

Colombia at the 63rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Summary of statements, 14 September to 13 October 2026

1. General overview

During the 63rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Colombia was the subject of statements by civil society organisations, independent United Nations mechanisms, the Office of the Ombudsperson and Colombia's Permanent Mission. Discussions addressed implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, enforced disappearances, transitional justice, territorial rights, structural racism, security and drug policies, and the recruitment of Colombians for conflicts abroad.

Colombia also made statements on the interpretation of concepts relating to gender, sexual and reproductive rights, discrimination and education.

The statements reflected concern about potential setbacks in the implementation of Comprehensive Rural Reform, the functioning of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), mechanisms for searching for missing persons, and the protection of communities' territorial rights. Militarised approaches to combating drug trafficking, racial profiling and the potential use of chemical substances to eradicate illicit crops were also questioned. Other notable developments were the Colombian State's responses to international reports on mercenarism and racial discrimination, as well as its interpretative statement of 7 October concerning several Council resolutions. The latter revealed a shift by the new Government away from certain concepts related to gender perspectives, sexual and reproductive rights, and intersectional discrimination.

2. Statements directly concerning Colombia

14 September — Aerial spraying, mercenaries and the right to water

Aerial spraying and drug policy

In a statement by Elementa/IDPC, the organisation warned about the new Colombian Government's announcement that it would resume eradication programmes using chemical substances. It recalled the historical use of glyphosate and its alleged impacts on health, water, livelihoods and the environment, and highlighted the risk of using ammonium glufosinate, which the statement described as potentially even more toxic. It called on the Special Rapporteur to continue monitoring the issue and use the mechanisms available under the mandate to prevent potential harm.

Right to water

Colombia was presented as a positive example of community water management. During the dialogue on the rights to water and sanitation, Special Rapporteur Pedro Arrojo cited Colombia as an example of efforts to strengthen community-based models. He referred specifically to partnerships between the State and communities, and to Colombia's experience with community aqueduct networks under the previous Government.

Mercenarism

The Working Group on the use of mercenaries presented the findings of its visit to Colombia (16–27 March 2026). It noted that the history of Colombia's armed conflict has contributed to a sizeable population of people with military and security experience who may be recruited to participate in conflicts abroad. Those particularly exposed include former military personnel, young people, people in economically vulnerable situations and even members of Indigenous communities. The Working Group warned of recruitment networks operating through social media, informal intermediaries and transnational structures, sometimes using deceptive practices that could amount to trafficking in persons, such as hiring people for purported logistics or security duties that ultimately involve direct participation in combat. It also highlighted the severe consequences for recruits' families, particularly in cases of disappearance or death, and difficulties in repatriating remains, obtaining death certificates and accessing benefits. The Working Group further expressed concern about Colombian nationals' participation in conflicts where serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights have been reported, including alleged involvement in training child soldiers. Against this background, it welcomed the passage of legislation paving the way for ratification of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries and the establishment of interinstitutional mechanisms. It urged stronger regulation of private security companies to prevent their use as channels for unlawful activities.

The Colombian State acknowledged an increase in the recruitment of its nationals for foreign conflicts and stressed that this is a transnational phenomenon requiring cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination. It also emphasised the responsibility of those financing, facilitating or benefiting from recruitment. The State explained that it had strengthened institutional coordination, prevention campaigns, consular assistance and support for families, and asserted that Colombia neither promotes, supports nor authorises the participation of its nationals in international armed conflicts.

The Office of the Ombudsperson called for a distinction between mercenarism, exploitation and trafficking. It also provided a striking figure: between January and August 2026, it had reportedly received 293 cases related to Russia and Ukraine. According to its statement, 76.9% of combatants were heads of household, 92.3% of those reporting cases to the Office were women, and 88.5% of those women subsequently had to assume responsibility as heads of household. The Office also highlighted major physical and psychological consequences for families and called for a permanent assistance pathway, with specific protection for women searching for their relatives.

