urging the Colombian government and the ELN to enter formal peace talks.

Throughout the peace process, women have taken advantage of every opportunity and mechanism available to participate in civil society conferences, working groups, and research initiatives on the agenda items at the Havana peace tables. In 2012 and 2013, women participated in the civil society forums on agrarian development policy, political participation, illicit crops and drug trafficking, and victims established at the

behest of the parties in Havana and facilitated by the United Nations System in Colombia and the Center for Reflection and Monitoring the Peace Talks (“Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz”) of the National University (Universidad Nacional). Women participated in working groups (*mesas de trabajo regionales*) in nine regions of Colombia organized by the Peace Commissions of the House and Senate in Colombia, with the support of the United Nations System. A special effort was made to ensure that 40-50% of the participants in the regional working groups were women. With the support of UN-Women, women’s proposals in each consultation were synthesized and made available to the peace negotiators in Havana. Furthermore, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres was one of the civil society conveners of the 2014 Regional Encounters for Peace that took place in 12 regions of the country. Supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, these meetings were designed to air the concerns, proposals, and resources that civil society could offer in different regions of the country for a post-Accord era.

After the first year of peace talks, the persistent engagement of Colombian women and their international allies achieved some success in opening the peace process to women and victims from diverse populations across the country. The change came following a landmark National Summit of Women for Peace in October 2013, initiated by a consortium of nine Colombian women’s organizations representing different ethnic, regional, cultural, and political backgrounds.<sup>162</sup> The Summit had the backing of UN-Women and the United Nations system in Colombia, as well as key embassies and development partners present in the country, including Sweden, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland, as well as OXFAM. At the summit, some 450 representatives of Colombian women’s organizations from 30 of Colombia’s 32 departments met in Bogotá. They put forth three key demands: that the parties stay at the table until an agreement is reached; that women be included at the peace table and at every stage of the process; and that women’s needs, interests, and experiences of conflict be considered during the talks.<sup>163</sup> The messages of the summit were driven home at UN headquarters in New York, where the Committee for the Convention to End Discrimination against Women

(CEDAW) had been engaged in a review of Colombia’s compliance with CEDAW treaty obligations.<sup>164</sup>

The National Summit of Women for Peace was pivotal in securing an opening for women as plenipotentiaries on the government peace delegation. In November 2013, the Government appointed two women—Nigeria Rentería and María Paulina Riveros—as plenipotentiary negotiators.<sup>165</sup> Some months later, the peace delegation would also establish a sub-commission on gender, and solicit the direct engagement of victims, women, and LGBTI persons at the peace talks. At the summit, women’s groups also submitted recommendations relating to the provisional accords already reached on agrarian rural development, political participation, illicit crops and drug-trafficking, as well as on the remaining agenda items relating to the rights of victims, the cessation of conflict, and the endorsement, implementation and monitoring of agreements.<sup>166</sup> Their efforts have been accompanied by advocacy strategies and dialogue with the government and the international community to ensure due consideration of their proposals.

By the end of the first year of peace talks, FARC women also secured greater participation and visibility on their peace delegation. In April 2013, Commander Victoria Sandino joined the negotiating team, although she was technically not brought on as a plenipotentiary. Nonetheless, her participation gave women 20 per cent of the slots at the top of the team. Women’s participation continued to grow, and by February 2015, the FARC delegation in Havana was made up of more than 40% women, including several female commanders, closely reflecting the gender composition of the FARC as a whole.<sup>167</sup> In October 2013, FARC women launched their own webpage, [www.mujerfariana.org](http://www.mujerfariana.org), which hosts a variety of multimedia presentations, narratives, and interviews by and about the perspectives and lives of FARC women, and women have been active in the FARC communications programs.<sup>168</sup>

On the peace delegations, at the tier just below the plenipotentiaries, women on both sides have quietly sustained the peace process. Elena Ambrosi, director of the human rights office for the Ministry of Defense, and Lucía Jaramillo Ayerbe from the President’s Office, serve as alternate

plenipotentiaries and have accompanied the process from the start. They were two of the three women witnesses among the 17 signatories to the framework agreement secretly negotiated in Cuba and signed on Aug. 26, 2012. (The third woman signatory was Sandra García (aka Sandra Ramirez), long-time companion of FARC founder Manuel Marulanda.) Elena has had a particularly significant role at and around the table, serving as a kind of adjunct plenipotentiary in her functions.

