



**Engaging with
the peace process
in Colombia:**

Reflections from Christian
Aid's programme

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Christian Aid Ireland is an international development organisation. We work globally for structural change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality and dignity for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice. We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is greatest, tackling the effects of poverty, as well as its root causes

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Front cover

Nayibe Valencia, a community leader, comes from the Naya region. Her husband and two brothers in law were disappeared and killed. She is displaced and living in the humanitarian space in Puente Nayero, Buenaventura.

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Glossary

- ANZORC:** Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina
- CALCP:** El Colectivo de Abogados Luís Carlos Pérez or Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers Collective
- CCAJAR:** Colectivo de Abogados Jose Alvear Restrepo or the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective Corporation
- CCEEU:** Coordinacion Colombia Europa Estados Unidos or Coordination Colombia Europe United States
- CIJP:** Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz or the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace
- CSO:** Civil Society Organisation
- ELN:** Ejército de Liberación Nacional or National Liberation Army
- FARC:** Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
- FARC-EP:** Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army
- GBV:** Gender-Based Violence
- HRDs:** Human Rights Defenders
- INGO:** International Non-Governmental Organisations
- IDP:** Internally Displaced Person
- LGBTI:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
- NGO:** Non-Governmental Organisations
- OIDHACO:** Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos - Acción Colombia or the International Office for Human Rights - Action on Colombia
- SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals
- UN:** United Nations

Executive Summary

One of the most significant peace agreements of recent times was signed in Colombia in 2016, ending over 50 years of brutal and deadly armed conflict. This came at a time of a global escalation of violence but also a renewed international attention to peace in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Sustaining Peace Resolutions.

On the second anniversary of the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, in this paper Christian Aid is highlighting the learnings, reflections and key insights from the work of our local civil society partners on building peace. The role of civil society in peace is important and too often overlooked. In Colombia, independent civil society organisations played a key role in influencing the transitional justice system and in facilitating the voice and participation of conflict-affected communities and victims in the peace talks, particularly for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Within civil society, women's organisations played a significant role in pursuing gender equality in the context of peace and a prominent focus on gender in the Peace Agreement.

As peacebuilding gets more global attention it's important that actors are clear what it means to work on conflict and on peace. The assumption that just because you provide development relief in a conflict setting that you will reduce violence has been proven to fail, context after context. Economic investment alone will not build peace. It needs to be the right type of investment, assessed to mitigate against harm, targeted at excluded groups and complemented with an explicit peacebuilding focus.

We share this learning at a crucial moment for peace in Colombia- with a new government visibly less committed to the Final Peace Agreement and an escalation of attacks against human rights defenders. The implementation of the Final Peace Agreement has advanced in

many ways however, many of the more difficult aspects - rural reform, advancing economic development, enhancing citizen participation, reincorporating former combatants, substituting crops of illicit use, and addressing the concerns of victims and providing mechanisms for transitional justice - remain to be addressed. The need to sustain peace in Colombia has never been greater than now.

Reflection one: following decades of resisting the violence of armed conflict, defining a positive vision of peace was empowering for civil society and enabled them to proactively engage with the peace process when it began, however securing wider societal support for the peace process was challenging

In the midst of conflict, partners played the role of keeping hope alive, addressing immediate violence but also focusing on the long-term and laying the foundations for peace. Defining a positive vision of peace to work towards was important. Partners had worked on issues of inequality, land, HRDs, and GBV for decades - however they began to highlight how dealing with these issues was part of the solution for peace and worked with communities to convince them to engage with the process. Regular review and assessing programmes by partners enable them to respond to conflict.

The dominant narrative in society, re-enforced by the stories told by mainstream media, was that guerrilla groups were terrorist groups with no political motivations, and solely responsible for all the violence. Whilst partners challenge these dominant narratives and misinformation through their ongoing legal work, wider societal support for the peace process was overlooked. Without this, peace will be under threat and not gain political support.

Reflection two: Focusing on human rights in the context of the peace process, particularly the rights of victims of the armed conflict was at the heart of our programme's approach, it helped prioritise programmatic interventions and guide us in deep and complex political dilemmas inherent in the conflict

Human rights, particularly economic and social rights, are integral to peacebuilding. The programme made a deliberate decision to focus on the human rights of victims of violence, prioritizing the perspective of women, ethnic groups and marginalised communities. This approach highlighted the accountability of the Colombian state for its own actions, but also the actions of armed actors, and brought a focus on systemic and root causes of the conflict.

Reflection three: the support of the international community for peace in Colombia was critical, but worked best when it didn't impose agendas and enabled partners to work adaptively, flexibly and in response to the context

The international community - INGOs, governments, multilateral agencies, the diplomatic community - plays an important role in supporting peacebuilding in Colombia. Such support is critical when it seems that there is little progress nationally and in providing visibility and protection for partners who face grave risks. Today in Colombia, partners still need to take preventive measures as violence continues, focus on implementation of the Peace Agreements and to continue to seek international support for this. The ability to reflect, learn, adapt and respond as the context evolved was important to partners. Irish Aid supported an adaptive programme which has an emphasis on supporting learning, reflection and adaptation and which is independent from the Colombian Government.

Reflection four: real achievements for women's rights in the peace process created the potential for further changes in relation to gender justice, but also this process prompted a backlash against women's rights and

the Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual Intersex (LGBTI) community

The gains for women's rights under the Final Peace Agreement were hugely significant, in particular the establishment of Gender Sub Commission and the fact that there is no amnesty for sexual violence. This is an enormous achievement in a context where on average 400 women victims per day, over 16 per hour, experience sexual violence.¹ This work was driven by an active and organised feminist movement, reinforced by global frameworks such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The sub-commission on gender was instrumental in delivering gender specific provisions. Securing incremental changes allowed women's organisations to keep demanding change.

A peace process can open up space for transformative change to discuss feminist priorities, LGBTI issues and human rights. However, a backlash is inevitable and needs to be thought through in advance. The inclusion of women's rights and LGBTI rights was strongly rejected in the Peace Agreement. A key response of the programme was to form an alliance to bring together feminists and progressive religious leaders to work on developing a simpler and more convincing narrative to engaging local, regional and national actors more effectively on women's rights.

Reflection five: civil society needs to engage with the licit and illicit economy, both have a huge impact in terms of how peace is built and sustained

In Colombia, peace will only be sustainable if the economy is driven by an approach of inclusive development, particularly at this time of transition and expected increase in trade and investment, and the risks of further dispossession that comes with that. Peace also needs to be adequately financed and resourced, including progressive taxation for economic, social and cultural rights. The programme responded by looking at the issue of tax justice as a way to address the inequality and build peace.

1 Survey of the Prevalence of Sexual Violence against Women in the Context of the Colombian Armed Conflict 2010-15 Oxfam, alongside local organisations and networks of women, undertook a survey of 142 municipalities to look at the prevalence of sexual violence against women in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. https://www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ENCUESTA_INGLES_completo.pdf

Narcotrafficking financed both the armed insurgents and the paramilitaries, with paramilitary groups embedded into the networks of political and state power. The reality of this illicit economy and its connections with the structures of power in Colombia need to be understood when working on peace. Organisations trying to contribute to the peace process must seek to engage in complex and sensitive topics like that of illicit economies. Development actors can no longer be blind to the drugs trade and other illicit activities that are now part of the lives of millions of the people we aim to support.

Reflection six: Conflict resolution involves engaging with armed actors and those responsible for violence; to do this well courage and in-depth power analysis are needed to understand the dilemmas and risks for civil society actors

Dilemmas emerge for civil society organisations when an armed actor such as FARC becomes a political actor. Conflict resolution involves engaging with people responsible for violence, this is fraught with complexities and tensions. Our programme has managed this by remaining focused on the human rights of victims, Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, marginalised communities who have born the worst effects of violence in Colombia.

Power analysis was important to not only to understand what is politically likely to gain traction but also to understand what mattered to victims. Assessing and understanding power has to happen on a regular basis in a conflict setting.



Fernando Rodallega (blue t-shirt), a young man in his 20s seated outside his house with his family in the Puente Nayero humanitarian space, Buenaventura. He said: **"Thank God the humanitarian space was established."** Before the safe zone he had to sleep elsewhere before going to work, because it was too dangerous to go out at night.

Introduction

Christian Aid and our partners have worked to tackle violence and build peace for more than 20 years in Colombia, demanding an end to violence and calling for justice on issues of impunity and human rights violations committed in the course of the conflict.¹ This paper, on the second anniversary of the signing of the Colombian Final Peace Agreement, gives a brief overview of this work and shares the key programmatic learnings, reflections and insights from this experience of peacebuilding by our partners, from the period of 2012 to the present day.

Following over 50 years of internal armed conflict, formal dialogue between the guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government started in October 2012. These talks culminated in the signing of a peace agreement on 24 August 2016 which was then rejected in a referendum on 2 October 2016 due to lack of public support and the mobilisation of sections of Colombian society against the Agreement.² The Final Peace Agreement was signed on 24 November 2016, and it was subsequently approved by a majority vote in Congress on 1 December 2016.

