



Colombia Country Report: Children & Security

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I. BACKGROUND

Map of Colombia¹



¹ Central Intelligence Agency, 'Colombia', available <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html> accessed 18 January 2017.



Children in Colombia – Struggle Within Conflict

Armed conflict between government forces, paramilitary armed groups and rebel armed groups, as well as fighting amongst those groups, since the mid-1960s has had an impact on children in Colombia.² While a paramilitary demobilisation process took place over a decade ago, children continue to be subjected to serious human rights abuses perpetrated by both armed guerilla groups and the successor groups to paramilitaries that have emerged.³ While the signing of a peace agreement at the end of 2016 between the Government of Colombia and the country's largest armed group, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), is an important step in ending one of the world's longest civil wars after more than five decades of conflict, FARC-EP is, however, not the only armed group in Colombia. Other armed groups such as Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), as well as paramilitary groups known as *bandas criminales* (BACRIM), remain active. Armed violence has, however, reached its lowest level in years.

Colombia's long-running conflict, which is estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 45,000 children since 1985,⁴ has greatly impacted 7.6 million people, 2.5 million of which are children.⁵ Despite peace talks between FARC-EP and the Government which commenced in 2012, UNICEF estimates that 250,000 children have been affected by the conflict since 2013 alone, with some 1,000 children used or recruited into non-state armed groups during that period.⁶ Children remain exposed to direct physical and psychological harm from landmines and other explosive remnants, limiting their freedom of movement and access to healthcare, schooling, markets, and roads. From 2013, at least 75 children have been killed and another 180 injured from landmines and unexploded ordinance; at least 180 children have been victims of sexual violence; and 65 schools have been damaged by fighting or used for military purposes.⁷ Children

² International Criminal Court, Office of the Prosecutor, 'Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2016' (14 November 2016), available https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-pe_eng.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017, para. 234.

³ United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Colombia (September 2011-June 2016)', UN Doc. S/2016/837 (4 October 2016), ('October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report') section II, para. 4; Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2016: Colombia' (2016) ('2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia'), p. 188.

⁴ UNICEF, 'Childhood in the Time of War: Will the children of Colombia know peace at last?' (March 2016), available http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF_Colombia_Child_Alert_March_2016_FINAL.pdf accessed 18 January 2017, ('UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia'), p. 4.

⁵ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 4.

⁶ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

⁷ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 4. See also United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict', UN Doc. A/70/836-S/2016/360 (20 April 2016) ('2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report'), p. 29.



have been exposed to extreme violence which has caused a great deal of psychological harm.⁸ In 2015, Colombia had the world's highest number of internally displaced people.⁹ Since 1985, nearly 2.5 million children have been displaced and 8,000 children have disappeared.¹⁰ Notably, the peace negotiations between the Government and FARC-EP reduced the number of displaced children by up to 40 percent between 2013 and 2015.¹¹ A disproportionate number of IDPs are, however, either Afro-Colombians or indigenous people.

FARC-EP and ELN are known for their forcible recruitment of child soldiers.¹² Since 1999, more than 6,000 children fled from non-state armed groups or were released by the military; of that group, the average age of recruitment was 13 years, and one in six were children from Afro-Colombian or indigenous backgrounds.¹³ Sexual violence against children is endemic, with 18,000 cases reported in 2013, with 70 percent of cases involving girls under the age of 14, and some groups conducting forced sterilisation and forced abortion.¹⁴ In conflict areas, children also experienced high levels of malnutrition and disease, compounded by difficulty in accessing essential services and roads.¹⁵ Armed conflict has had the greatest impact on children of Afro-Colombian and indigenous origins living in rural areas.¹⁶

II. SECURITY SITUATION

1. Context

Colombia, the fourth largest country in South America, has experienced five decades of ongoing conflict. Armed conflict between the government forces, paramilitary groups and their successors, and armed rebel groups have resulted in gross violations of human rights. Although political issues initially motivated rebel

⁸ National Center of Historical Memory, 'BASTA YA! Colombia: Memories of National Center for Historical Memory 2016' (2016), available <http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2016/basta-ya-ingles/BASTA-YA-ingles.pdf>, accessed 18 January 2017, ('National Center for Historical Memory 2016'), pp. 267, 321.

⁹ UNHCR, 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015' (20 June 2016), available <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>, accessed 18 January 2017, p. 30.