A team of eight highly capable women from the High Commissioner for Peace's Office serves as the backbone of the process from the government side.<sup>169</sup> Among them, Mónica Cifuentes, Elena Ambrosi and Marcela Durán, respectively, manage the legal, thematic, and communications strategies for the team. In addition, eighty percent of the staff in the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the presidential office that supports the peace process, are women.

## Subcommissions, Commissions, and Delegations

Women inside the peace process have considerable power through a series of mechanisms that have been established during the peace process. These include commissions, subcommissions, thematic working groups, and a drafting commission.

The two key subcommissions where women are playing roles at the table include the Technical Subcommittee on Ending the Conflict and the Gender Subcommittee. The Technical Sub-commission on Ending the Conflict was established in 2014 to address the issues of a bilateral ceasefire, the laying down of weapons, FARC prisoners, criminal organizations, and security guarantees. Women are twenty-five percent of its members; three of 10 members on the FARC side are women, and two of the 10 government subcommission members are women.<sup>170</sup>

The gender subcommission, unlike the technical subcommission, is composed primarily of women (one FARC delegate is male). Announced in June 2014 and installed on September 7, 2014, the subcommission is an innovation with few global precedents.<sup>171</sup> It is potentially an important vehicle for women's empowerment in a post-Accord period, a symbolic recognition of the

In Havana, women on the peace delegations on both sides are engaged in researching, analyzing and crafting proposals. They are reviewing and writing memos, briefings, policy positions, and speeches for their teams. They are designing communication and education strategies, programs, and materials. Behind the scenes, out of the public eye, and with the negotiators, they are crafting the language of the agreements.

For each of the five substantive agenda items at the peace table, teams of advisors have been formed in which women dominate. Women sit on major commissions, subcommissions, and working groups. Although these roles are generally not counted when one looks at women's roles in peace processes, these are influential posts that have provided opportunities for women to engage in the process in a meaningful way. Their participation in the process belies arguments that there are no women with the proper qualifications to serve in the highest levels of the peacemaking leadership.

importance of considering gender at the table, and a vehicle by which to ensure consideration of difficult themes such as sexual violence and women's political participation. It has, however, no decision-making authority, and no guarantees that its recommendations will be accepted and implemented. Likewise, it has no authority to change agreements reached.<sup>172</sup> Co-chaired by María Paulina Riveros for the government, and Victoria Sandino Palmera for the FARC-EP, the subcommission is mandated "to review and guarantee, with the support of national and international experts" any peace agreements that are reached, and to ensure that they "have an adequate gender focus."<sup>173</sup> Colombian government negotiator Nigeria Rentería (who has since stepped down from her post to run for governor of Chocó) noted that the commission "seeks to guarantee inclusion, social equality, and bring us closer to an accord that represents the interests of men and women."<sup>174</sup> The FARC delegation for its part expressed the hope that the commission "would produce real change for women and members of the lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender (LBGT) communities" and "grant full rights to women and to the LBGTI sectors that have been discriminated against for so long."<sup>175</sup>

Other than those subcommissions, there have been other instances, such as the Historical Commission on the Conflict and its Victims, established by the table in August 2014 to define the basis for the agreement on reparations for victims, where women have made fewer inroads. That commission in many ways replicated the lines of division and exclusion that exist within Colombian society. It included only one woman, María Emma Wills, among its 12 commissioners (two additional rapporteurs charged with producing the final report were men). It included no Afro-Colombians or indigenous representatives or academic specialists that might have provided historical perspectives on the conflict from these marginalized perspectives.

Another working group of jurists, established to assist with breaking through an impasse on the issue of transitional justice and victims, failed to include even one woman. Disproportionality notwithstanding, the group of male jurists insisted that amnesty would not be permitted for sexual violence in the context of the internal armed conflict, and would instead be treated as a crime against humanity that is not eligible for amnesty. This was a demand of many women's organizations and one of the recommendations of groups at the Summit in October 2013—although, admittedly, not a consensus position.