15 September — Disappearances, women searching for missing relatives and mercenaries

Disappearances and women searching for missing relatives

During the dialogue with the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, two statements specifically addressed Colombia: one by a Colombian organisation and the other by Peace Brigades International (PBI).

In its statement, International Office for Human Rights Action said that the ICRC had documented 2,659 cases of missing persons in the context of the armed conflict and claimed that at least one person had disappeared every two days since the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement, while stressing that this figure did not capture the full extent of the phenomenon. It further stated that 59% of cases were concentrated in Cauca, Norte de Santander and Antioquia. The same statement cited figures from the Office of the Ombudsperson indicating that 2,145 disappearances had reportedly been recorded by August 2026, almost as many as in the whole of the previous year. It also underscored a particularly important point: disappearances were allegedly no longer confined to the armed conflict but were

occurring in an increasingly diverse range of contexts linked to the proliferation of armed actors, illicit economies and forms of territorial social control. In Bogotá, it specifically referred to links with trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation. It called for investigations and adequate resources for the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed Missing (UBPD).

Peace Brigades International argued that the persistence of disappearances shows that protection and non-recurrence guarantees have yet to reach the territories effectively. According to its statement, the ICRC documented 99 conflict-related disappearances between January and July 2026.

PBI also specifically highlighted the situation of women searching for missing relatives. It said that the killing of two prominent women searchers illustrated the risks faced by those seeking missing persons and demanded effective implementation of the Law on Women Searchers and its implementing decree.

Mercenaries

OIDHACO statement. OIDHACO cited estimates that approximately 10,000 Colombians had been recruited for mercenary or criminal activities abroad, pointed to possible cases of trafficking and highlighted the difficulties faced by more than 600 families in locating their relatives. It called for completion of the ratification of the international convention against mercenarism, criminalisation of these activities and the promotion of reintegration opportunities. It explicitly called for implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, arguing that this would reduce some of the conditions that lead former combatants and others to accept such offers.

Sudan. Other organisations (Midline for Human Rights and Partners for Transparency) denounced alleged networks recruiting, financing and deploying Colombians to the Sudanese conflict and called for investigations.

Message from the High Commissioner

Volker Türk presented Colombia as a positive example of how human rights education can contribute to peacebuilding. He cited arts-based and storytelling programmes that have helped young people, including former child soldiers, develop empathy and trust.

16 September — Rural reform, transitional justice and denialism

Rural reform

During the dialogue with the Working Group on the rights of peasants, the Colombian Commission of Jurists noted that two years had passed since Colombia constitutionally recognised peasants as rights holders entitled to special protection, but criticised the Government for replacing the term ‘peasant’ with expressions such as ‘small rural entrepreneur’. The organisation argued that this was not merely a terminological issue, since ‘peasant’ is a legal category associated with specific rights to land, culture and collective organisation.

The Colombian Commission of Jurists expressly linked this issue to the 2016 Peace Agreement, recalling that Point 1 (Comprehensive Rural Reform) places the peasant population at its centre. It therefore called on the Council and the Working Group to urge Colombia to respect its international and constitutional obligations and refrain from changing official terminology in ways that weaken commitments to rural communities.

Transitional justice

During the presentation of the High Commissioner’s report on the human rights of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations, Colombia was cited twice as an example of good transitional justice practice. The report’s

overall aim is to examine ways of combating impunity and ensuring justice, effective remedies and reparations for women and children affected by conflict.

First, Colombia's Truth Commission was cited as an example of how truth-seeking processes can be made accessible to children and young people. It was recognised for using literary narratives and digital platforms to present its findings in an accessible way to younger audiences.

Second, the report presented the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) as an example of good practice. It noted that the JEP applies an intersectional, gender- and age-sensitive approach in its macro-cases, in line with the broader recommendation to ensure independent, impartial investigations tailored to the needs of women and children.

Denialism

During the dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, focused on denialism and revisionism in transitional justice contexts, Colombia's Office of the Ombudsperson addressed denialism and historical memory. It stated that denialism harms victims' dignity, obstructs the construction of collective memory, perpetuates violence and weakens accountability. It also warned about efforts to deny or justify criminal acts and challenge truths already established by judicial and non-judicial bodies, expressing particular concern when these practices come from public officials.