¹⁰ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 4.

¹¹ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 9.

¹² José Miguel Vivanco 'Colombia: Sexual Violence By FARC Guerrillas Exposed' (Human Rights Watch, August 2016) available <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/11/colombia-sexual-violence-farc-guerrillas-exposed>, accessed 18 January 2017, ('HRW Sexual Violence by FARC').

¹³ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

¹⁴ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 8.

¹⁵ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

¹⁶ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 9.



and paramilitary groups, their agendas have evolved over time with a primary focus on profiting from drug and crime-related activities.¹⁷ The conflict in Colombia has seriously affected the lives of civilians, who have endured violence, executions, kidnappings, child recruitment, enforced disappearances, and forced displacement, among other violations.¹⁸ The situation in Colombia has proved difficult to measure due to, initially, a lack of political will and, more recently, a lack of accessibility to reliable information or to armed groups.

Colombia's two largest armed groups, the FARC-EP and ELN, were founded in the 1960s in the wake of a decade of political violence in Colombia known as 'La Violencia' (The Violence) between 1946 and 1958.¹⁹ The Violence saw a bipartisan split in many areas of society, including the armed forces, the justice system, and religious institutions. In response to escalating events, both political parties formed armed groups: guerrillas and communist self-defense groups aligned with the Liberal party, and paramilitary groups supported the Conservatives.²⁰

It is estimated that over 220,000 individuals died during the conflict between 1958 and 2012, with civilians representing at least four out of five casualties.²¹ In a span of three decades, paramilitary groups carried out nearly 2,000 massacres of defenseless victims.²² Between 1985 and 2012, 26 people were displaced every hour.²³ During the worst years of the conflict (1996-2005), a person was kidnapped every eight hours.²⁴ More than 6.8 million Colombians have been internally displaced by violence, representing the world's second largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) after Syria.²⁵ In 2014 alone, more than 180,000 civilians were displaced.²⁶ As of the end of 2015, roughly 45 percent of displaced persons were children. During the worst years of the conflict (1996-2005), a person was kidnapped every eight hours.²⁷ Between January and November 2015, the National Registry of the Disappeared estimates close to 5,500

¹⁷ BBC, 'Colombia profile – Overview' (BBC News, 31 March 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19390071>, accessed 18 January 2017.

¹⁸ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 188.

¹⁹ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 118.

²⁰ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 118.

²¹ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 26.

²² National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 42.

²³ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 40.

²⁴ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 40.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2017: Events of 2016' (Human Rights Watch, 2017), ('2017 Human Rights Watch Report'), p. 201; 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 188.

²⁶ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 191.

²⁷ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 40.



forced disappearances alone.²⁸ As of the end of 2015, roughly 45 percent of displaced persons were children.²⁹

Historic peace talks between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP commenced in 2012.³⁰ A ‘breakthrough agreement’ between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP was reached on 15 December 2015, establishing a truth commission on justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition for victims of the conflict.³¹ The peace talks were interrupted by many setbacks. However, in June 2016 a definitive ceasefire was agreed upon with the intent to broker a peace deal between the two parties.³² In August 2016, a 297-page peace accord was reached that would formally put an end to 52 years of conflict.³³ However, after a plebiscite in October 2016, a slim majority rejected the peace deal in a popular referendum and the accord was not ratified.³⁴ The absence of a definitive peace agreement rendered the ceasefire fragile.³⁵ Homicides and threats against community leaders also spiked in November and December 2016. President Juan Manuel Santos nonetheless earned the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize on 7 October 2016. The peace deal required further 50 revisions before it was formally ratified on 1 December 2016.

The Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) were also due to commence peace negotiations on 27 October 2016.³⁶ Those negotiations are currently delayed as a result of disagreement between the Government and ELN concerning the release of ex-congressman Odin Sanchez and ELN’s request for the release of two prisoners in exchange.³⁷ This disagreement has resulted in the suspension of preparatory talks until 10 January 2017.

²⁸ Human Rights Council, ‘Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia’ UN Doc. A/HRC/31/3/Add.2 (23 June 2016), para. 12.

²⁹ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 9.

³⁰ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 4.

³¹ United Nations Security Council, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence’, UN Doc. S/2016/361 (20 April 2016), (‘April 2016 SG Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence’) para. 30.