Delegations to Havana at the invitation of the peace table have provided an additional vehicle for women's engagement. Two sets of delegations were particularly important. First, at the request of the table, and with the facilitation of the National University, the United Nations, and the Colombian Bishops Conference, five delegations of victims traveled to Cuba in the second half of 2014 to meet with the negotiating teams. The majority of the sixty victims on these delegations—60%—were women. The inclusion of women who had experienced sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict on the delegation gave voice to an issue that had not been addressed in Havana previously. UN-Women provided support to this process and helped to accompany the victims' delegations. Members of the negotiating teams described the participation of these groups in Havana as "transformative" and noted their deepened emotional commitment to ending the

conflict that they felt after meeting with the victims and hearing their experiences.

The Gender Subcommission established a second set of delegation visits to Havana that focused specifically on the perspectives and proposals of women's groups—this time not as victims, but as peacebuilders. Between December 2014 and March 2015, three delegations that included 18 representatives of women's organizations and LGBTI persons participated directly in the peace talks table. Their presence in Havana drove home the gendered dimensions of the war, offered new engagement opportunities, and exposed the negotiators to gender-sensitive perspectives and proposals.

All of the delegations urged the government and the FARC to stay at the table until they reach a final accord to end the conflict, and to seek measures to de-escalate the violence in the meantime. Agreements between the Colombian government and the FARC to de-escalate the violence, including through ceasefires, a joint demining initiative, measures to recover the bodies of the disappeared, and temporary measures to reduce bombing attacks respond in part to the growing voice of civil society made manifest in the visits of the victims, women and LGBTI representatives. As a direct result of these delegation visits to Havana, the FARC initiated a process of acknowledgement, apology, and making amends. In response to women's requests in Havana and the more general demands of civil society to de-escalate the conflict, the FARC announced it would increase the recruiting age and release the remaining child soldiers from its ranks.

Such engagement of delegations of victims, women's groups, and LGBTI organizations at a peace table is unprecedented. In addition to the aforementioned outcomes, the opportunity to participate in the Havana peace talks has also contributed to repairing both the historic continuum of inequality, discrimination, exclusion, and violence to which women and LGBTI persons have been subjected, as well as their particular victimization during Colombia's internal armed conflict, but to initiating possibilities for repairing the social fabric that has been torn during decades of war.

# THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Whether or not women’s proposals in Havana will be transformed into policy options that promote sustainable peace through gender equality and empowerment of all girls and women remains to be seen. Will the truth commissions, land commissions, peace constituencies, reconciliation commissions, and other mechanisms that are established as part of the peace accords include gender parity and perspectives in their design, composition, implementation, and evaluation, as called for by the National Summit of Women and Peace.<sup>176</sup> Will gender-sensitive budgeting exercises help ensure that the budgets for development projects designed to help pull the country out of war benefit men and women equally? If violence against women and the LGBTI community has been a tactic of war, will this be explicitly catalogued as a violation of any ceasefire agreements? Will respect rather than dominance be promoted as the new model for masculinity during peacetime? Will female and male ex-combatants each be given appropriate, differentiated options that meet their needs? Will reparations ensure women’s full access to land, restitution, and other benefits? Women’s organizations and their international allies will have to persist in their hard work to ensure that these questions are raised and addressed.

## Ceasefires, DDR, and Gender

War often leads to rapid changes in gender roles and relations, and these must be considered in the transitions back to peace.<sup>177</sup> When individuals leave their communities to go to war, when populations are displaced or individuals are killed or injured, and when individuals return from war, men and women assume new roles and responsibilities.<sup>178</sup> Some women break gender stereotypes to pick up arms, often abandoning their families in the process. In wartime, women who stay behind may become widowed or suddenly be charged with caring for family members who become landmine victims. Women may find themselves supporting their families as single heads of households, and may enter the labor market for the first time and become the primary breadwinners for their families – a role traditionally occupied by men.

Men who go off to war (both for the State and for illegal armed groups) are seen as fulfilling the heroic mission assigned to their gender. Society grants them power and status for their wartime roles. Following the cessation of war, gender roles and relations

nonetheless must be re-negotiated. Male combatants who are unable to provide for their families on their return may feel their gender identity under threat, which sometimes leads to violence against women and other negative coping strategies.