The signing of the Final Peace Agreement coincided with renewed international attention on peacebuilding. The UN Sustaining Peace Resolutions, the effective official global policy on peace, mandated by 27 April 2016 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and the UN Security Council Resolution 2282, signalled a reprioritisation of peace. It represents a shift from a narrow post-conflict focus to

a broader approach of conflict prevention and sustaining peace.³ This is very much aligned with Agenda 2030 or the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where peace was also given specific attention, particularly in Goal 16, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁴

This renewed international focus on peace is relevant for Colombia as it highlights how peace needs to be sustained in an ongoing way, particularly with the election of Ivan Duque from the far-right wing party, Centro Democrático, as Colombia's new president. Supported by right wing parties critical of the Peace Agreement, Mr Duque pledged to make substantial adjustments to it during his political campaign. Now in office, the new president and his supporters in parliament are promoting specific adjustments to the Peace Agreement. Mr Duque has also been critical of the talks held between the government and another guerrilla group, the ELN, and these are currently on hold. There is a risk that the process will fail and our partners are calling for both parties to set aside their differences and reach an agreement.

This is a crucial moment for peace in Colombia. As we mark the two-year anniversary of peace the new government is visibly less committed to the Final Peace Agreement and there has been an increase in attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs). This paper therefore makes key recommendations based on our programmatic learning on how peace can be sustained in Colombia.

Peace and conflict in Colombia

Colombia's conflict has been brutal and deadly, with over eight million victims to date of multiple forms of violence, including forced disappearance, extra-judicial executions, kidnappings, torture, and various forms of sexual and gender-based violence.⁵ Unequal property distribution, intrinsically linked to the social inequality that persists in the country, fuels much violence. Colombia is the most unequal country in Latin America in terms of access to land, with 81% of land concentrated in the hands of 1% of the population.⁶

Forced displacement and land grabs have been a central part of the Colombian conflict. In 2017, Colombia had the world's largest internally displaced person (IDP) population, 7.7 million IDPs were registered in Colombia, an increase of over a quarter-million from the beginning of the year.⁷ Given these high rates of displacement, land remains at the heart of the struggle for peace.

The Colombian state is largely absent in rural areas where other non-state forms of authority dominate, and thus fails to provide adequate protection for the civilian population throughout its territory. Narco-trafficking and other illegal economic activities have fuelled the conflict, including kidnapping and extortion. Although the figures are disputed, the FARC passed from a thousand men in 1982, to approximately 18,000 in 2002 and around 8,000 before they demobilised,⁸ while all the paramilitary groups together had around 32,000 members, according to some estimates, in 2005.⁹ Inequality and poverty in Colombia compounded violence. High income inequality and rural poverty created a breeding ground for all armed groups, guerrillas and paramilitaries, and allowed a process of continuous recruitment for their ranks. The majority of recruits of non-state

armed groups typically came from the poorest strata of the rural areas.¹⁰

Human rights defenders are consistently targeted and killed, particularly those working to defend land, territories and the environment, victims' organisations and peacebuilding activists.¹¹ According to numbers registered by Front Line Defenders, out of the cases of human rights defenders killed worldwide in 2017, around 30% were Colombians.¹² The single most targeted group are local leaders promoting voluntary substitution of illicit crops,¹³ the issue of illicit crops is part of the Peace Agreement. From January 2017 until October 2018 alone, a total of 39 leaders from COCCAM, a network promoting voluntary crop substitution supported by Christian Aid, were killed.¹⁴

The magnitude of conflict-related sexual violence against women in Colombia is yet to be fully understood. A study spanning 2001–09 found that on average 54,410 women per year, 149 per day, or six women per hour, suffered from sexual violence in Colombia. These figures support the findings of the Constitutional Court that sexual violence constitutes a 'systematic, habitual and generalised practice' in the Colombian conflict.¹⁵ A second survey covering 2010–15, reveals that despite the peace talks and the reduction of combat violence, women were experiencing an increase in sexual violence with 18.36% of the women surveyed in 142 municipalities being victims of this violence. This violence was perpetrated by all the armed actors: State Security Forces, guerrillas and neo-paramilitaries. This statistic of 18.36% translates into on average 400 women victims per day, over 16 per hour.¹⁶

While not perfect, the Peace Agreement in Colombia offers the most transformative potential for the promise of peace in a generation. The Peace Agreement covers six interconnected and interdependent areas: full rural agrarian reform; political participation; demobilisation of guerrillas and the dismantling of criminal organisations; finding solutions to the illicit economy; implementing a transitional justice system for victims; and finally, an implementation mechanism, involving the international community.¹⁷ The many reforms outlined in the agreement are intended to correct social inequalities and institutional deficits in Colombia that are widely considered root causes of the armed conflict.¹⁸

Colombia is one of the first countries to extensively address both women's and LGBTI rights in a peace negotiation. The creation of a Gender Sub-Commission was informed and inspired by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The Final Peace Agreement excludes

amnesties for conflict sexual violence, recognising these as crimes against humanity, war crimes and/or acts of genocide. Critically significant was the inclusion of a specialist investigation team for conflict related sexual violence with provisions in line with the Rome Statute on handling evidence for acts of sexual violence.¹⁹ There is a Gender Committee and a Working Group on Gender Violence in the Investigation and Accusation Unit a gender-based task force. This gender taskforce will, amongst other things, investigate gender-based crimes committed in the conflict, holding hearings and liaise with women and LGBTI organisations, with the objective of documenting how the conflict has impacted on women and the LGBTI population.²⁰ Given the horrendous abuses against women during the conflict, respect for women's rights will be key indicators used to measure change in peacebuilding. There are also reports of an increase in sexual violence and gender-based violence, especially in areas previously controlled by the FARC-EP.²¹

Gloria Chocho Chamarra (right) next to her teenager daughter from the Wounan tribe. They were forced to flee their home in the countryside after bombing nearby. They live in a dilapidated schoolhouse on the outskirts of Buenaventura, where 260 people from three communities have been displaced for two years.



Christian Aid's programme in Colombia

Christian Aid's programme has supported 15 partners since 2012 working on peace, actively engaging with the peace process, transitional justice, protection of human rights defenders, tax justice, land restitution, highlighting the need to address illicit economies, gender justice and addressing gender-based violence.²² Christian Aid Colombia's partners have a permanent presence in key regions and strong links with local communities. Our programme aims to:

1. **Build communities' resilience** by helping them claim their human rights, particularly their rights related to land and territory.
2. **Hold the state to account**, make it more responsive to civil society and actively protect human rights defenders, including local leaders.

Christian Aid partners include the CIJP (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz or the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace), ABColombia, Peace Brigades International, Corambiente, Cedetrabajo, CCEEU (Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos or Coordination Colombia Europe United States), CCAJAR (Colectivo de Abogados Jose Alvear Restrepo or the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective Corporation), CALCP (El Colectivo de Abogados Luís Carlos Pérez or Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers Collective), ODHACO (Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos Acción Colombia or the International Office

for Human Rights - Action on Colombia), and Pastoral Social who work to support communities and HRDs to protect themselves while also raising their profile to prevent and reduce the threat of violence and attacks, building their resilience to stay on their land; work to build peace through transitional justice; work to address gender equality by focusing on gender-based violence; challenging existing gender norms; supporting women to gain access and control over resources; and helping women to participate directly in political processes at all levels, including local and national peacebuilding; and work on fiscal justice and challenging inequality as one of the root causes of the internal armed conflict, and ensuring that public money is directed to the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and that there is a progressive tax system where the rich pay more and the poor less.²³

Christian Aid's role has been to support partners – financially, amplifying their voices and supporting their programmatic and advocacy work. Since 2012, six partners have been phased out and two new partners were added: ANZORC (Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina) who works to support communities in gaining access to land and transforming war economies into peace economies and Sisma Mujer who works on gender justice linked to peace.

Father Alberto Franco from Christian Aid's partner, the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission in the humanitarian space of Puente Nayero, Buenaventura.



Our reflections on working on peace in Colombia

Our partners, along with many other actors, contributed to peacebuilding in Colombia. Two reports from Christian Aid partner ABColombia, 'Civil Society Voices: Agendas for Peace in Colombia' and 'Women's Participation in the Colombian Peace Process', show that despite some scepticism from civil society about the talks, the majority of them, 'consider these talks as the best chance for Colombia to end the conflict between the State and the FARC guerrillas'.²⁴ We acknowledge the multitude of actors who made such contributions. In this paper we draw upon reflections from our programme staff and partners in Colombia on their key learning from their work.

The methodology used to capture learning for this paper involved reviewing programmatic evaluations, annual reports, strategies, theories of change and a series of reflection sessions with partners and the programme team. A reflection session was held with the programme team initially and then subsequent interviews were held in early 2018 with partners individually, where the key reflections and learnings emerged. These reflections were then further analysed by the authors.

The intended audience is civil society, governments and international institutions supporting peace in Colombia.