The Office cited Constitutional Court judgments T-375 of 2025 and T-202 of 2026, which, according to the statement, protected expressions of remembrance and dignity by mothers seeking truth and justice for sons who had disappeared or had been falsely presented as killed in combat. It further argued that public officials are subject to a heightened standard of truthfulness and responsibility and called for indicators to identify denialist practices at an early stage, particularly when they originate with authorities or circulate on digital platforms.

The Colombian Commission of Jurists stated that there is currently denialism concerning elements of the Agreement and specifically mentioned two:

- Comprehensive Rural Reform, in the face of narratives describing it as a 'false agrarian reform';
- and transitional justice mechanisms, particularly the JEP.

The organisation warned that government statements about potentially abolishing, modifying or defunding the Special Jurisdiction for Peace would affect victims' rights and the accountability of perpetrators.

It also made a very specific international appeal: that the Human Rights Council and the countries that have supported Colombia over these ten years should demand compliance with the Agreement and respond to denialist initiatives that could jeopardise the sustainability of transitional justice.

Peace Brigades International (PBI) stated that, ten years after the Peace Agreement, violence persists or has intensified in certain territories, citing Putumayo and Magdalena Medio. It noted that ethnic and peasant communities continue to face land dispossession and control by armed groups, and linked the need for a State presence to effective protection guarantees and conditions for territorial peace.

23 September — Territorial rights of the Kankuamo Indigenous people

Statement by the Kankuamo people

Representatives of the Kankuamo Indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta warned of the risk of regression in Indigenous territorial rights resulting from changes of government, political priorities and economic interests.

They highlighted the protection of the Black Line (Línea Negra), associated with the ancestral territory of the Indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and the risks posed by extractive projects and mining activities.

They asked the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples to examine the rollback of previously recognised rights in future reports and formulate preventive responses. The statement concerned prior consultation and territorial guarantees.

29 September — Structural racism, security and drug policy

Structural racism, security and drug policy

The International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement (EMLER) presented its fifth annual report, focusing on the relationship between drug policies and systemic racism. It stated that punitive and militarised approaches to drug control have helped perpetuate racial discrimination, racial profiling, excessive use of force and inequalities in the criminal justice system, particularly affecting Africans and people of African descent. It recommended replacing these approaches with policies grounded in human rights, public health, community participation and accountability.

With regard to Colombia, the Mechanism presented the findings of its official visit in May 2026. While recognising the country's serious security challenges, it warned that predominantly punitive and militarised policies had caused serious human rights violations in the past, disproportionately affecting Afro-Colombian communities. It stressed that any expansion of security operations to combat violence and drug trafficking must strictly respect international human rights law and avoid reproducing historical patterns of exclusion, racial profiling and criminalisation. It also welcomed Colombia's recognition of systemic racism and initiatives relating to dialogue during protests, historical memory and reparative justice.

A positive Colombian practice was presented: alternatives to imprisonment for women heads of household convicted of minor drug offences. The criticism was that the policy does not yet incorporate a comparable ethnic-racial approach for people of African descent, despite their disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system.

Finally, it urged the Colombian Government to preserve the progress achieved and use the report's recommendations as a roadmap for strengthening racial justice and equality in the country.

Response from the Colombian State: The Colombian delegation said the new Government had submitted a formal response to the Mechanism's report on 19 September, acknowledged persistent racism and racial discrimination, and affirmed its commitment to the rights of Afro-descendant people and other ethnic communities. At the same time, it defended the need to combat armed and criminal organisations involved in drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, illegal mining and other illicit economies. It questioned some of the report's assessments because the visit took place in May 2026, before the new Government took office, and called for a distinction between documented facts, preventive risk assessments and policies actually implemented. It also maintained that security

policies are not inherently incompatible with racial equality and highlighted police reforms and dialogue mechanisms in protest settings.

