

HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE IN COLOMBIA #HRC58



1. Total Peace Policy

Throughout 2024, the national government has pursued a negotiated and dialogue-based resolution to the conflict with various armed groups and criminal organizations. As part of the Total Peace policy, negotiations with these groups or criminal structures have been carried out in parallel with efforts to drive territorial transformations – actions aimed at strengthening infrastructure and basic services in the areas most affected by the conflict^[1]. This initiative has been referred to by the Office of Commission for Peace as “Peace Models”^[2].

By the end of 2024, the government reported the structuring of five Peace Models in the following regions: 1) Tumaco and the Telmí Triangle in Nariño (4 municipalities); 2) Abades, in Nariño; 3) Baja Calima and Bajo San Juan, in Chocó and Valle del Cauca; 4) Quibdó, in Choco; 5) Yarí, in Meta and Caquetá^[3]. Unfortunately, there is concerning little public and available information regarding the progress and results of these actions. Additionally, there has been weak coordination between the Office of Commission for Peace and other institutions regarding this initiative.

Regarding negotiations, the most significant progress has been made in local dialogues with criminal gangs controlling Buenaventura, Valle de Aburrá, and Quibdó, as well as with armed structures of ELN dissidents. However, the dialogue table with the ELN guerrilla was suspended following the group’s recent attacks on civilians in the Catatumbo region two weeks ago. Although a model for civil society participation had been established in May 2024, the ELN’s failure to uphold several agreements—including the ceasefire and the prohibition of kidnappings—led to the suspension of negotiations in January 2025.

Currently, there are nine (9) ongoing negotiation frameworks under the Total Peace policy.

Group	Situation
NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN)	In November 2024, became active again. In January 2025, the process was suspended by order of the President.
FRENTE COMUNEROS DEL SUR (ELN dissidents)	Active in the department of Nariño.
LA SEGUNDA MARQUETALIA	Fragmented: Negotiations are only being held with a faction called the National Coordinator of the Bolivarian Army (CNEB).
ESTADO MAYOR DE BLOQUES Y FRENTE (EMBF) formerly known as the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central, EMC)	Active in its sixth cycle of dialogue.
GAITANIST SELF-DEFENSE FORCES OF COLOMBIA (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), also known as the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo)	Beginning negotiations.
GANGS IN THE ABURRÁ VALLEY	Active and progressing as a socio-legal dialogue.
GANGS IN QUIBDÓ	Active and progressing as a socio-legal dialogue.
GANGS IN BUENAVENTURA	Active socio-legal dialogue. The ceasefire ended on February 5th. The 'Shottas' announced a unilateral ceasefire starting from that date.
AUTODEFENSAS CONQUISTADORAS DE LA SIERRA NEVADA (ACSN)	Beginning negotiations.

The escalation of violence in several regions of the country has hindered society's participation, both in the negotiations and in monitoring compliance with the agreements reached. It has also slowed progress in several of the dialogues.

Implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement

In 2024, concrete progress was made in the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement (AFP), including the creation of the Agrarian Jurisdiction^[4] and the National Reintegration System, as well as the adoption of a public policy for dismantling criminal behaviors and organizations. However, in general, delays in the implementation of the AFP persist. By July 2024, deficiencies were reported in the updating of the multipurpose cadastre and in the territorial security necessary to guarantee victim reparations^[5]. The absence of a discussion about the Statutory Law on Protest in Congress remains an unresolved issue, along with the promotion of gender-related measures and ethnic chapter. The positive news of the adoption of the dismantling policy has been overshadowed by its lack of implementation.

In October 2024, the government announced a “shock plan” to accelerate implementation. This plan included national and local agreements to expedite the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (PDET), an emphasis on Integral Rural Reform, a legislative agenda, the strengthening of the Security System for Politics, and the assignment of responsibilities for implementation, among other measures^[6]. Subsequently, in November, the Implementation Framework Plan (Plan Marco de Implementación, PMI) of the AFP was updated to define the actions, strategies, and goals for planning the agreement’s implementation. As part of this process, the government presented a strategy to adjust the plan, modifying existing indicators and incorporating new ones to strengthen compliance with commitments related to the Integral Rural Reform, security guarantees, ethnic and gender approaches, and issues of truth, justice, and reparations^[7].

With one year and six months remaining in its term, the Gustavo Petro administration faces significant challenges in delivering concrete results from its peace policy. Its success depends on coordinating interinstitutional efforts, advancing the adoption of a legal framework for several of the ongoing negotiations, reaching humanitarian agreements to reduce violence in conflict-affected territories, and, most importantly, making progress in implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement—the core of the Total Peace policy. Moreover, the government must reinforce state presence in regions that have been historically affected by the conflict.

2. Continuation of the armed conflict and humanitarian situation

In 2024, armed conflicts in Colombia continue to have a severe impact on communities, intensifying violence in historically affected regions and worsening the humanitarian crisis.