³² BBC, ‘Colombia profile – Timeline’ (10 October 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19390164>, 18 January 2017 9 9 (‘BBC Colombia Profile: Timeline’).

³³ BBC, ‘Colombia peace boost as Uribe opens door to Farc talks’ (19 October 2016) available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37701597>, accessed 18 January 2017.

³⁴ BBC, ‘Colombia referendum: voters reject Farc peace deal’ (3 October 2016) available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37537252>, accessed 18 January 2017.

³⁵ United Nations Security Council, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Colombia’ UN Doc. S/2016/1095 (23 December 2016), para. 16.

³⁶ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 7.

³⁷ See e.g. InSight Crime, ‘Colombia Peace Process Delayed Again After ELN Fail to Release Hostage’ (27 October 2016), available <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-peace-process-delayed-again-after-eln-fail-to-release-hostage>, accessed 18 January 2017.



2. State, Non-State, and International Actors

a) State Actors

Government Forces: Colombian Security Forces

The Fuerza Pública (Security Forces) in Colombia include the army, air force, navy, and police. The Security Forces have allegedly engaged in illegal acts throughout the war, using methods such as arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings.³⁸ Investigations into the actions of army brigades, specifically between 2002 and 2008, revealed regular civilian executions at the hands of the Security Forces.³⁹ Known as ‘false positives’, these executions were carried out with the purpose of boosting the body count in the government’s fight against guerrillas.⁴⁰ Many of the victims, including children and teenage boys, were lured or kidnapped by army brigades, taken to remote locations, killed, and posed to look like enemy combatants.⁴¹

In 2008, the government, under then President Álvaro Uribe, finally took action on these extrajudicial killings following reports that the 15th Mobile Brigade had tricked teenage boys and young men from Soacha with a promise of work, only to execute them upon arrival.⁴² Three army generals were dismissed and faced charges as a result of this incident, though many more senior army officials have yet to be brought to justice.⁴³ Since 2009, there has been a dramatic decrease in cases of unlawful killings by the state.⁴⁴ According to the preliminary investigation conducted by the ICC Office of the Prosecutor, Colombian authorities have carried out investigations and prosecutions against mid- and low-level members of the Security Forces.⁴⁵ It is reported that Colombian courts rendered 817 sentences against 961 members of the

³⁸ See United Nations Human Rights Council, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston’, UN Doc. A/HRC/14/24/Add.2 (31 March 2010). See also National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 26.

³⁹ See 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 203; 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia; Human Rights Watch, ‘On Their Watch: Evidence of Senior Army Officers’ Responsibility for False Positive Killings in Colombia’ (2015), available <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/24/their-watch/evidence-senior-army-officers-responsibility-false-positive-killings>, accessed 18 January 2017. p. 1, (‘HRW False Positive Killings’).

⁴⁰ See 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 190; HRW False Positive Killings, p. 1.

⁴¹ HRW False Positive Killings, p. 1.

⁴² HRW False Positive Killings, p. 66.

⁴³ HRW False Positive Killings, p. 66.

⁴⁴ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 203.

⁴⁵ See also 2017 Human Rights Watch, p. 203.



armed forces for false positive cases up to February 2016. By June 2016, the Colombian authorities were said to be investigating more than 3,600 cases of extrajudicial killings.⁴⁶ However, concerns remain over the prosecution of high-level officials. As reported by the Colombian authorities, since 2012 two colonels, two lieutenant colonels, 12 majors, eight captains and 29 lieutenants have been convicted of such conduct.⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, however, notes that no meaningful progress has been achieved and that many senior officials have been promoted as opposed to prosecuted.⁴⁸ The ICC and NGOs continue to monitor the situation accordingly. Security Forces have allegedly aided and colluded with paramilitaries and their successor groups in the commission of crimes.⁴⁹

b) Non-State Actors

As a result of years of political conflict, a number of non-state paramilitary groups and armed groups have formed. The largest and most notable group is the FARC-EP, but the lesser known communist guerrilla National Liberation Army (ELN) and right-wing paramilitaries and their successor groups also continue to be active. FARC-EP and ELN have reportedly committed all six grave violations against children in Colombia: abductions, killing and maiming, rape and other sexual violence, attacks against schools and/or hospitals, the denial of humanitarian access, and the recruitment and use of children.