Office of the Ombudsperson: Colombia's Office of the Ombudsperson stated that structural and systemic racism persists in Colombia and is not confined to isolated incidents, but permeates the ways in which the State monitors, investigates, prosecutes, records and provides remedies for violations affecting ethnic peoples and Afro-descendant populations. It specifically identified racial profiling, excessive use of force against young Afro-descendants and discriminatory application of policing measures. In rural areas, it added that entire communities experience extreme violence by armed groups while the State presence remains very weak. The Office also denounced a lack of data: Colombia does not even adequately know how many Afro-descendant people are deprived of liberty. It proposed legally defining and prohibiting racial profiling, incorporating this prohibition into police protocols, and training officers and justice-sector personnel through an ethnic-racial and human rights approach.

Individual case and direct question to the State: In a joint statement delivered by the International Service for Human Rights, speakers demanded justice for Donovan Balanta Paz, an Afro-Colombian man who reportedly died in police custody on 20 September after being beaten and subjected to electric shocks. The statement linked the case to racial profiling documented by the Mechanism and asked the Colombian State directly what measures it would take to prohibit, record and sanction racial profiling and provide reparations to victims.

7 October — Colombia's interpretative statement on gender and other rights

Colombia's interpretative statement on gender and other rights

During the Human Rights Council's 43rd meeting, Colombia delivered a statement concerning seven resolutions (L9, L17, L20, L29, L30, L34 and L36), revealing a shift by the new Government away from mainstreaming gender perspectives and intersectional approaches in public policy and international human rights commitments. Although it formally supported the resolutions, it expressed reservations and restrictive interpretations regarding several fundamental concepts. In particular, it distanced itself from the expression 'sexual and reproductive health and rights', arguing that it is neither universally agreed language nor a legally binding definition. It also limited its interpretation of the concept of gender and expressions such as gender-based violence by referring to the Rome Statute, and questioned the legal precision of terms such as intersectional discrimination, systemic and structural racism, and reparative justice. In education, it emphasised parental rights concerning their children's education, while on freedom of expression it insisted on the application of Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Finally, it maintained that these expressions create no new obligations and do not expand the Colombian State's existing international commitments.

This statement is particularly concerning because it signals a political change of direction that could weaken the mainstreaming of gender, diversity and intersectional perspectives throughout the Colombian State's activities. Challenging concepts widely used by international human rights mechanisms could diminish their recognition and effective application in public policy. The statement is therefore a sign of a possible rollback in political commitment to the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people, particularly significant in a country whose 2016 Peace Agreement incorporated a gender perspective as a cross-cutting component.

3. Other statements and references

15 September — Human rights education

Volker Türk, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, cited Colombian arts and storytelling initiatives involving young people and former child soldiers as examples of education for peace.

29 September — Women, peace and security

Amrita Kapur of WILPF mentioned Colombia among countries where programmes working with men and boys address masculinities, militarism and violence prevention. The Office of the High Commissioner highlighted the role of gender stereotypes in conflicts and their impact on women human rights defenders.

12 October — Transnational corporations and human rights

During the intergovernmental Working Group on transnational corporations, Member of the European Parliament Martin Günther specifically referred to Germany's imports of coal from territories inhabited by the Wayuu and Yukpa Indigenous communities in Colombia, whose livelihoods and survival are reportedly threatened by the consequences of extractive activities. He used this example to underscore that European consumption of raw materials has direct consequences for human rights and the environment in producing countries, and that Europe cannot continue to benefit from natural-resource imports while evading responsibility for the impacts of extraction.

Finally, he argued that the future binding treaty on business and human rights offered a historic opportunity to combat corporate impunity through legally enforceable responsibilities, effective access-to-justice mechanisms and international accountability systems. His statement highlighted the need for the European Union to assume greater responsibility for the consequences of its companies' activities and supply chains for affected communities, particularly Indigenous peoples in countries such as Colombia.

4. Summary and assessment of Colombia-related issues addressed during the 63rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

The 63rd session provided international visibility to several human rights concerns relating to Colombia, particularly against the backdrop of the tenth anniversary of the 2016 Peace Agreement and the new Government's first decisions.