Reflection one: after decades resisting the violence of armed conflict, defining a positive vision of peace was empowering for civil society organisations and enabled them to proactively engage with the peace process when it began. However, securing wider societal support for the peace process was challenging.

From the perspective of Christian Aid and our partners and based on our conflict analysis, the starting point in seeking to build peace was to seek to address the root causes of the conflict. These are viewed by Christian Aid and partners as inequality, including the concentration of land, economic resources and political power; widespread impunity; gender inequality; and the gross and systemic violations committed by all armed actors, legal and illegal, including sexual violence.²⁵ After many years of resistance against the atrocities committed by armed actors, standing for peace was a source of renewed energy for the civil society movement and something of a turning point.²⁶ In the initial stages of the peace process partners therefore sought to work with communities to define what peace could mean for them. For the communities our partners work with, peace means more than just an end to violence and conflict, or a negative peace.²⁷ It was fundamentally about a more positive peace that would address inequality, tackle impunity and realise human rights²⁸. It therefore meant access to land and public services, such as health and education, public authorities that actually worked to guarantee human rights and respect for the rule of law in which nobody would be above the law, and that there would be accountability for crimes committed in conflict, regardless of who committed them.²⁹

Defining peace helped communities to engage with the substantive issues of the peace process when it began in 2012. During the process of consultations, many communities were already relatively clear that they wanted the peace process to deliver restorative justice which emphasised reconciliation, rather than necessarily punitive justice, and that they wanted not only the truth established but also the process for dealing with the truth would be important (these points were put on paper and influenced the scope of the Truth Commission).³⁰ Partners had worked on issues of inequality, including land, HRDs and GBV for decades, however the way partners approached them evolved as the peace talks developed.

This approach evolved in two ways. Firstly, along with highlighting how these issues were the root causes, they also began to highlight how dealing with these issues was part of the solution for peace. Partners made the choice to fully engage with the peace process despite some concern about the political commitment of both parties. Partners therefore adjusted their work to the new opportunities that the peace process provided and began to elaborate solutions for substantive issues such as inequality and impunity that could be fed into shaping the dialogue. Secondly, they worked with communities, firstly to convince them of the merits of taking a leap of faith to engage with the process and then more formally when talks began in Havana. While key areas of work had to continue, partners made tactical adjustments to their work and focused more on bringing community issues to the national level. This shift in approach was facilitated by regular review, taking stock of why the programme was making certain choices and constantly questioning what our assumptions of change were.

The process of engaging constructively with peace was empowering for civil society in multiple ways. Partners were able to take their years of working at the local level with communities in Colombia to the national level as peace talks developed. Partners' knowledge, legitimacy, experience and skills gained from supporting communities in dealing with legal and illegal armed actors, who were often acting in collusion with businesses and authorities, allowed them to make a meaningful contribution and bring these skills into negotiations between the government and FARC. Civil society actors felt that the process of engaging with peace required all parties to challenge their narrative of the 'other' and to begin to understand for example why members of the military did what they did. Unheard of before stories emerged, for example individual members of the military forces who resisted taking part in human rights violations. Such processes begin to slowly sow the seeds of reconciliation.³¹

While the programme made progress defining peace with communities affected by violence, partners realised that a lack of wider societal engagement with the peace process could potentially block any peace agreement. This concern bore out with the rejection of the referendum by a slim majority.³² Largely, ordinary citizens did not understand the peace process, driven by misinformation in the process and public opinion not grounded in facts.³³ The dominant narrative in society, reinforced by the stories told by mainstream media, was that guerrilla groups were terrorist groups with no legitimate mandate or motivations, and solely responsible for all the violence.³⁴ This meant that there was in effect, limited public understanding of the fact that all forces – legal and illegal armed – committed widespread crimes and that the armed forces and the paramilitaries, acting together or separately, are responsible for far more crimes than the insurgents.³⁵

The links between the armed forces, or other public servants, and paramilitaries are not fully recognised by the broad public, despite the fact that numerous judicial rulings over the years had highlighted this.³⁶ Partners are challenging this by supporting legal cases and continuously highlighting a different narrative of the conflict. On the other hand, communities living in poverty in areas controlled by the FARC were generally stigmatised in Colombian society as automatic supporters of FARC

and terrorists. The scale of suffering of Afro-Colombian, indigenous communities and other groups was hidden in plain sight. In this complex context of competing narratives, peace activists came to realise that in order to realise the potential of the Final Peace Agreement, wider society would need to engage with conflict analysis and also what peace really means.³⁷

Key insights

- Laying the foundations for peace took decades in Colombia, civil society work was ongoing when peace seemed an impossible dream. By addressing the root causes of conflict and seeking to build peace in the midst of the conflict, partners played the role of keeping hope alive, addressing immediate violence but also focusing on the long-term and laying the foundations for peace.
- Defining a positive vision of peace to work towards was important for partners in Colombia. It was not enough – and was disempowering – to simply resist conflict and violence. Partners needed to go further by putting forward a positive articulation of peace when the peace talks began.
- Partners had worked on issues of inequality, including land, HRDs and GBV for decades, however the way partners approached them evolved as the peace talks developed. Firstly, along with highlighting how these issues were the root causes, they also began to highlight how dealing with substantive issues such as inequality and impunity was part of the solution for peace. Secondly, they worked with communities, initially to convince them of the merits of taking a leap of faith to engage with the process and then more formally when talks began in Havana. This shift in approach was facilitated by regular review, taking stock of why the programme was making certain choices and constantly questioning what our assumptions of change were.
- The dominant narrative in society, reinforced by the stories told by mainstream media, was that guerrilla groups were terrorist groups with no legitimate mandate or motivations, and solely responsible for all the violence. Partners challenge these dominant narratives and misinformation through their ongoing legal work. However, those working on peace began to realise that wider societal support for the peace process and awareness of the human rights violations of victims was overlooked. Without wider societal support, peace will be under threat and not gain political support.

Reflection two: focusing on human rights in the context of the peace process, particularly the rights of victims of the armed conflict was at the heart of our programme's approach. It helped prioritise programmatic interventions and guide us through deep and complex political dilemmas inherent in the conflict.

For decades, while there were some limited peace initiatives with insurgents, the response to violence from the government was primarily a military one and the possibility of such a comprehensive and an inclusive peace process a distant dream. As the country slowly began to focus more on the potential for peace after the peace talks started in 2012, various actors began to frame their work as peacebuilding.³⁸ Private companies (even those accused of violating human rights), state authorities, civil society organisations and the diplomatic community began to set out how they were contributing to peace. Peacebuilding was suddenly relevant to the entire context.

While this increased focus on peace was welcomed by Christian Aid's programme it also brought risks that peace was used so broadly as a concept that it had limited meaning and that actors defined peace according to their own mandates and interests. In order to make a clear contribution to peace – and to enable the programme to adapt to new opportunities emerging from the peace talks – the programme deliberately decided to engage with the peace process with a focus on human rights. In particular addressing the rights of victims of the armed conflict – marginalised women, Afro-Colombians, indigenous communities and rural communities – those communities who had experienced the highest levels of displacement, violence and armed conflict. Importantly, as a faith-based organisation the values that guide our work include standing in solidarity with those most affected by violence, love, dignity and respect for human rights. This focus on the human rights of those most marginalised and affected by violence was fundamental to who we are.

These shared values and the importance of addressing human rights violations as a contribution to peace was also fundamental to partners. The denial of economic, social and cultural rights was both the result of and one of the underlying structural causes of the conflict. Under international human rights law the Colombian state is accountable for its own actions, but it can also be made accountable for failing to protect the civilian population from the actions of armed actors in its territory. As well as addressing violence from armed actors, state accountability would also address many of the systemic and root causes of the conflict such as access to services, land and inequality. This built on the decades of work by partners defending victims' human rights and advocating for an alternative to the military focus and for negotiations. The programme's assumption was that if the country could realise the victim's rights, this would ultimately strengthen the rule of law and address poor governance issues in the state.³⁹ A secondary assumption was that the advocacy and visibility of using international human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and the International Criminal Court, ensured a political cost if the state did not address the endemic levels of violence given the state's concern with its international image.⁴⁰

As the peace talks evolved, the programme prioritised working on human rights and peace within a framework of transitional justice, specifically prioritising the rights of victims to truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-repetition. The focus on accountability under international human rights law strengthened partners support to all victims regardless of who was perpetrating the violence (military, FARC or paramilitaries).

Since 2012, this focus on the human rights of victims secured key achievements. Partners were instrumental in advocating that the transitional justice system applied to all actors and not just the FARC, a factor critical for FARC accepting it. Before the publication of the final text of the peace accords, our partner Compaz was called

to work on the ethnic perspectives in the agreements to ensure the interests of indigenous and black communities are protected. This especially related to access to and control over land and ensuring autonomous governance structures were safeguarded and reaffirmed in the Peace Agreement. Partners supported several high-level cases to the courts with some high-level prosecutions against military leaders and businessmen who used paramilitaries to grab land and displace communities. Our partners have challenged extrajudicial killings and also brought other high-level perpetrators of crimes to justice, including army generals. These cases made it possible for the military to accept that the transitional justice system would apply to them as well as the FARC. Partners also helped rural communities obtain access to more than 500,000 hectares of land, a key building block to peace. The fact that the transitional justice system addresses the roles of both armed forces and insurgents, was instrumental in securing FARC's engagement. The development of the Truth Commission and the Special Unit for the Search for People Assumed to be Missing/Disappeared were influenced by partners and HRDs can play a role in their ongoing work.