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP)

The FARC-EP is the largest organised group in Colombia. Initially formed as a politically motivated Marxist group, FARC-EP has since become increasingly involved in activities related to drugs.⁵⁰ In 2002, they had reportedly 20,000 fighters, though the number has significantly decreased in recent years.⁵¹ Recent estimates place their numbers at around 6,000-7,000, with an additional 8,500 civilians who make up the FARC-EP's support network.⁵²

⁴⁶ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 203.

⁴⁷ See ICC Office of the Prosecutor, 'Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2016' (14 November 2016), available https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-pe_eng.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017, para. 243.

⁴⁸ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 203.

⁴⁹ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 189.

⁵⁰ BBC, 'Profiles: Colombia's armed groups' (29 August 2013), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-11400950>, accessed 18 January 2017 ('BBC Profiles: Colombia's Armed Groups').

⁵¹ BBC, 'Who are the Farc?' (BBC News, 28 September 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36605769>, accessed 18 January 2017, ('BBC: Who are the FARC').

⁵² BBC: Who are the FARC.



FARC has committed systematic atrocities against children since its formation.⁵³ Despite years of peace talks and ceasefires, reports of attacks on civilians by FARC-EP continued. Such attacks have decreased since 2014, but have not stopped completely. In 2015, FARC-EP was engaged in killings and forced displacement in a town called Tumaco, as well as an attack on an oil pipeline which resulted in a shortage of water for nearly 200,000 people for several days.⁵⁴ The FARC-EP has also used anti-personnel landmines, which have killed and injured many civilians; however, in May 2015, FARC-EP began dismantling the mines following an agreement with the Santos administration.

The FARC-EP has been known for its recruitment and use of children in guerrilla warfare.⁵⁵ In 2015, the group made a commitment to end the recruitment of children under the age of 17 and announced its intention to release children under 15 within its ranks. In May 2016, the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP signed an agreement on the separation and reintegration of children in the conflict.⁵⁶

Before leaving office in 2016, Colombia's acting Attorney General revealed the results of his office's investigation that uncovered 232 cases of sexual crimes against children by FARC-EP, including rape, forced sterilisation, and forced abortion.⁵⁷ It was concluded that these acts were not isolated incidents but constituted a guerilla policy handed down by top officials.⁵⁸

Children and FARC-EP⁵⁹

Arlette was in seventh grade when she was forced to join the FARC-EP. She was living with her parents and her brothers near Popayán, Cauca. One Friday after school, Arlette and four of her friends went for a swim in the nearby river. They were approached by four FARC-EP soldiers in uniforms with AK-47s and Galils, who took them against their will and drove them to their camp in the mountains. The four girls, all between the ages of 14 and 16, were given uniforms and weapons. When their parents heard what had happened, they went to the camp to get the girls back. The FARC-EP refused to let them return home, saying that it was too late for them to leave.

⁵³ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 202.

⁵⁴ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 188.

⁵⁵ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, pp. 90-93.

⁵⁶ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section III, para. 17.

⁵⁷ HRW Sexual Violence by FARC.

⁵⁸ HRW Sexual Violence by FARC.

⁵⁹ This case study has been adapted from a story originally published in Human Rights Watch, 'You'll Learn not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia' (September 2003), p. 45, available <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/colombia0903.pdf>, accessed 18 January 2017.



Arlette and her friends were separated and sent to different fronts. She spent four months fighting for the FARC-EP before she was able to escape.

National Liberation Army (ELN)

The ELN is Colombia's second largest guerrilla group with approximately 1,300 active combatants.⁶⁰ It was founded in the early 1960s to protest the unequal distribution of wealth in Colombia.⁶¹ Their activities were initially focused on attacking multinational corporations, large landholders, and oil pipelines, but in order to finance themselves, they gradually became involved in drug trafficking, kidnappings for ransom, and extortion.⁶² The ELN have been responsible for killings, forced displacement, kidnappings, and child recruitment, most recently in the province of Chocó, including the kidnapping of a mayor from the area who was held for four months.⁶³ In 2016, the ELN also continued to use antipersonnel landmines, reportedly killing three civilians and injuring 19.⁶⁴ They have also been identified as being complicit in sexual violence against women and girls.⁶⁵ Today, the ELN continues to commit serious abuses against civilians.⁶⁶

The ELN was included in the 2015 agreement to demine areas of Colombia. In March 2016, the Government of Colombia and the ELN announced an agreement to begin peace talks.⁶⁷ However, two days before the talks were to commence, President Santos gave the ELN an ultimatum to release their last remaining hostage before discussions could formally begin. The peace talks have since been delayed⁶⁸ and remain stalled until January 2017.

