

**Brussels, 02/12/2022**

**Ms. Ursula Von Der Leyen**

*President of the European Commission*

Sent via email to:

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**Mr. Josep Borrell**

*Vice President of the European Commission/High Representative*

Sent via email to:

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**To the President of the Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen,  
To the Vice President of the Commission/High Representative Josep Borrell,**

On 24 and 25 October 2022, a delegation of women human rights defenders from Colombia visited the European Parliament in Brussels. Following their visit, we are sending this letter to stress the importance of continued support from the European Union for the various peace processes in the country.

In Colombia, the Final Peace Agreement was signed in 2016 between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP. The agreement represented a milestone for peace, both in Colombia and throughout the world. Nevertheless, violence continues in Colombia due to confrontation between different armed groups. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are currently six armed conflicts in the country. These armed conflicts continue to seriously affect the lives of communities in affected areas. In 2021, a number of different kinds of human rights violations increased, including internal forced displacement (52,880), confinement as a result of the conflict, selective killings, antipersonnel mines (486), and forced recruitment. These figures had fallen to historic lows in 2016 and 2017 as a result of the signing of the Peace Agreement, however, in subsequent years they have been gradually rising. They are indicators of suffering in the civilian population in regions where armed groups fight for control of legal and illegal economies, and over the civilian population.<sup>1</sup>

The Government of President Gustavo Petro has proposed a policy of “total peace” that seeks a negotiated solution to the various conflicts with different armed groups. Depending on the characteristics of each group, the policy provides for different kinds of political and legal negotiations. The policy also includes a commitment to moving forward with the implementation of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP. Human rights organisations have noted that the lack of implementation of the Agreement is one of the reasons for the persistence of armed violence and human rights violations.

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<sup>1</sup> [Colombia: Living in the shadow of armed conflict | International Committee of the Red Cross \(icrc.org\)](https://www.icrc.org/en/news/press-releases/2022/10/24/colombia-living-in-the-shadow-of-armed-conflict)

Human rights and civil society organisations support the current Government's peace policy, emphasizing the importance of not losing sight of the focus on the victims' rights to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition. They ask that in the new processes of dialogue and negotiated settlement with armed groups, are built according to the accumulated experience and institutions created as part of the process with the FARC-EP.

It is important that the European Union shows its support for and monitors the new dialogue process with the ELN as soon as possible, as well as the processes with the other armed groups; to guarantee differential approaches, especially the ethnic and gender approach. To do this, the mandate of the European Union Special Envoy should be extended to cover the peace process with the ELN, ensuring that he plays an active role both in monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP, in particular the points supported by the European Union's different cooperation instruments, and in the dialogue process with the ELN.

We also echo concerns expressed by Colombian human rights coordination groups during their visit to the European Parliament regarding the continuing human rights situation in Colombia. In 2021 there were 996 individual attacks on human rights defenders, an increase of 3% compared to the previous year and the highest figure recorded by the *Somos Defensores* Program since 2010. Many of these attacks were against social leaders working on the implementation of different aspects of the Peace Agreement. Patterns of impunity persist in these attacks. We once more insist that the risk for these defenders could be reduced moving forwards with the implementation of the measures contained in point 3.4.<sup>2</sup> of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, such as the Special Investigation Unit and the National Commission for Security Guarantees.

The European Union has supported the peace process and the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, through bilateral cooperation, the European Peace Fund and the Special Envoy. We would like to stress the importance of maintaining EU support for civil society and human rights organisations in Colombia at this key moment. Indeed, the absence of human rights as a priority issue in the political and cooperation agreements between the EU and Colombia is worrying. We share our concern about information published about misuse of funds in the OCAD Paz, intended for the implementation of Development Plans with Territorial Focus (Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial). It is important that the European Union insists on accountability for funding through international development cooperation for the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Finally, we would also like to highlight the importance of EU support for the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth Commission, finalists for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize 2022.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Programa Somos Defensores, "Teatro de Sombras"- Informe anual 2021, Sistema de Información sobre agresiones contra personas defensoras de DD.HH en Colombia SIADDHH. Available at: <https://somosdefensores.org/>

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