Focusing on solutions that addressed victims' rights provided criteria for addressing deep and complex dilemmas inherent in a conflict, for example when talking about how harsh or soft the sentences should be for the FARC and the other perpetrators or protecting the

programme from accusations of siding with the FARC. It also helped to provide solutions grounded in what communities actually wanted. In many cases, truth mattered as much to victims as legal accountability, for some victims what mattered was clearing their loved one's name, for example, in those situations where the military would insist that the innocent person belonged to the FARC.⁴¹ An exchange visit to El Salvador by Christian Aid and our partner, the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, gave some new perspectives on the Colombia peace process, for example, the need for a peace process that truly transforms the structural causes of the armed conflict and goes beyond disarmament. Another important learning was that the struggle for justice and peace takes decades.

During the decades of conflict, divisions emerged between peace activists and human rights groups, with the former promoting peace without real demands for justice or truth, while the latter advocated for accountability and justice.⁴² These divisions were gradually lessened due to continuous engagement and long-term partnerships between peace activists and human rights groups, built over time and based on mutual trust and understanding of their roles.⁴³ The fact that the Peace Agreement contained transitional justice provisions based on the rights of victims also meant that peace and justice were linked within this framework.⁴⁴



An indigenous women talking on her cell phone in the shelter for displaced indigenous people in Buenaventura.

Extra-judicial killings: what we learnt from addressing asymmetrical power

Security forces in Colombia carried out a significant number of premeditated civilian murders and fraudulently presented the civilians as 'killed in combat'. The former UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Mr Philip Alston, following a mission to Colombia found that 'although it appears that these so-called falsos positivos (false positives) were not carried out as a matter of State policy, they were also not isolated occurrences. The killings were committed around the country and by a large number of military units. They occurred because military units felt pressure to show success against the guerrillas through "kill counts". There were incentives: an informal incentive system for soldiers to kill and a formal one for civilians who provided information leading to the capture or killing of guerrillas. The latter system lacked oversight and transparency. Overall, there was a crucial failure of accountability, with problems at all stages of the investigatory and disciplinary processes.'⁴⁵

The injustice, secrecy and cover up of the issue of extra-judicial killing meant that this was an issue the programme could not ignore and it was a key part of our focus on victims. Soldiers would for example kill an innocent young man and make it look like he was a member of the FARC by manipulating the crime scene, often dressing the victim in clothing people from the guerrilla groups would wear to give the impression the victim was killed in combat. The forces tasked with protecting civilians was responsible for these extrajudicial killings. Our partner Coordinacion Colombia Europa Estados Unidos documented 6,863 cases of extrajudicial killings by the armed forces.⁴⁶

Another reason the programme wanted to highlight this issue was due to the asymmetrical power dynamics. Victims

were mostly young men from poor rural areas of the country. While the judicial system in Colombia has been relatively effective when it comes to crimes committed by the insurgents it has been very ineffective when it comes to state crimes. All high-level insurgent leaders have been sentenced for multiple crimes while not a single general in the army has been sentenced for extrajudicial killings, despite the magnitude of the crimes. The asymmetric power between the families of the victims, and the armed forces explains why there are very few sentences related to these crimes and all against relatively low-ranking soldiers. Armed forces and their political allies, have been successful in persuading a large part of the public that it is unfair that members of the armed forces have to be judged by special peace courts. On the other hand, victims are routinely stigmatised as liars. A mother of one of the victims says: 'The only thing that I want is for the military to tell the truth about why they killed my son... for them to say that he wasn't a bad person...'⁴⁷

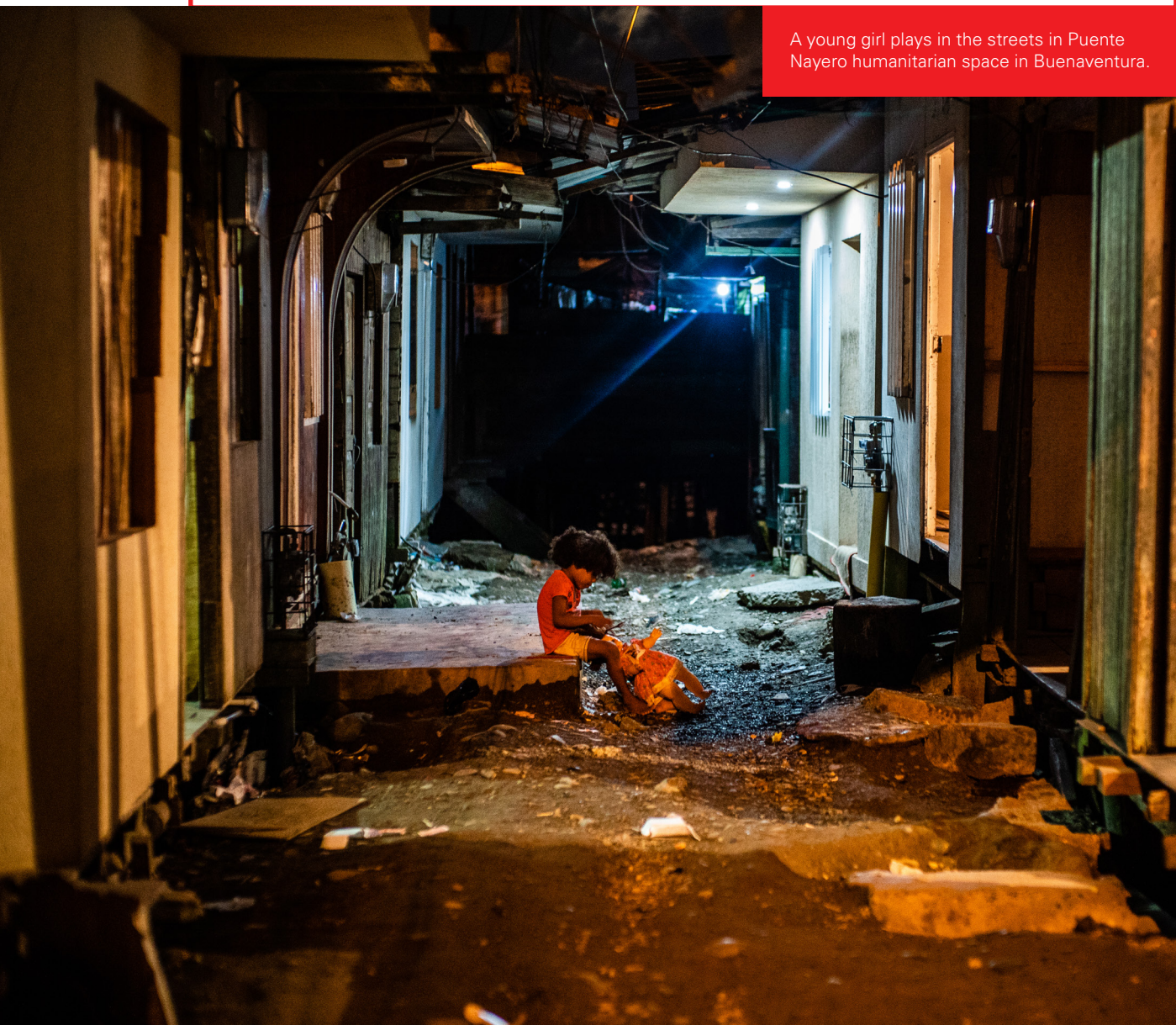
Our partners believe that false positives were part of a wider policy which was authorised from higher up the chain of command. This has been confirmed by the International Criminal Court which stated that there is a reasonable basis to believe that the extrajudicial killings were committed pursuant to a policy adopted at least at the level of certain brigades within the armed forces, constituting the existence of a state or organisational policy to commit such crimes.⁴⁸ Colombia remains under preliminary investigation by the Prosecutors Office of the International Criminal Court.

Dealing with this issue remains a priority as although the number of extrajudicial killings has gone down, they still take place.

Key insights

- Working in a violent context requires constant reflection about how we can contribute to peace, especially when multiple actors claim they are working on peace. In this context the programme made a deliberate decision to focus on the human rights of victims of violence, i.e. everyday people across the country who were terrorised by violence and on the frontline of conflict. This strategy worked very effectively in prioritising programmatic interventions but also in enabling the participation and preparation of victims' inputs into the peace agreement, in particular bringing in the perspective of women, ethnic groups, women and marginalised communities.
- By focusing on human rights as a means to build peace the programme used the explicit assumption that the peace process involved the state as a crucial actor, under international human rights law the Colombian state is accountable for its own actions, but also the actions of armed actors in its territory. As well as addressing violence from armed actors, state accountability would also address many of the systemic and root causes of the conflict such as inequality, impunity and lack of access to public services and land.