Stigmatization of all ex-combatants is strong, but female ex-combatants, who transgressed gender roles when they went to war, may find it particularly difficult to reconfigure their lives within the narrow confines of traditional gender roles. Ex-combatants of both genders may find it difficult to get work and to re-define their roles in their families and communities.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs that use gender-aware policies and strategies, however, can provide opportunities for creating new models of masculinity and femininity that are based on fairness, respect, and dialogue, rather than force and violence. Increasingly, the literature is examining the role of both men and women in this process.<sup>179</sup>

The UNSCR resolutions mandate not only women's participation, but also the integration of gender perspectives and gender analysis, in the design and implementation of conflict prevention initiatives, cease-fire agreements, peace accords, DDR (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration) strategies, reparations programs, and post-conflict reconciliation initiatives and budgeting. The Colombian government, in keeping with emerging global lessons in other conflict zones, has recently begun to acknowledge the importance of including a gender perspective in DDR processes, though these have not yet been fully implemented.<sup>180</sup> At the October 2013 summit, Colombian women's groups called for a rights-based (as opposed to needs-based) approach that recognizes women and men's differential experiences of war and of peace, and for policies that recognize the heterogeneity of women by age, ethnicity, social class, region, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>181</sup>

With respect to policies for ending the conflict, four additional points are key. First, in the DDR process, a differential approach that recognizes the needs of girls, boys, men and women is essential. Past Colombian programs have not accommodated the heterogeneity of ex-combatants and the particular traumas of war that different groups have experienced. Nor have they considered the specific trajectory of different armed groups, the particular needs of minors, men and women, or the specific reintegration strategies and approaches of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.<sup>182</sup> Colombia's past DDR programs have focused largely on men's experiences of demobilization and disarmament. In this model, girls and women, who sometimes play support roles in armed groups and may not carry arms, fall by the wayside. As one former EPL-militant told me, "The negotiating model for DDR focuses on those with the guns and thus leaves out most of the women, many of whom don't even appear in the lists of those demobilizing."<sup>183</sup>

The Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration has outlined a gender approach to reintegration that, on paper at least, now recognizes the need for a gender-differential approach. Past processes have lacked this gendered dimension, and have failed to

meet the needs of girls and women who leave the jungles.<sup>184</sup> Female ex-combatants, supporters and dependents have not benefitted equally from services, incentives, health care, grants, or housing support. In part, this is because their names are not included on the lists of those demobilizing and because they are not given clear information about the DDR process, their rights, options, and the procedures for securing benefits. Many women self-demobilize, thus foregoing the benefits to which they are entitled; some of these end up in poverty, drug trafficking, prostitution, or returning to the war. Best practices suggest that programs should expand definitions of "fighters" that keep women and girls off the demobilization lists, ensure that they are educated about and incorporated into benefits programs, provide economic alternatives, and seek to meet their differentiated gender needs.

Female ex-combatants and their families have particular needs for sexual and reproductive health services, adequate health care more broadly, and psycho-social support, particularly relating to combat-related trauma, mental illness, and sexual violence. There has been a lack of trained psychologists and institutional entry points to address these issues. Women also have particular needs for physical security, support to care for their children, and livelihood options as they transition to civil society.<sup>185</sup>

Former ex-combatants have criticized the tendency of DDR programs to reproduce gendered-traditional approaches that leave women little opportunities for engagement in the public domain. Past DDR programs have perpetuated traditional roles for women and ignored the social and political aspirations of many female ex-combatants.<sup>186</sup> Within the FARC, women constitute up to 40% of the membership and engage in a variety of roles, including positions of military and political authority.<sup>187</sup> Many FARC women have ascended the chain of command and assumed mid-level commander posts.<sup>188</sup> In the ELN, as well, women are thought to constitute about a third of the rank-and-file, and they play leadership roles in education, health, communications, international work, logistics, organizational definition, intelligence, political work, and military combat.<sup>189</sup> Ensuring meaningful social and political engagement for these

women will be key to their successful integration into civilian life. The experiences of female ex-combatants in Colombia and in Central America underscore the difficulties that ex-combatants face in finding new peacetime roles that allow them to continue their vocations as agents of social change.<sup>190</sup>

Second, in the same way that demobilization and disarmament programs provide opportunities to de-link arms and weapons from politics, they also provide the opportunity to delink weapons from gender ideologies. Designing new models of “masculinity” and “femininity” that reject violence and gendered or racialized hierarchies of power in favor of respectful, democratic relations will be key to breaking the cycle of violence.<sup>191</sup> Men and women will need to work together to negotiate new identities and to create new understandings about what it means to be a man or a woman in a society at peace. Where violence against women has been tacitly accepted as a norm, the best approaches to prevention and protection require building a new culture that respects and empowers women. This includes engaging women in visible leadership roles in the design and implementation of DDR programs. In 2014, women constituted 57% of the staff (229 of 400 positions) and 60% of the contractor positions (592 of 982 positions) at the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR), but they have yet to break the glass ceiling in the organization.<sup>192</sup>