Throughout 2024, armed groups have expanded their presence: The National Liberation Army (ELN) is now active in 231 municipalities across 20 departments, marking a 7% increase from 2023 and a 26% increase from 2022^[8]. The Central General Staff (EMC), a dissident faction of the FARC, is present in 209 municipalities across 22 departments, 47 more than in 2023^[9]. The Segunda Marquetalia, another FARC dissident group, now operates in 65 municipalities across 12 departments, an increase of 11 municipalities from 2023^[10]. The Gulf Clan (AGC), a paramilitary group, has also expanded, impacting 316 municipalities^[11]. This strengthening of armed groups has exacerbated the security and humanitarian crisis.

In 2024, Colombia recorded 76 massacres with 267 victims^[12], primarily targeting social leaders and rural communities, highlighting the rising violence and territorial expansion of illegal armed groups.

Despite the negotiations and dialogue efforts held throughout 2024, violence in the conflict zones has not significantly decreased. Moreover, the recent breakdown of negotiations with the ELN ^[13] has set the stage for further armed confrontations between groups and an increase in violence against civilians.

According to Monitoring Bulletin No. 31 by Coalico[14], during the first half of 2024, at least 17,359 children and adolescents were affected by forced displacement. Overall, throughout 2024, a total of 313,600 people experienced forced displacement and confinement: 176,500 due to displacement and 137,100 due to confinement. The year 2024 recorded the highest number of confined individuals, with a 57% increase compared to the previous year, according to the OCHA humanitarian situation report[15].

The Office of the Ombudsman[16], reported at least 409 cases of child recruitment in Colombia. Of these cases, 39% involved girls, 51% affected Indigenous populations, and 6% Afro-Colombians, representing a significant increase from the 342 cases recorded in 2023. However, it is important to note that underreporting prevents an accurate assessment of the full extent of the problem.

The Ombudsman's monitoring system recorded 105 mass displacement events affecting 25,611 people throughout 2024[17].

Between January and December 2024, 400,612 migrants crossed the Darién Gap[18] – a high figure despite a decrease compared to 2023.

In 2024, Colombia recorded 745 femicides, according to the Ombudsman's Office[19], reflecting the country's deeply entrenched structural inequalities, especially in contexts of armed conflict. This phenomenon disproportionately affects Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural women, as well as LGBTIQ+ individuals[20], who face multiple forms of discrimination and violence. The persistence of these patterns underscores the urgent need to develop gender-focused instruments and policies in peace initiatives and in strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of violence.

Since mid-January 2025, in the Catatumbo region, Norte de Santander, the escalation of violence—driven by ELN attacks on civilians during clashes with a FARC dissident faction—has caused catastrophic damage. Reports indicate that 54,000 people have been displaced, 55 people killed (including six signatories of the peace accord), and more than 30,000 people confined[21].

3. Situation of human rights defenders and social leaders

In December 2023, the Constitutional Court declared a State of Unconstitutional Affairs[22] regarding violence against human rights defenders and social leaders, describing it as “massive, systematic, and widespread.”[23]. The ruling highlights the persistence of rights violations, the impunity surrounding them, and the absence of “a comprehensive and specific public policy instrument that integrates different dimensions and meets the minimum conditions necessary to ensure its effectiveness” [24].

Along the same lines, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), following its on-site visit to Loco in April 2024, warned that “(...) the reconfiguration of the armed conflict, the expansion of non-state armed groups, and the territorial control exercised by these actors are fundamental elements in understanding the violence faced by social and community leaders, including members of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant and peasant communities, as well as those belonging to social movements and labor unions” [25].

In August 2024, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) issued a historic ruling[26] holding the Colombian state internationally responsible for serious human rights violations committed against

members of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (Cajar) and their families from the 1990s to the present. The ruling emphasizes the abuse of intelligence activities by state authorities against human rights defenders.

Throughout 2024, at least 166 human rights defenders were killed^[27] (143 men, 19 women, and 4 individuals of diverse sexual orientations), with the most affected sectors being community, grassroots, and Indigenous organizations. The departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, and Arauca recorded the highest number of cases. Although this figure represents a slight decrease compared to previous years (175 in 2023^[28] and 201 in 2022^[29]), the situation remains critical, with high levels of impunity, as in most cases, neither the material nor intellectual perpetrators have been identified.

Beyond homicides, other forms of violence persist, including threats, stigmatization, co-optation, surveillance, profiling, enforced disappearances, gender-based violence, and sexual violence. Additionally, the creation of “fake NGOs”^[30] by various actors with political, economic, and military interests has increased. These organizations are used to infiltrate and weaken the social and human rights movement through defamation, stigmatization, and coercion. The growing presence of armed actors has also led to underreporting of attacks, as communities, subjected to control and terror, are forced into silence.