A young girl plays in the streets in Puente Nayero humanitarian space in Buenaventura.



Reflection three: the support of the international community for peace in Colombia was critical, but worked best when it did not impose agendas and enabled partners to work adaptively, flexibly and in response to the context.

The support of diplomatic staff and the international community in Colombia to civil society organisations working on peace was hugely important for Christian Aid partners.⁴⁹ The magnitude of killings in Colombia made it inevitable that both national and international actors condemned the levels of violence, including atrocities for which state actors were directly or indirectly responsible. These voices condemning violence were crucial because they put immense pressure on the state to live up to its responsibility of guaranteeing human rights.⁵⁰ The government in Colombia was concerned about its international reputation, anxious to portray itself as a strong, modern state and challenge the image of failed narco-state that persisted throughout the decades of conflict. Civil society organisations therefore could leverage this ambition and dependency on international standing in their advocacy work.⁵¹

The international community from governments across the political spectrum to diplomatic voices to INGOs and regional bodies, were consistent voices for peace that played a key role in pushing the government to support the peace process. To date, these voices have been able to advocate for peace within Colombia. However, with a new government in place no assumptions can be made about civil society space remaining open and the voices of international actors still being listened to. Any reduction in critical voices for peace at international level would have serious negative effects on partners and their work on peacebuilding, land restitution and impunity.

Working on peace in Colombia was and is dangerous, as seen by consistently high levels of attacks on local level HRDs challenging armed actors. Local leaders face the greatest risks whereas partners

with a certain national and international recognition face far fewer risks.⁵² Christian Aid's programme deliberately supports their work with advocacy to enhance partners' visibility and as a protection strategy. Support from particular governments, donors, UN agencies and bodies is critical in this.

From the perspective of our partners, long-term partnerships based on mutual trust and a shared understanding of complementary roles with local actors were the most valuable.⁵³ INGOs in particular need to be clear on their role in supporting local partners and responding to their needs. For both INGOs and the wider international community, partners were clear that external actors could play a facilitating role – or speak out in solidarity – but should not take the steering wheel in driving change in Colombia. Partnerships based on mutual trust and a shared understanding of complementary but different roles, enabled better ongoing reflection as the context changed. Such relationships enabled conversation and reflection about how to face new challenges in a fast-changing context given the risk of strong civil society organisations suddenly becoming redundant or without a clear role.

The ability to adapt, learn and respond was important in enabling partners to address the shifts in the context as the peace process progressed. Significant developments continued to occur in relation to the peace process which the programme needed to respond to and adapt their approach, including the beginning of talks with ELN, and the establishment of the three institutions of the Peace Agreement (the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Truth Commission, and the Special Unit for the Search of People Assumed to be Missing/Disappeared), the increase of violence against HRDs, new threats from agri-businesses and multinational companies interested in the land for economic purposes. Adapting, responding and learning from these changes was a key part of the programme's approach. A key funder of the programme in Colombia is Irish Aid, as part of a wider grant managed

by Christian Aid Ireland. This programme applies an adaptive programme which has an emphasis on supporting learning, reflection and adaptation. This includes 'strategy testing', explicit theories of change and 'outcome harvesting'. Annual strategy testing events, based on a procedure developed by The Asia Foundation, are designed to stimulate regular reflection around the theories of change underpinning partner activities. Participatory outcome harvesting is used to inform the testing of strategies and to support revision of theories of change where necessary. This approach enables programmes to change gear or shift lane when necessary.⁵⁴

Key insights

- The international community – INGOs, governments, multilateral agencies, the diplomatic community – plays an important role in supporting peacebuilding in Colombia. Such support is critical when it seems that there is little progress nationally and in providing visibility and protection for partners who face grave risks.
- Partners recognised that violence would continue or increase post the Final Peace Agreement. The only thing to do in this case is to take preventive measures, focus on implementation of the Agreement and to continue to seek international support for this.
- The ability to reflect, learn, adapt and respond as the context evolved was critical to partners. This enabled the programme to engage constructively with the peace process. This was made possible by long-term partnerships between INGOs and local partners. Critical to this was the fact that a key donor, Irish Aid, supported an adaptive programme which has an emphasis on supporting learning, reflection and adaptation.



Mariela Ortiz from the Wounan tribe seated in the room where she sleeps among other displaced families in an abandoned schoolhouse on the outskirts of Buenaventura. They are desperate to return to their land, but it is unsafe.



Reflection four: real achievements for women's rights in the peace process created the potential for further changes in relation to gender justice, but also this process prompted a backlash against women's rights and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

Former President Santos was initially strongly criticised in the peace process as all lead negotiators were men, with women involved in a tokenistic way. This was despite the Colombian state's chief negotiator publicly stating that 'women have been the vortex in which the pain of the conflict has focused with immense intensity'.⁵⁵ National and international women's organisations pressurised the negotiators to appoint women to their frontline teams and to give them a meaningful role.⁵⁶ While official negotiations started in August 2012, it wasn't until April 2013 when the first woman was appointed to a frontline negotiating team – Victoria Sandino for the FARC. The government followed in November 2013 with the appointment of Maria-Paulina Riveros and Nigieria Rentería.⁵⁷

In response to pressure from civil society, early on in the process, each of the chapters of the Peace Agreement, which were made public one at a time, included a strong gender focus, driven by the establishment of a Gender Sub-Commission at the talks in Havana. This, alongside formal mechanisms set to guarantee the participation of civil-society,⁵⁸ and the work of Colombian women's civil-society organisations (CSOs), ensured an influential and prominent gender focus in the Peace Agreement.⁵⁹ Christian Aid partners, in particular Sisma Mujer and the National Women's Network, also contributed significantly to the strong gender justice provisions in the Peace Agreement, they were represented on the Gender Commission in the Peace Agreement and there is now no amnesty for sexual violence as well as increasing accountability for human rights violations. This is an enormous achievement considering that the topic is highly sensitive to all the armed actors – both the

FARC and the armed forces would clearly have preferred not even to discuss it and leave it in silence and impunity.⁶⁰

Achievements for gender justice came incrementally, small wins enabled women's groups to keep demanding change.⁶¹ Although initially, women's participation was tokenistic, it served a purpose in establishing a foothold for women and ultimately in introducing a strong gender focus. Whilst the gender provisions in the Peace Agreement won't deliver the full vision of gender equality in Colombia, they were important victories for women in a context with such horrific levels of sexual violence.⁶² Partners drew upon international frameworks such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and its subsequent resolutions, which emphasise the participation of women in peace processes, state responsibility to end to impunity, and the fact that crimes relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls should be excluded from amnesty provisions.⁶³

On one hand, the peace talks opened up space to discuss feminist priorities, LGBTI issues and human rights. On the other hand, this made explicit tensions between conflicting visions of Colombian society, with the feminist movement using the opportunity to advance women's rights and some religious fundamentalist elements of Colombian society opposing them.⁶⁴ Women's organisations framed issues not only as women's issues but highlighted solidarity with different groups. Many organisations hoped that this increased attention on women and minority human rights would ultimately positively affect patriarchal social norms over time. However, women's issues and more broadly LGBTI issues are strongly rejected in fundamentalist religious circles in Colombia, which was one of the main reasons the peace plebiscite was rejected in a popular vote and that the gender and LGBTI provisions had to be softened in the Peace Agreement that was later signed. The rejection of the Agreement provoked fear amongst partners that conservative religious, including fundamentalist, views would gain further political power and undermine the gains made. However, such conservative groups arguably did not gain

as much political power in the March 2018 elections, as our partners had feared.⁶⁵ However, there was a negative impact that partners such as Sisma Mujer feel needs to be better understood. During the run up to the plebiscite, No campaigners against the referendum challenged what they saw as a 'gender ideology'. This played to patriarchal attitudes which were suspicious and fearful of the potential transformation of gender dynamics offered by the strong focus on the rights of women, marginalised groups and LGBTI in the agreement. The public rejection of these ambitious equality agendas seems to have had a negative impact on society at large by justifying narratives that discriminate against women and the LGBTI community.⁶⁶ Patriarchal attitudes that informed the 'gender ideology' campaign in the plebiscite on the Peace Accord, generated a context which made violence against women HRDs more acceptable. The killings of women HRDs doubled between 2016 and 2017,⁶⁷ and threats against LGBTI defenders jumped from five in 2016 to 26 in 2017.⁶⁸

A key learning from the programme from this strong opposition to women's rights was the need to facilitate dialogue between feminist, often non-religious groups and progressive religious leaders. The campaign against women's rights in the Peace Agreement was led by fundamentalist religious movements, mostly evangelicals but also Catholics. In conversations with partners and allies, including the Inter-Church Commission on Justice and Peace, Sisma Mujer, the National Women's Network and Church of Sweden, partners reflected on the inability of both traditional, mostly atheist, feminists and the progressive religious leaders to reach a broad audience. The feminist movement recognised its difficulties in reaching the rural communities, in particular. A key response of the programme was to form an alliance to bring together feminists and progressive religious leaders to work on developing a simpler and more convincing narrative to engage local, regional and national actors more effectively on women's rights.⁶⁹

Feminist organisations such as Sisma Mujer which has been highly visible and outspoken on women's rights, also worked within civil society to highlight how the armed conflict affected women differently. This resulted in a gender sensitisation of the human rights movement more broadly and meant that today during high level advocacy engagement, the issue of women is always raised and representatives of the women's movement are given priority seats in meetings.⁷⁰

The programme came to realise that having women's voices at the initial table was only the first step. In order to make institutions tasked with implementing the Final Peace Agreement truly inclusive – the staffing of these institutions matters hugely.⁷¹ The social and the human rights movements therefore influenced not only the content of the Peace Agreement but also the institutions that will implement it. Partners welcome the fact that HRDs occupy high positions in the three transitional justice institutions and that three of them are women: the female Director of the Special Unit for the Search of People Assumed to be Missing/Disappeared was a Vice-President of a former partner, the male President of the Truth Commission is an ex Director of a former partner, the President of the Special Peace Courts is female (and a majority of the judges are women).⁷²

A child studies alone in the small school in Cabeceras, a community on the San Juan river.