Third, studies from other conflict zones also leave clear lessons about the important role that women

play in determining the success or failure of DDR programs.<sup>193</sup> Women, who are deeply ensconced in their communities and families, are often key to determining how ex-combatants will be received when they return home. Their knowledge also enables them to be effective partners on a range of humanitarian matters (including IDPs, refugees, demining commitments, and youth recruitment) that are often included in ceasefire and peace agreements.

Finally, in the same way that the peace accords should anticipate the gender-differentiated needs of ex-combatants, they should consider the gender-differentiated needs of the receptor communities. In Colombia and elsewhere, when ex-combatants return to their communities of origin, there is frequently an escalation of domestic violence.<sup>194</sup> The design and implementation of violence prevention programs, as well as the promotion of citizen pacts between the receiving communities and the demobilized with the leadership of women’s organizations and local authorities can anticipate and address this dynamic and help ensure that when a peace accord is signed, it does not translate into greater violence against women.<sup>195</sup> It should be noted here that both male and female ex-combatants are more inclined to violence in the aftermath of war, though each group is socialized to handle this violence differently, with women often turning the violence inward or toward their children, and men more often lashing out at their partners.<sup>196</sup>

## Women, Gender and Transitional Justice: Truth, Justice, Reparations, and Guarantees of Non-Repetition

Colombia has the challenge, in the shadow of the International Criminal Court, of finding or creating mechanisms that will comply with Colombia’s international obligations to investigate, prosecute, and punish human rights violators; satisfy victims’ rights to truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition; and be acceptable to both sides in the context of the peace process currently underway. In the proposals put forth by women’s organizations in Havana and synthesized at the National Summit of Women and Peace, women urged the parties to acknowledge women’s

particular victimization; to clarify the causes, origins and impacts of the conflict on women; and to recognize responsibilities for that victimization.<sup>197</sup> Women’s organizations are demanding a role in the discussions about how their rights will be satisfied, reparations for the specific damages suffered, and protection for their lives and physical integrity.

Truth commissions have long been considered a necessary component of transitional justice mechanisms that facilitate sustainable peace. At the national summit, Colombian women called for parity and the participation of women victims in any official

truth commission that might be established. They suggested that such commissions be set up at the departmental, municipal and local levels, and that they document violence by all of the armed groups, including the neo-paramilitary gangs.<sup>198</sup>

The Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, in consultation with truth commission experts worldwide, has already established the Colombian Women's Truth and Memory Commission, which released their report, "Women's Truth: Victims of the Armed Conflict in Colombia," in Dec. 2013.<sup>199</sup> Using feminist collaborative methodologies, the report draws on testimonies from close to 1,000 women, and documents the impact of physical, psychological and conflict-related sexual violence on women's health, gender and family relations, and motherhood. Unlike most truth commission reports, it also documents victims' coping strategies and demands for reparations and justice. The Women's Truth and Memory Commission is the first independent truth commission to be established in Colombia; the first commission to analyze the impact of an armed conflict on women in particular; the first truth commission to be promoted, led, and carried out by a women's organization; and the first truth commission that takes an explicitly feminist, comprehensive approach aimed at documenting not only women's victimization, but also women's strategies to address their victimization. The report provides important documentation and methodological insights that should be considered in the development of a national truth commission process. Likewise, several of the National Historical Memory Center's 50-plus emblematic cases chart new territory in analyzing women's victimization, agency, and resilience in the conflict.<sup>200</sup> The HMC has designed and published innovative methodologies and guidelines for working with women and their communities in the construction of historical memory that will also provide valuable inputs for a truth-telling process.<sup>201</sup>

At the National Summit for Peace, women called on all of the armed groups to ensure that their members do not commit crimes of sexual violence and to uphold

international standards that consider sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes.<sup>202</sup>