United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC)

While no longer active, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) was created in 1997 in an effort to unite various right-wing paramilitary forces in Colombia. Between 2003 and 2006, the government administration under Uribe negotiated the demobilisation of the AUC.⁶⁹ Due to serious shortcomings in the

⁶⁰ BBC, 'How significant is Colombia's ELN rebel group?' (BBC News, 30 March 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35929399>, accessed 18 January 2017, ('BBC: ELN rebel group').

⁶¹ BBC: ELN rebel group.

⁶² BBC: ELN rebel group.

⁶³ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 202; 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 189.

⁶⁴ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 202.

⁶⁵ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section III, para. 31.

⁶⁶ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 202.

⁶⁷ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 7.

⁶⁸ BBC, 'Colombia's ELN rebels balk at hostage ultimate' (25 October 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37761010>, accessed 18 January 2017.

⁶⁹ BBC Profiles: Colombia's Armed Groups.



demobilisation process, however, a number of paramilitaries managed to remain active and, as a result, many new successor groups were formed that continue to carry out violations of human rights, including killings, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances.⁷⁰

Paramilitary successor groups (BACRIM)

Paramilitary groups, including drug trafficking gangs, are referred to by the Colombia government as *bandas criminales* (BACRIM).⁷¹ There are several major BACRIM organisations which are currently active, including: Los Urabeños or Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (also known as Clan Úsuga); Los Rastrojos; Águilas Negras; Los Paisas; and El Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antiterrorista Colombiano (ERPAC).⁷² Their numbers have been estimated to be between 4,000 and 10,000 members.⁷³ It is reported that most members of these criminal gangs belonged to the AUC during mobilisation a decade ago.⁷⁴ These paramilitaries are responsible for many human rights violations, from the drug trade to kidnapping for ransom to sexual violence, even targeting human rights defenders.⁷⁵ The Committee on the Rights of the Child reports that BACRIM continues to recruit and use children in high volumes, including girls who have been subjected to serious sexual violence including rape, forced pregnancy and abortion, and sexual slavery.⁷⁶ Human rights organisations have criticised the lack of government accountability as reports have shown evidence of collusion between these BACRIM groups and state officials.⁷⁷

c) Regional Actors

There are various regional actors with involvement in Colombia. The conflict has directly impacted a number of surrounding states, mainly Ecuador and Venezuela. Other neighbouring countries, such as Panama, have reported cross-border recruitment of children by FARC-EP.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ 2017 Human Rights Watch Report, p. 202; Amnesty International, ‘Colombia: Fear and Intimidation: The dangers of human rights work’ (6 September 2006), available <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR23/033/2006/en/>, accessed 18 January 2017, p. 6; Human Rights Watch, ‘Paramilitaries’ Heirs: The New Face of Violence in Colombia’ (3 February 2010), available https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/colombia0210_insert_low_0.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017 (‘HRW Paramilitaries’ Heirs’).

⁷¹ BBC Profiles: Colombia’s Armed Groups.

⁷² October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 7.

⁷³ HRW Paramilitaries’ Heirs, p.3.

⁷⁴ European Parliament, ‘Briefing September 2016: Decisive step for Colombian peace agreement: Implementation presents huge challenges’ (September 2016), available [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589804/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)589804_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589804/EPRS_BRI(2016)589804_EN.pdf), accessed 18 January 2017, p. 7.

⁷⁵ HRW Paramilitaries’ Heirs, p.3.

⁷⁶ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding Observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Colombia’ UN Doc. CRC/C/COL/CO/4-5 (6 March 2015), paras. 65(b) and (c).

⁷⁷ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 189.

⁷⁸ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section III, para. 19.



