

In Colombia, as in other countries, women suffer structural discrimination and live in a clearly unequal position in relation to men. In a patriarchal society like Colombia, women suffer inequalities in all aspects of life. The employment gap between men and women is increasing; although women have joined the labour market their unemployment rate doubles that of men, and so they often accept exploitative and precarious employment as part of the informal economy. Women also suffer inequality in access to land, as deeply seated cultural norms benefit men in inheritance, in the sale of land, access to credit and technical assistance. In terms of political participation, women make up a significant part of the 52% of the population that votes. However, according to "Inter-Parliamentary Union", women currently fill only 14% of council positions and just 17% are members of Congress. The maternal mortality rate remains very high in Colombia, with 75.6 deaths per hundred thousand live births, rising in some areas such as the Chocó region to 200, according to UNFPA (2010).

There has been progress in the political recognition of women's rights in Colombia, yet women continue to suffer multiple human rights violations. It is important to take into account when analyzing violence against women in Colombia, the double victimization they suffer due to living in a patriarchal society where structural discrimination is the norm and in a situation of armed conflict. One of the cruelest effects of this situation in Colombia is the way that sexual violence has been used as part of the armed conflict to control women¹.

According to the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office in Colombia, around 70 percent of women in Colombia have suffered some form of violence (physical, psychological or political), and up to 80% of victims do not report crimes committed against them.



Sexual violence as a weapon of war

All armed parties to the internal armed conflict in Colombia continue to use sexual violence as a strategy of war and terror. A new report has revealed that 489,687 women were direct victims of sexual violence between 2001 and 2009.

Between 2001 and 2009, every hour six women were the direct victims of sexual violence.

In March 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights asked the Colombian State to "issue, as soon as possible, detailed instructions to their personnel in order to ensure proper attitudes and actions towards sexual violence" and called on the Attorney General's Office to "adopt a policy for the systematic investigation of cases of sexual violence and to quickly move forward in the investigation of alleged cases".

There is almost total impunity for crimes of sexual violence. As an example, according to figures from the Attorney General's Office, under Law 975, there have been 51,616 confessions, yet only 42 are related to sexually violent crimes and these have not led to any convictions. There are high levels of underreporting of crimes of sexual violence because the victims are afraid to report their attackers, or because of a lack of sensitivity and training of public officials, which leads to the revictimization of women who dare to report the facts. The available figures do not reflect the actual size and extent of violence against women.



Forced displacement and Ruling 092 of 2008

According to figures from the NGO, Consultancy for Human Rights and Forced Displacement (CODHES), there are nearly 6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia. Women, along with children and adolescents, make up 67% of the total number of IDPs in the country.

Colombian Constitutional Court Ruling 092 recognises the disproportionate impact of the internal armed conflict on Colombian women and makes a direct link between displacement and sexual violence.

In Ruling 092 of 2008, the Constitutional Court ordered the Colombian government to create 13 protection programs for women in situations of forced displacement and ordered the Attorney General's Office to investigate 183 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups, either preceding or resulting from the forced displacement of women. The Ruling also recognises sexual violence as a generalized and systematic crime against women in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. This represents a step forward in the recognition of women's rights, calling for the urgent defense of these rights; however, to date the ruling has still not been effectively implemented in Colombia.

Women Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders are all those women who individually or collectively exercise their right to defend civil, political, social, economic, cultural, collective, sexual and reproductive rights.

There is a need to monitor the specific situation of women defenders because gender issues, imposed social roles and power relations also affect their work. Discrimination affects women defenders as they face greater risks inherent to their gender, including rape and sexual harassment, the use of offensive ideas about sexuality aimed at discrediting their personal reputation and their work, and threats and attacks against their children.

Former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Hina Jilani, has said about women defenders "(...) not only may they face human rights violations for their work as human rights defenders, but even more so because of their gender and the fact that their work may run counter to societal stereotypes about

women's submissive nature, or challenge notions of the society about the status of women (...)"

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, "women defenders at greater risk of suffering certain forms of violence and other violations, prejudice, exclusion and repudiation than their male counterparts"

According to the 2010 Annual Report of the Special Rapporteur, Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for certain groups of particularly vulnerable women defenders, including lawyers who fight against impunity and women who defend the rights of indigenous peoples and land rights. The differential protection needs of women defenders should be fully consulted with them and urgently applied, according to national and international protection mechanisms.



Conchita Guerra

Faced with the dramatic situation of the violation of women's rights, we ask the EU and its member states to:

- Implement the EU guidelines on violence against women and the guidelines on human rights defenders
- Make statements in support of organisations that defend the human rights of women

We ask the European Union to urge the Colombian government to take the following actions:

- Urgently implement Ruling 092 and Law 1257, in full consultation with the women concerned
- Comply with the recommendations of the United Nations system relating to the rights of women, including the Universal Periodic Review and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
- Invite to Colombia the UN Rapporteur on the situation of violence against women to verify the situation and actions required for change

1. Violence against women is defined in the United Nations Declaration on the elimination of violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

The Inter-American Convention for the prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women, known as the Convention of Belem do Pará, defines violence against women as including physical, sexual and psychological violence:

- "a. that occurs within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the woman, including, among others, rape, battery and sexual abuse;
- b. that occurs in the community and is perpetrated by any person, including, among others, rape, sexual abuse, torture, trafficking in persons, forced prostitution, kidnapping and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as in educational institutions, health facilities or any other place; and
- c. that is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs".

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