Women victims who testified for the Colombian Women's Truth and Memory Commission acknowledged that the harm they suffered is irreparable.<sup>203</sup> They recognize however that formal reparations provide an opportunity to transform and re-weave broken lives and damaged relationships with the State, and to facilitate women's rights to education, economic opportunities, justice, health care, and psychosocial services that can allow them to reclaim their lives.<sup>204</sup> These women are calling for individual and collective reparations, according to the magnitude and nature of the particular violence and its context. At the individual level, victims are calling for measures that will allow them to heal and rebuild their lives with dignity, and that will support a process of personal and communal reconciliation.<sup>205</sup> At the collective level, many women are seeking structural transformations and mechanisms of accountability that will confirm the collective censure of violence against women and gender-based violence and ensure a commitment to gender equality as a guarantee that the violence will not be repeated. For many victims of sexual violence, these guarantees of non-repetition include formal acknowledgement of responsibility by all of the parties involved in crimes of sexual violence, as well as a commitment to implementing structural reforms that address the historical discriminatory practices that underpin such violence.<sup>206</sup>

Peacebuilding is a transformative process to restructure social relations, transform patterns of exclusion, and strengthen respect for human rights, including women's rights. As the Colombian Women's Initiative for Peace observed, "Peacebuilding is not centered on the individual will of the armed actors of the war, but must be understood as a comprehensive political, social, economic, citizen-based, and cultural process."<sup>207</sup> It is in this broader sense that women's proposals for transitional justice can be better understood.

# CONCLUSIONS

A peace process is more than just the signing of an agreement at the peace table; it offers the opportunity to address the underlying social inequities and injustices of a society that are at the roots of a conflict. Understanding the gender dimensions of a conflict as well as the various phases of the peace process helps to identify and evaluate the multiple entry points for women's engagement. In a preparatory phase, the groundwork for a political solution is laid. This is usually followed by a period of formal negotiations or peace talks (with or without a mediator). An extensive period ensues for implementing agreements, holding parties accountable to their commitments, and engaging in the reforms and peacebuilding activities that will sustain the peace. In each of these phases, there are a myriad of roles and opportunities for women.

This case study on gender, women and the Colombian peace process illuminates the realities and the potential for women's engagement and why that engagement is essential to peace. It shows how the conflict has had different effects on men and women that in turn vary by age and ethnicity. The study suggests that historic discrimination and the differentiated impacts of the conflict on women and girls, as well as women's creative contributions to peace, justify women's presence and leadership at every phase of the peacemaking and peacebuilding process, and that gender equality and enhanced political participation and power for women can help repair the legacy of sexual and gender-based violence. It illustrates the importance of understanding the gender dimensions of conflict in order to ensure that those dynamics are fully considered in the reconstruction of a new Colombia in the post-Accord phase. Neglect of these gender dimensions will easily perpetuate old patterns of exclusion, intolerance, discrimination and abuse.

The Colombian case reminds us that there is much that can be done in the absence of a national peace process to prepare for peace. Colombian women have lobbied for legislation, defended human rights, promoted a public discourse for peace, mediated or mitigated conflict in their communities, mobilized constituencies, and repaired relations in communities that have been broken by war. Women have

engaged in dialogue and action for peace, and lobbied for political solutions. Their actions have helped prepare the ground for the peace talks in Havana and are essential to building and sustaining peace. The Colombian process reminds us that building peace takes time. More than a decade of cumulative efforts by Colombian women, working independently and within civil society organizations, to secure concessions and humanitarian agreements from both armed groups and the government is bearing fruit in the current peace talks with the FARC.

Despite international agreements that women's presence at the peace table is a question of international security and peace, there is a paucity of women at most peace tables, and the Colombian one is no exception. The Colombian case shows that women's absence cannot be explained by a lack of qualified women, and it suggests that, without external pressures, peace processes tend to reflect and replicate power relationships existing in the broader society. Where inequality is deeply and historically entrenched, it is normalized and invisible. Changes to these patterns of inequality will not come without concerted and unrelenting effort to secure it and to sustain it.

