CURRENT SITUATION

The 2016 Colombian peace accord that ended one of the world’s longest-running armed conflicts is now being carried out, and the country faces the massive task of reintegrating former fighters and fostering reconciliation. The half-century war killed at least 220,000 people, uprooted more than 6 million, and left some 8 million registered victims. The U.S. invested about $10 billion in strengthening Colombia to fight the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) and suppress drug trafficking, and actively supported the peace process.

Under the deal between the Colombian government and the FARC, almost 10,000 guerrillas will demobilize, transition to civilian life, and be allowed to enter electoral politics. Preventing a resurgence of violence will require reintegrating them into society, compensating victims and returning their lands, and shrinking the socio-economic disparities and political exclusion at the root of the conflict. The government also continues to pursue peace talks with a smaller insurgency, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and faces groups of demobilized paramilitary fighters reorganizing into criminal gangs.

USIP’S WORK

For more than a decade, the U.S. Institute of Peace helped prepare the ground for a political solution, particularly with an eye toward post-conflict reconciliation. With implementation of the peace agreement and the start of talks with the ELN, USIP will continue to stimulate fresh thinking...
about peace processes and on how to apply lessons from Colombia’s experience to other conflicts. Understanding that most peace accords fail within the first five years, the Institute is working to help Colombia beat the odds by providing technical support and modest funding to train Colombians in mediation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. USIP’s recent work includes:

**Colombia Peace Forum.** This series of conferences, initiated after talks with the FARC began in 2012, has produced analysis of the peace process to inform public opinion leaders, and U.S. and Colombian policy. The forum now will address the challenges of the accord’s implementation, and formulate strategic proposals to ensure that the parties fulfill their commitments, especially to those most affected by the conflict—women, victims, ethnic communities, and ex-combatants.

**Supporting Inclusive Peace Processes.** USIP funded collaborations of lawyers, scholars, and relevant parties to open the way to peace talks. The Institute will continue to offer its expertise during implementation of the agreement with the FARC and for negotiations with the ELN. Drawing on its Colombia experience, the Institute also distills lessons from past attempts at peacemaking, and counsels negotiators, international envoys, and others on how peace processes can be strengthened. Colombian innovations, including the participation of victims in the process, offer important lessons for places like Northern Ireland, where justice and memory issues were postponed, and for war zones such as Syria, where policymakers seek guidance on what can be done in the absence of a peace process.

**Fostering Reconciliation.** The Institute advises and funds local initiatives for peace, contributes expertise to historical memory projects, and facilitates dialogues to reduce violence. The Institute supports a project to systematize human rights databases for use by a national truth commission in Colombia that will be part of the peace settlement.

**Empowering Women for Mediation.** USIP developed and supports a network of 30 women mediators from a dozen regions of Colombia, who serve as catalysts for post-war reconciliation. The women lead projects to help prevent and mediate disputes between ex-combatants and victims, reduce tensions among ethnic groups, and foster communication between citizens and government. The concept, designed with partners in Colombia, is being expanded throughout the country and abroad.

**Strengthening Civil Society for Peace.** USIP provided funding for local committees that prepared communities for the challenges of peace and that are poised to monitor and implement the accord in 10 of the country’s 32 departments. The committees, aimed at creating models for citizen involvement in peace and reconciliation efforts, include local government and civil society representatives. In the oil-rich department of Arauca, the committees invited USIP to support and help facilitate dialogues among companies, local authorities, and communities. They have sustained the dialogues for more than four years. The relationship helped generate alternatives to projects planned by the companies that would have uprooted 150 families.

**Generation Change Fellows Program.** The Institute’s program for strengthening the effectiveness of youth community leaders will extend to Colombia in 2017, with training anticipated for 25 Fellows. Generation Change Fellows gain skills that include mediation, active listening, and effective leadership, and join USIP’s global learning community for young peacebuilders.