Key insights

- The gains for women's rights under the Final Peace Agreement were hugely significant, in particular the establishment of the Gender Sub-Commission and the fact that there is no amnesty for sexual violence and increased accountability for human rights violations. This is an enormous achievement considering that the topic is highly sensitive to all the armed actors – both the FARC and the armed forces would clearly have preferred not even to discuss it and leave it in silence and impunity. This work was driven by an active and organised feminist movement, reinforced by global frameworks such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
- The inclusion of women in the peace process was tokenistic at first but later led to tangible results. The sub-commission on gender was instrumental in delivering gender specific provisions. Securing incremental changes allowed women's organisations to keep demanding change.
- A peace process can open up space for transformative change. In Colombia such space opened to discuss feminist priorities, LGBTI issues and human rights. Women's organisations framed issues not only as women's issues but highlighted solidarity with different groups.
- However, a backlash is inevitable and needs to be thought through in advance. The inclusion of these issues made explicit tensions between conflicting visions of Colombian society, with the feminist movement using the opportunity to advance women's rights and equality rights more broadly and some fundamentalist religious elements of Colombian society opposing them and some backlash against these groups. The inclusion of women's rights and LGBTI rights was strongly rejected in the Peace Agreement. A key response of the programme was to form an alliance to bring together feminists and progressive religious leaders to work on developing a simpler and more convincing narrative to engaging local, regional and national actors more effectively on women's rights.
- Having a strong women's organisation in the programme was important. The work of a vocal feminist organisation influenced the wider human rights movement on the importance of gender issues.



A group of returned people from Cabeceras, a community on the banks of the San Juan, river gather for a ceremony with a banner to establish their territory as an internationally-protected humanitarian zone.

Reflection five: civil society needs to engage with the licit and illicit economies, both have a huge impact in terms of how peace is built and sustained.

Christian Aid believes that peace will only be sustainable if the economy is driven by an approach of inclusive development, particularly at this time of transition following over five decades of armed conflict. To address this, the programme included a tax justice partner who advocates for more progressive taxation, which would ultimately contribute to peace by addressing inequality. This work matters just as much following the Final Peace Agreement. Peace is expected to result in increased trade and investment from multinational companies given that foreign investment is heavily promoted by the government. Territories that were previously inaccessible due to the presence of insurgents are now potentially open for business. Land has always been at the centre of the conflict in Colombia and now the expansion of agro-industries and mining to new territories is leading to new conflicts. Communities opposing this are often viewed as anti-development, ignoring the fact that for them, 'investment' too often means displacement and loss of their livelihood. The programme responded to this by continually emphasising the need for respect for the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, in particular that communities want their rights to prior, free, informed consultation, the right to be involved, and to stay on their land. Communities Christian Aid works with want investment, investment that works for them and involves them.⁷³

Partners also focus on the insufficient budgets allocated to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. This is even more of a risk with the new government who opposes the Peace Agreement in many ways, those seeking to block its progress are now overseeing the financing of its implementation. In response, Christian Aid's programme is supporting the Tax Justice Network, to monitor the budgets, both the specific peace budget but also the broader national budget which will oversee resource allocation related to

economic and social rights such as land, infrastructure and public services – all key components of peace.

In 2016, Christian Aid's programme in Colombia shifted focus to also looking at the illicit economy – focusing on the illicit drugs trade in particular, complementing Christian Aid's global policy work which highlighted that this issue is a blind spot in development thinking.⁷⁴ Engaging with this issue was crucial as in Colombia since the 1960s different institutions – legal and illicit – competed with each other to assert their authority. Narcotrafficking, whose almost unlimited financial resources contributed to the strengthening of the guerrillas, transformed small agrarian insurgent groups into great military powers. Paramilitary groups developed in the early 1980s, eventually transformed to politically oriented armed actors – facilitated by their links with powerful interest groups and government institutions.⁷⁵ Contrary to perceptions – and the perception created by labels such as 'warlords' and 'drug lords' – their objective is not to manoeuvre outside the state but within it. Paramilitary groups are not at the margins of electoral politics and policy making.⁷⁶ Some argue that the control of cartels and paramilitaries over the local and regional powers deepened the weakening of institutions and the party system, with local and departmental leaderships not depending only on funding from the central layers of the state. The paramilitaries' political influence was not limited to local politics. The same practices were used to influence elections to the Senate and the House of Representatives.⁷⁷

Two key concerns for Christian Aid's staff were that the debate around illegal economies was dominated by a few actors, including the armed forces, the right-wing parties and the US, and that neither the dominant alternative development projects, nor forced eradication, offered models of success for communities. In particular women's livelihoods in rural areas are threatened by forced crop substitution as coca leaves worked as an economy for women, leading to greater financial autonomy and

empowerment. Christian Aid staff decided to focus on the illicit economy directly themselves and decided to lead this work themselves given the sensitivity of the issue for partners but also to take on new partners who could be supported to work on this more directly. This was welcomed by partners given the relevance of the issue to the peace process and the fact that they were focused on other issues. The programme seeks to engage with the illicit economy in three ways: 1) by contributing directly to the international debate with the larger Christian Aid family on illicit economies based on our in-country experiences 2) by engaging others, including other INGOs and partners, and most importantly giving space to the communities and 3) by looking for ways in which Christian Aid can support communities, with presence of illegal economies, primarily coca leaves in transforming war economies into peace economies in Peasant Reserve Zones.⁷⁸

Specifically, the programme is implementing two complementary research projects on the illicit economy. Project Nadia (currently funded by a Christian Aid fund, In Their Lifetime, which is supported by major donors) and as a partner in the SOAS, University of London-led 'Drugs and (dis)order: Building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war'

(funded by the UK government's Global Challenges Research Fund). Both seek to address the fundamental questions of how to transform war economies into peace economies, by market systems development combined with other policy and civil society interventions. Colombia has by far the highest number of hectares of coca leaves in the world,⁷⁹ evidence that existing ambitious and very costly, US-backed, eradication programmes haven't worked. Project Nadia is seeking to develop successful cases for market access in areas affected by conflict and see if they can be replicated. In early 2019, the project will implement pilots in one or two promising sectors (coffee, cocoa and/or buffalos), showcase how they have worked and seek funding with donors to scale up. In the current context, the laying down of weapons by FARC created a vacuum for illegal armed groups to fill this space and there seems to be a tendency of conflict changing from being mostly political to being mostly about illegal economies. The 'Drugs and (dis)order' project aims to generate a new evidence base on drugs and illicit economies and their effects on armed conflict, public health and livelihoods and develop new programmatic approaches and policy reforms, that can contribute to the reduction of violence and more inclusive development and sustainable livelihoods in drugs-affected contexts.⁸⁰

Key insights

- In Colombia, peace will only be sustainable if the economy is driven by an approach of inclusive development, particularly at this time of transition and expected increase in trade and investment, and the risks of further dispassion that comes with that. Peace also needs to be adequately financed and resourced, not just through the implementation of the Peace Agreement but also through progressive taxation for economic, social and cultural rights. The programme responded by looking at the issue of tax justice as a way to address the inequality that is one of the drivers of violence and beginning to look more at inclusive development.
- Narcotrafficking financed both the armed insurgents and the paramilitaries. However paramilitary groups were embedded into the networks of political and state power. The reality of this illicit economy and its connections with the structures of power in Colombia need to be understood when working on peace. Therefore, organisations trying to contribute to the peace process must seek to engage in complex and sensitive topics like that of illicit economies. Development actors have tended to view the issue of the illicit economy as separate to development. That is no longer possible. Like it or not, the drugs trade and other illicit activities are now part of the lives of millions of the people we aim to support.

Reflection six: conflict resolution involves engaging with armed actors and those responsible for violence; to do this well courage and in-depth power analysis are needed to understand the dilemmas and risks for civil society actors.