The role of Colombian women in the peace process reminds us as well that the formal peace table is only one of many tables where negotiations take place. Even when women are not at the main table

(and it is important that they are there), their multiple contributions at other tables and around the negotiating tables should not be overlooked. Behind the scenes, women are playing key roles as advisors, negotiators, and facilitators, and are providing essential technical and substantive support to the negotiating teams and to the process itself. These roles should be recognized and women should be adequately and appropriately credited for their contributions. Increasingly, the research is showing that the quality of women's engagement and whether or not their voices are heard is essential to the sustainability of peace.<sup>208</sup>

In this regard, the gender subcommission is one potential space for impact, and it is charged with ensuring that any accords reached serve men, women and LGBTI persons. It is, however, a body without decision-making authority. Its power will be demonstrated to the extent that it can exact changes that might be warranted in what has already been agreed to by the parties. In the end, women's most important substantive contributions may stem from their engagement as delegates on the peace delegations in Cuba, their participation in substantive discussions about the agenda, in drafting language related to each of the agenda points, their broader participation on other subcommissions and working groups of the negotiating teams, and from other less visible roles such as preparing briefs for the negotiating team and designing communications and educational strategies to bring the public along.

For now, Colombian women at, around, and beyond the table continue to play a role in sustaining the peace process, even as they are preparing to contribute in a post-Accord period. Given that any agreement will require public endorsement, women will be an important resource for educating the public about the terms of the accord and creating an environment of public support and legitimacy for peace.

The Colombian case shows finally that strong, independent, civil society organizations—especially women's organizations—have the capacity to prepare the way for a peace process and to influence

its shape—both from within and from the outside. In order to be effective, furthermore, women's organizations and civil society organizations more broadly must have the capacity to anticipate needs and be ready with proposals. Effective engagement demands strategic thinking; coordinated planning across many levels—local, regional, national and international; persistent, high-quality, timely research and advocacy; cultivation of alliances; and coalition-building across institutional, geographic, and psychological barriers. It requires flexibility, innovation, and adaptation to shifting political contexts. Likewise, it requires resources, accompaniment, and technical support. International funding priorities need to be more robust, consistent, and reliable in this regard. The National Women's Summit for Peace was pivotal in creating a platform that brought together a wide range of key women's organizations and networks, and helped them to articulate their priorities and leverage their messaging at a national and international level. Finally, access to an interlocutor at the peace table is key; the gender subcommission has played an important role in providing that interlocution.

With or without peace accords, women are leading from the ground up and from the top down in efforts to transform their society. For now, many Colombian women's organizations are seeking roles in the implementation of the peace accords. Rosa Emilia Salamanca, director of the women's research group, Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), underscores the importance of transforming Colombian culture and notes that “the negotiating table is one element, but an insufficient element of a peace process.”<sup>209</sup> Working in every sector—communications, churches, schools, families, business, the Armed Forces, indigenous communities, Afro communities, the arts, government institutions—sometimes in isolation, sometimes in coalition—women are creating a culture of peace and dialogue. Their actions form the backdrop against which peace talks have emerged and against which the ratification and implementation of peace agreements will occur. Women's engagement and leadership can seal a peace deal and will help ensure its viability for the long haul.

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# ENDNOTES

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  162. The consortium included Casa de la Mujer, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Mujeres por la Paz, Colectivo de Pensamiento Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad, Grupo de Seguimiento de la Resolución 1325, Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas (CNOA), Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz (IMP), and Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Negras e Indígenas de Colombia (ANMUIC). National Summit of Women for Peace, *Synthesis-Executive Summary* (Bogotá, Colombia, 23 to 25 October 2013) [photocopy].
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  166. "Propuestas de la Cumbre de mujeres y paz presentada a la Mesa de Negociación a los puntos que estan acordados y los que faltan por acordar," Havana, Cuba, Feb. 2015.
  167. Fixing percentages is a bit problematic, as numbers are subject to change over time. New members arrive on the island, the composition of the teams changes over time, and public information about the teams is difficult to come by. As of Feb. 12, 2015, women included 17 women (42.5%) of 40 delegates in Havana. (Victoria Sandino, Personal Interview with the Author, Havana, Cuba, Feb. 12, 2015). Secretaria Distrital de la Mujer of the Office of the Mayor of Bogota notes that of 30 members of the FARC peace delegation, 13 (43%) are women, suggesting that the additional 10 members may be in Havana in other consulting capacities with the delegation. In either case, the percentage remains roughly the same. (Secretaria Distrital de la Mujer of the Office of the Mayor of Bogota, "De Santo Domingo a La Habana: El papel de las mujeres en la firma de acuerdos de paz," <http://www.sdmujer.gov.co/images/>

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171. Sri Lanka had a similar gender subcommission in its peace process.
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