In response to this crisis, the government has promoted initiatives to improve the prevention and protection of human rights defenders. Key measures include the launch of the Action Plan for the Comprehensive Program of Guarantees for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders^[31], the ratification of the Escazú Agreement, and the approval of the Public Policy for the dismantling of criminal organizations targeting social leaders^[32]. Additionally, in June 2024, Congress passed the Women Searchers Law^[33], a pioneering measure recognizing and protecting victims of enforced disappearance.

However, significant gaps remain in the implementation of these policies, as well as a serious lack of coordination between national and local entities in adopting and enforcing effective protection measures. Moreover, the Attorney General's Office has made little progress in investigating and prosecuting those responsible for these attacks. Finally, a comprehensive policy to organize the institutional response for preventing violence and protecting human rights defenders has yet to be adopted, despite the Constitutional Court's ruling and international recommendations.

4. Advances in Human Rights

Social reforms

In 2024, the Colombian government has been promoted structural reforms in pensions, labor, health, and education, which are expected to have a significant impact on people's living conditions.

The pension reform, approved in July 2024, establishes a four-pillar system that prioritizes older adults living in poverty, integrating both solidarity-based and contributory approaches. Its implementation is set for July 1, 2025 ^[34].

The labor reform introduces progressive improvements, such as paid leave for medical appointments and family emergencies, the extension of paternity leave to four weeks, labor rights for app-based delivery workers, and the formalization of employment for community mothers^[35]. This reform, along with the health reform – which prioritizes primary care, prevention, and a centralized administration model to ensure transparency and improve service quality – continues to move through Congress^[36]. However, both face significant challenges in securing approval.

In September 2024, the Ministry of Education proposed a reform for the Law 30 of 1992 to adjust state funding for public universities based on their actual costs and GDP growth. However, the proposal failed to pass the first debate [37].

Police Reform and the Right to Protest

Between 2022 and 2024, new regulations were introduced to govern the use of less-lethal weapons and to create the National Dialogue and Order Maintenance Unit (UNDMO), replacing the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD), in an effort to shift police doctrine toward a less repressive approach. In 2023, guidelines were also established to manage social protests, prioritizing dialogue and minimizing the use of force.

However, civil society organizations warn that ongoing issues – such as internal oversight mechanisms within the police, the monitoring of excessive force cases, and the effective and impartial investigation of human rights violations in protest contexts – continue to hinder meaningful structural transformation of the National Police [38].

Advances in Women's Rights

Two significant milestones took place over the past year for Colombian women. First, 23 years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the government launched a participatory process in October 2022 to develop Colombia's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (PAN1325). More than 1,500 women from diverse regions contributed, helping to shape strategies to address Colombia's peace challenges [39].

The plan was approved in the second half of 2024, fulfilling a longstanding commitment to the women who have worked for peace from their communities and diverse backgrounds [40]. PAN1325 aims to transform the lives of Colombian women by: i) recognizing their leadership as peacebuilders; ii) ensuring their right to health and ancestral practices; iii) guaranteeing a life free from violence; iv) providing access to justice; v) protecting territories; vi) promoting economic autonomy; and vii) ensuring safe mobility, with a focus on rights, gender, intersectionality, differential approaches, and anti-racism [41].

Additionally, over the past year, the government actively promoted the appointment of women to high-ranking positions in the state. By nominating exclusively female shortlists of highly qualified candidates, the Supreme Court of Justice appointed jurist Luz Adriana Camargo Garzón as the new Attorney General on March 12, 2024 [42]. Later, on August 16, Iris Marín Ortiz was appointed as Colombia's Ombudsperson, becoming the first woman to hold this position since the institution was established in 1991 [43].

5. Requests:

We request that Colombia be mentioned in the statement to be made during the General Debate following the High Commissioner's Global Update and the presentation of the **Annual Report on the Human Rights Situation in Colombia**, under **Agenda Item 2**, scheduled for **Monday, March 3**.

Colombia's situation may also be addressed during the Interactive Dialogue on the presentation of the **Special Rapporteur's Report on Human Rights Defenders**, on **Thursday, March 6**.

As part of these interventions, we suggest:

1.) Maintaining support for the Total Peace policy in Colombia, emphasizing the need to advance the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, particularly the policy for dismantling criminal groups.

2.) Expressing concern over the worsening human rights and humanitarian situation and highlighting the importance of negotiating humanitarian relief measures to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population.

3.) Calling for the swift approval and implementation of a Public Policy on Guarantees for the Defense of Rights, in coordination with existing public policies and the provisions of the 2016 Final Peace Agreement. This includes advancing the incorporation of differential and collective approaches in prevention and protection measures and making progress in the fight against impunity.

Finally, we welcome progress in social reforms and women's rights and urge continued efforts to promote the participation of women in high-level positions within the Colombian government.

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