Our partners in Colombia work on difficult issues such as impunity and state accountability, often challenging the mechanisms of a powerful state with no real political interest in peace before 2012. However, the programme has also challenged the violence of insurgent groups and condemns violence by all actors, despite the fact that partners are often accused of belonging to or supporting the insurgents, in particular the FARC.

Under the Final Peace Agreement, FARC transitioned from armed actor to the political party, la FARC, keeping their acronym and guaranteed ten seats (five in each of the two chambers) of parliament for the next two electoral cycles as part of the terms of peace. They are now an established political party with representatives, pursuing their aims through the political system. The deliberate decision by FARC to keep their acronym can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture aimed at convincing

ex-combatants and supporters of the (supposedly) positive role that FARC played in bringing change to Colombia. A dynamic that raises dilemmas for those engaging in the context, including civil society.

Christian Aid is driven by an anti-poverty and justice agenda, and does not typically engage with armed actors, criminals or terrorists. In conflict contexts, NGOs do however have to be very aware of the power of these groups, and sometimes of the potential legitimacy they hold with communities we work with and their ability to make or break peace. State actors ultimately need to engage with these groups, indeed not engaging with them can backfire and lead to worse outcomes. For those working on peace in Colombia these dilemmas are complex and hugely sensitive. FARC was at the negotiating table and influencing the future of the country because they had used violence, not necessarily because of their legitimacy with communities. FARC was a strongly hierarchal organisation dominated by men and while they may have advocated for a very comprehensive peace agreement which addresses the root causes of the conflict, in reality they had no mandate to do this from communities.

Siode Arbolia's two brothers were shot dead near their homes in Cabeceras in 2017.



From the perspective of our partners, the response to this was to advocate for a broad, inclusive and participatory peace process with input and strong representation from communities and victims, in particular women. The programme helped finance victims to meet and collectively construct proposals, for example to the Truth Commission, and travel to Havana, where the actual talks took place. Christian Aid broadly welcomed the focus of the Peace Agreement developed in Havana which centred around major structural issues, such as land reform and the illicit economy. FARC played an important role in this, particularly in insisting on comprehensive rural reform.

A key learning for the programme in engaging with these dilemmas was to use power analysis to help us understand the risks and dilemmas inherent in the context. Both FARC and the State stood to lose in victims' struggle for justice and truth, however at the same time they needed civil society to give the peace talks legitimacy and show they would deal with the horrific legacy of violence. Both the government and FARC were responsible for systematic violations against victims throughout the conflict.⁸¹ Power dynamics

need to change in order to address the legacy of violence, for example in order to ensure non-repetition of violence, the armed forces should be reformed quite significantly, something politically difficult to secure. Likewise, FARC had to relinquish significant power. How to engage with FARC as a political actor, transitioning from an armed actor, created a dilemma for the programme. While their narratives for peace were similar to many of our partners, and indeed the UN, their background of crime and armed resistance undermined their positioning and legitimacy, a history that communities or Christian Aid could not forget. As a matter of policy Christian Aid or partners do not affiliate with political parties but in reality we are extremely cautious with FARC. Christian Aid and our partners welcomed FARC's transition to political actor, since the transition from armed actor to political part is a necessary step as part of the broader move to peace. Christian Aid also continues to strongly condemn atrocities committed by FARC, and other armed actors in Colombia publicly. Keeping the focus on the human rights of victims is the way we navigate our engagement with la FARC as a political actor.

Key insights

- Dilemmas emerge when an armed actor such as FARC becomes a political actor for civil society organisations. Conflict resolution involves engaging with people responsible for violence, this is fraught with complexities and tensions, our programme has managed this by remaining focused on the human rights of victims, Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, marginalised communities who have born the worst effects of violence in Colombia.
- Power analysis was important to not only to understand what is politically likely to gain traction but also to understand what mattered to victims. Assessing and understanding power has to happen on a regular basis in a conflict setting.

Conclusion and overall learning

For the last 20 years, Christian Aid's entire focus in Colombia has been on building peace. This experience in Colombia has highlighted some key lessons of relevance to those working on peace more broadly. Firstly, for countries that are stuck in seemingly endless cycles of violence, peace can seem like an impossible dream. Peace in Colombia, which has been in a state of continuous conflict since La Violencia or the civil war of the early 1950s, seemed such an impossible dream. The work of civil society during these decades of adverse conditions was essentially laying the foundations for peace, when peace felt impossible.⁸²

Secondly, civil society needs to challenge the violence but keep a view to the future when large scale change or peace becomes possible. Civil society actors need to be clear about what peace means to the communities they serve – and set out how they define peace – and be ready to engage with solutions for peace. In the case of the Colombia programme, our partners were clear that this meant addressing the structural and systemic issues around land inequality, gender-based violence, exclusion and economic justice – and putting the human rights of victims at the heart of their approach.

Thirdly, as peacebuilding gets more global attention from the UN, donors and other actors, it is important that actors are clear what it means to work on conflict and on peace. The assumption that just because you provide development relief in a conflict setting that you will reduce violence has been proven to fail, context after context. Economic investment alone will not build peace. It needs to be the right type of investment, assessed to mitigate against harm, targeted at excluded groups and complemented with an explicit peacebuilding focus.

Fourthly, power dynamics and narratives need to be intentionally engaged with. This will determine strategies like whether the international community has a key role, how to deal with expected backlash to transformative agendas, how to engage with armed actors, and assist with tackling particular conflict narratives in society that need to be engaged with in order to make peace sustainable and supported by the wider population.

Fifthly and finally, the potential for peace to transform gender dynamics will likely only be realised with the engagement of a specific feminist actor to drive this change – but also by engaging progressive faith actors or other allies. We hope that these lessons can contribute to the implementation of global peace policy agendas such as the Sustaining Peace resolutions, the SDGs and Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

An active and dynamic Colombian civil society, from the local to the international, sought to turn the tide of violence and build peace. The voices and proposals of civil society in Colombia have assisted in incorporating points of view otherwise ignored by the parties at the table, and helped to identify steps to overcome some of the most difficult issues on the table. Civil society played a key role in influencing the transitional justice system and in facilitating the participation of conflict-affected communities and victims in the peace talks and giving them a voice in the process, particularly for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Within civil society, women's organisations played a significant role in pursuing gender equality in the context of peace and a prominent focus on gender in the Peace Agreement.

The implementation of the Final Peace Agreement has advanced in some ways over the last two years. However, many of the more difficult aspects – such as achieving rural reform, advancing economic development, enhancing citizen participation, reincorporating former combatants, substituting crops of illicit use, and addressing the concerns of victims and providing mechanisms for transitional justice – remain to be addressed.⁸³ The two-year anniversary of the Final Peace Agreement marks a key moment for peace activists in Colombia. The initiatives from the new government to weaken the transitional justice system and the lack of will to implement other parts of the agreement, in particular those related to integral rural development

and voluntary crop substitution, are of profound and grave concern. Peace is by no means guaranteed and will require sustained and ongoing effort. Partners will need to engage more actively to challenge the wider societal narratives that still fail to recognise the reality and history of violence in Colombia. They will need to ensure that all aspects of the Final Peace Agreement are implemented. For Christian Aid's programme our focus will continue to be on protecting victims' rights, particularly of women and Afro-Colombians and indigenous people, but also on ensuring that inclusive development underpins our work on peace and human rights.



A meeting of journalists and members of Christian Aid in the indigenous community of Santa Rosa de Guayacan on the Calima river.

Policy implications and recommendations

International actors involved in supporting the Colombian peace process and other peace processes should insist peace is inclusive and gives priority to the views of marginalised victims and communities and the organisations that represent them. Donors should support and facilitate local civil society actors to drive peace rather than imposing external agendas, they can do this by enabling local ownership of agendas for change and by supporting local actors to adapt, respond and adjust to their context.

Peace is a long-term process which will require an adaptive and sustained intervention: long term support is needed to implement the Final Peace Agreements and ensure that both the government and FARC hold good on their commitments. International cooperation needs to remain focused on the implementation of the Peace Agreement for the next five to ten years. Donors should continue to fund civil society organisations, independently from the government as they have a unique position to push implementation of the Peace Agreements and because independent actors are necessary also to ensure the rights of victims of state crimes. The work of land restitution, protection of HRDs, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence will still need attention and funding support. There is a risk that if there is a more centralised donor system that such work would not be funded.

INGOs and local civil society actors need to be clear about how they will work on conflict and how they will build peace. The focus on peace should be deliberate, explicit but also informed by values and standards of international law. Working in a violent context requires constant reflection about how we can contribute to peace, especially when multiple actors claim they are working on peace. A peace process offers a moment of potentially

transformative change but CSOs need to prepare for backlash against equality or human rights gains.

Policies that draw land and labour from the illicit economy need to be considered as essential for a long-term peace. New power struggles are happening where armed groups want to control the illicit economy. The illicit economy cannot be solved by a military forced response. The reality of this illicit economy and its connections with the structures of power in Colombia need to be understood when working on peace. Therefore, organisations trying to contribute to the peace process must be aware of these complex and sensitive topics.