Statements by civil society organisations, independent United Nations mechanisms and the Office of the Ombudsperson, together with positions expressed by the Colombian State itself, point to four main areas of particular relevance for monitoring and advocacy.

First, implementation of the Peace Agreement and possible setbacks concerning its core commitments featured prominently in several statements. Concerns were expressed about the future of Comprehensive Rural Reform, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and mechanisms for searching for missing persons, especially in view of possible institutional changes, budget cuts and narratives calling progress into question. With regard to Comprehensive Rural Reform, speakers recalled that the constitutional recognition of peasants as rights holders creates obligations for the State and is directly linked to Point 1 of the Peace Agreement. Statements on enforced disappearances also showed that this phenomenon is not merely a historical consequence of the armed conflict but has continued since 2016. Speakers warned that patterns of disappearance are diversifying and becoming increasingly linked to illicit economies, trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation and different forms of territorial control. In this context, they

called for preservation of the resources of the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed Missing (UBPD) and effective implementation of protection measures for women searching for missing relatives. At the same time, the United Nations' recognition of the JEP and the Truth Commission as examples of good practice in transitional justice provided a counterpoint to challenges directed at these mechanisms. Taken together, these statements reinforced the need to safeguard institutional progress and keep comprehensive implementation of the Peace Agreement on the international agenda.

Second, the new Colombian Government's position on gender perspectives, sexual and reproductive rights and discrimination was one of the session's most politically significant developments. The interpretative statement delivered by Colombia on 7 October introduced reservations and limitations regarding fundamental concepts such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and intersectional discrimination. This position is interpreted as a sign of a move away from mainstreaming gender and diversity perspectives in public policy and international human rights commitments. It also raises questions about potential consequences for the protection of the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people, as well as implementation of the Peace Agreement's gender perspective.

Third, developments in security and counter-narcotics policy prompted important human rights warnings. Statements on the possible resumption of chemical spraying, particularly with ammonium glufosinate, raised concerns about its potential consequences for health, the environment and the livelihoods of rural communities. Following its visit to Colombia, the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement (EMLER) also warned that predominantly punitive and militarised approaches had historically caused human rights violations and disproportionately harmed Afro-Colombian communities. The Mechanism insisted that any expansion of security operations must avoid perpetuating patterns of racial profiling, criminalisation and excessive use of force. Although the Colombian Government defended the need to combat criminal organisations and challenged some report findings as relating to a period before it took office, international recommendations provide clear benchmarks for assessing new security policies. The statements also reinforced the need to link efforts to combat drug trafficking with rural development, community participation and protection of the rights of the most affected populations.

Finally, the protection of the territorial rights of peasant, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, together with the responsibility of economic actors, formed another important strand of statements concerning Colombia. Representatives of the Kankuamo Indigenous people warned of risks of regression in previously recognised territorial rights, particularly in the face of changes in government priorities and pressures arising from extractive activities, and emphasised the importance of protecting the Black Line (Línea Negra) and the ancestral territories of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. These concerns connect with statements on the legal recognition of peasants and the need to preserve territorial guarantees under Comprehensive Rural Reform. These references situate territorial and environmental protection of Colombian communities within the broader international debate on corporate responsibility, free, prior and informed consent, and effective access to justice.

Overall, the session brought key concerns of Colombian organisations to the international arena, while providing recommendations from independent mechanisms and revealing some of the new Government's human rights positions. However, it is important to distinguish between allegations and demands presented by organisations, findings of United Nations mechanisms and official State statements, since they do not all carry the same institutional weight.

For OIDHACO and its member organisations, the main value of these statements lies in the opportunity to use their content to strengthen monitoring of Colombia's international commitments and inform dialogue with European institutions. The tenth anniversary of the Peace Agreement also presents an opportunity to connect current concerns about transitional justice, gender, security and territorial rights with the need to safeguard progress achieved and ensure continuity of peacebuilding commitments.