Development and investment in Colombia must be inclusive and based on the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights and ensure that communities are consulted in a meaningful way on business and foreign direct investment and should not be pursued at the expense of the poorest and most marginalised.

In light of the concerns about the new government's commitment to the Final Peace Agreement, the European Union, donors and multilateral agencies must continue to work with the Colombian government to ensure that the Peace Agreement is prioritised, implemented in full and adequately financed.

The Colombian government should prioritise the protection of human rights defenders and ensure that civil society has space to meaningfully participate in the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Endnotes

- 1 www.christianaid.ie/about-us/where-we-work/colombia
- 2 Among the reasons the agreement was rejected was due to the inclusion of progressive provisions on women's rights and LGBTI rights, public unease with the reintegration of ex-combatants to society, a transitional justice system perceived to be too lenient on FARC, and a general public backlash against FARC, land-owning elites and former President Uribe standing against it. Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 3 These Resolutions were published in 2015. Reviews were commissioned because of the perceived failure of UN instruments to contain and resolve conflicts around the world. The first review is the Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, also known as the AGE Report. The second review is the Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, known as the HIPPO Report, and the third, the Global Study on Resolution 1325.
- 4 www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
- 5 National Victims' Registry, colombiareports.com/colombias-war-victims-the-numbers/
- 6 For an extensive discussion of Colombia's 2014 Agricultural Census, see www.oxfam.org/en/research/snapshot-inequality
- 7 UNHCR, 'Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2017', www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf, p. 33. The total figure varies but UNHCR registers 7.7 million by the UNHCR (end of 2017).
- 8 www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/farc-profile/
- 9 Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas, 'Contribución al entendimiento del conflicto armado en Colombia', 2015.
- 10 Human Rights Watch, 'You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia', 2003, www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/colombia0903.pdf
- 11 www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/dangerous-ground/
- 12 Frontline Defenders 'Annual report 2017', www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/annual-report-human-rights-defenders-risk-2017
- 13 <http://defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/enlosmedios/7079/L%C3%ADderes-de-sustituci%C3%B3n-de-cultivos-il%C3%ADcitos-los-m%C3%A1s-asesinados-Defensor%C3%ADa.htm>
- 14 <https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/pais/siguen-asesinando-lideres-de-sustitucion-de-cultivos-ilicitos>
- 15 Campaign 'Rape and Other Violence: Leave my Body out of the War', First Survey of Prevalence, Sexual violence against women in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, 2001–09, www.usofficeoncolombia.org/uploads/application-pdf/2011-03-23-ExecutiveSummary.pdf and ABColombia, 'Colombia: Women, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the Peace Process', November 2013, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ABColombia_Conflict_related_sexual_violence_report.pdf
- 16 'Survey of the Prevalence of Sexual Violence against Women in the Context of the Colombian Armed Conflict 2010–15'. Oxfam, alongside local organisations and networks of women, undertook a survey of 142 municipalities to look at the prevalence of sexual violence against women in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ENCUESTA_INGLES_completo.pdf
- 17 'Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace', <http://especiales.presidencia.gov.co/Documents/20170620-dejacion-armas/acuerdos/acuerdo-final-ingles.pdf>
- 18 'The State of Implementation of the Colombia Peace Agreement', Report Two, 1 December 2016 to 31 May 2018, Kroc Institute for Peace Studies, https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/288008/180830_english_policy_report_2.pdf
- 19 Acto legislativo 1 de 2017 art. 7 transitorio.
- 20 Decreto 588 de 2017, art. 13. 10.
- 21 'The State of Implementation of the Colombia Peace Agreement', Report Two, 1 December 2016 to 31 May 2018, Kroc Institute for Peace Studies, https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/288008/180830_english_policy_report_2.pdf
- 22 www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Christian-Aid-Colombia-country-strategy-2012-17.pdf
- 23 www.christianaid.ie/about-us/where-we-work/colombia
- 24 ABColombia, 'Civil Society Voices, Agendas for Peace in Colombia', 2015, www.abcolombia.org.uk/civil-society-voices/ and ABColombia, Women's Participation in the Colombian Peace Process, 2018, www.abcolombia.org.uk/women-participation-colombian-peace-process-latin-news/

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- 25 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 26 www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/colombia/report-colombia/
- 27 Johan Galtung defined 'negative peace' as the absence of violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, a negative peace will ensue. It is negative because something undesirable stopped happening (e.g. the violence stopped, the oppression ended), https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu/documents/4264714/positive_negative_peace.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1540317202&Signature=Gol3G%2BRZ8cBhrng4nR8QKMqsyS4%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DJohan_Galtung_Positive_and_Negative_Peac.pdf
- 28 Galtung defined positive peace as filled with positive content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict.
- 29 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 30 Interview with partner Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, April 2018.
- 31 Interview with partner Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, April 2018.
- 32 Turnout was low at just over 37% (50.21% voted against to 49.78% for), directly threatening the viability of peace talks.
- 33 Interview with partner Peace Brigades International, April 2018.
- 34 Interview with Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 35 http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/observatorio/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/General_15-09-18.pdf
- 36 Jacobo Grajales, 'Private Security and Paramilitarism in Colombia: Governing in the Midst of Violence', *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, vol. 9, issue 3, 2017, p. 27–48.
- 37 Interview with Coordination Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, May 2018.
- 38 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Interview with Peace Brigades International, April 2018.
- 41 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 42 Interview with Coordination Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, May 2018.
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- 44 Interview with Coordination Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, May 2018.
- 45 Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston, Addendum Mission to Colombia, UN General Assembly, 31 March 2010, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/132/35/PDF/G1013235.pdf?OpenElement>
- 46 These cases have been documented by our partner, Coordinacion Colombia Europa Estados Unidos. See "Encuentro de Víctimas de Ejecuciones Extrajudiciales", which is a document the partner compiled from meetings with 330 family members of the victims, which was presented to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in February 2018 with specific recommendations on how to guarantee the rights of victims in this complex process on topics such as the right to a lawyer, information, accountability mechanisms and protection (many family members suffered from serious security risks because of the cases). Out of the 6863 cases, 5326 took place from 2002 – 2010, when Alvaro Uribe was President and when there was a sharp peak in cases of extrajudicial killings, with about two innocent people being killed by the armed forces every single day.
- 47 Ibid
- 48 The International Criminal Court, Situation on Colombia, November 2012, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/otp_-_colombia_-_public_interim_report_-_november_2012.pdf
- 49 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 50 Interview with Peace Brigades International, April 2018.
- 51 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Interview with Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, April 2018.
- 54 'Learning to Make a Difference, Christian Aid Ireland's Adaptive Programme Management in Governance, Gender, Peacebuilding and Human Rights', September 2018, David Booth with Karol Balfe, Róisín Gallagher, Gráinne Kilcullen, Sarah O'Boyle and Alix Tiernan, www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12387.pdf
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- 56 See note 13.

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- 58 www.abcolombia.org.uk/civil-society-voices/ and Women's Participation in the Colombian Peace Process, Louise Winstanley, Programme and Advocacy Manager at ABColombia, Published in Latin News, Latin American Regional Report, May 2018, www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ABColombia-LatinNews-Women-Participation-Peace-Process-.pdf
- 59 www.abcolombia.org.uk/women-participation-colombian-peace-process-latin-news/
- 60 Interview Sisma Mujer, November 2018.
- 61 Interview Christian Aid programme team, April 2018.
- 62 'Survey of the Prevalence of Sexual Violence against Women in the Context of the Colombian Armed Conflict 2010-15', Oxfam, alongside local organisations and networks of women, undertook a survey of 142 municipalities to look at the prevalence of sexual violence against women in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, www.abcolombia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ENCUESTA_INGLES_completo.pdf
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- 66 Interview Sisma Mujer, November 2018.
- 67 Analysis varies from 2017 with some suggesting a 133% increase. Corporación Sisma Mujer. September 2018. Comparative analysis of murders of leaders, leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia.
- 68 In those cases in which sexual orientation or gender identity is known, 14 were threats against transgender women and 3 against leading lesbian women and defenders. Corporación Sisma Mujer. September 2018.
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- 76 Jacobo Grajales, 'Legalising the Illegal in Colombia: Criminals as political actors', Christian Aid Occasional Paper, October 2015.
- 77 Mauricio Romero, ed., Parapolítica. La ruta de la expansión paramilitar y los acuerdos políticos. Bogotá: Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, 2007.
- 78 Peasant Reserve Zones refer to a legal concept of providing peasant in rural areas with control over their land and protecting the land from large scale agro-industrial interests. The Peasant Reserve Zones are widely recognised for their potential to build peace at the local level and protect the environment, including forest areas, from degradation. When using the term Peasant Reserve Zones we refer both to those zones formally established and those in the process of being established.
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- 80 www.soas.ac.uk/drugs-and-disorder/
- 81 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/colombia/report-colombia/>
- 82 Interview with Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, April 2018.
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