Ecuador

Ecuador has been documented as having carried out counter-insurgency operations in Colombia, including massacres of civilian populations.⁷⁹ Between 2008 and 2010, diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia were suspended, as a result of the Colombian Armed Forces launching an attack on a FARC-EP leader, Raúl Reyes, in Ecuadorian territory.⁸⁰ Ecuador has become an increasingly important destination country for Colombian refugees.⁸¹

Venezuela

While the FARC-EP was regarded in many countries as a terrorist organisation, the Venezuelan government under Hugo Chávez recognized the FARC-EP as a legitimate army. As a result, the FARC-EP had a Secretariat in Venezuela. In 2008, the Government of Colombia under Uribe denounced the Secretariat. This, along with an attack by the Colombian security forces on Ecuadorian soil, prompted Chávez to position 10 battalions on the border between Venezuela and Colombia.⁸² Throughout the conflict, Venezuelan forces have also conducted counter-insurgency operations that have perpetrated massacres of civilian populations in Colombia.⁸³

d) International Actors

United States

The U.S. has been heavily involved in the conflict in Colombia for many years. In 2000, the US government began a campaign named ‘Plan Colombia’, which included military and diplomatic aid to the Government of Colombia to end the conflict and begin an anti-cocaine strategy.⁸⁴ Notably, the U.S. Department of State has designated both FARC-EP and ELN as foreign terrorist organisations.⁸⁵ However, after a decade of

⁷⁹ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 42, fn. 15.

⁸⁰ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 187.

⁸¹ See International Labor Office, ‘Youth Employment and Migration. Country Brief: Ecuador’, available http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ed_emp_msu/documents/publication/wcms_230170.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017, p. 3.; ‘Migración forzada de colombianos en Colombia, Ecuador y Canadá (The forced migration of Colombians in Colombia, Ecuador and Canada)’, ed. Pilar Riaño and Marta Villa (Medellín: Corporación Región, 2008).

⁸² National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 42, fn. 15.

⁸³ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 42, fn. 15.

⁸⁴ BBC Colombia Profile: Timeline.

⁸⁵ US Department of State, ‘Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations’, available <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>, accessed 18 January 2017.



involvement and over \$8 billion USD worth of assistance to the country, ‘Plan Colombia’ had little to show for it, and grave violations of human rights continued.

In 2015, the U.S. provided approximately 280 million USD, mostly in military and law enforcement aid.⁸⁶ A portion of the aid required Colombia to abide by a number of human rights conditions; however, the U.S. Department of State has not adequately enforced this stipulation. Despite widely reported human rights violations; the U.S. certified that Colombia had met the conditions in September 2015.⁸⁷

United Nations Mission in Colombia (Mission)

On 23 June 2016, the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP signed the Agreement on a Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities and Laying Down of Arms, which named the Mission as the mechanism responsible to verifying compliance.⁸⁸ The Mission, made up of unarmed international observers, was established to monitor and verify the laying down of arms and to be part of the tripartite mechanism that will monitor and verify the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.⁸⁹ It will also be responsible for mediating disputes between the parties, as well as providing recommendations to the process.⁹⁰

International Criminal Court (ICC)

The situation in Colombia, and alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the context of armed conflict between and among government forces, paramilitary armed groups and rebel armed groups, have been the subject of preliminary examination by the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court since 2004. Its office continues to focus on the genuineness of national prosecutions and monitors Colombian investigations of crimes that may fall within the ICC’s jurisdiction.

⁸⁶ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 193.

⁸⁷ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, p. 193.

⁸⁸ United Nations Security Council, ‘Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the United Nations Mission in Colombia’ UN Doc. S/2016/729 (18 August 2016) (‘August 2016 SG Report UN Mission in Colombia’), Section II, para. 2.

⁸⁹ United Nations Mission in Colombia, ‘Mandate’, available <http://colombia.unmissions.org/en/mandate>, accessed 18 January 2016.

⁹⁰ August 2016 SG Report UN Mission in Colombia, Section II, para. 2.



III. CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

1. Recruitment and Use of Children

For decades, tens of thousands of children have been recruited into the ranks of non-state armed groups such as FARC-EP and ELN, as well as state-aligned paramilitary groups such as the AUC.⁹¹ Several thousands of those children were conscripted while under the age of 15.⁹² Some were kidnapped, but the majority ‘volunteered’ to join armed groups due to vulnerable economic and social circumstances.⁹³ Difficulties in the children’s home lives – including abuse, abandonment, institutionalisation in orphanages, lack of access to education and job opportunities - increased the likelihood of children viewing joining an armed group as an ‘opportunity’.⁹⁴

UNICEF reports that from 2013-2015 some 1,000 children were used in combat or recruited into non-state armed groups.⁹⁵ More than 6,000 children have run away or were released by the military since 1999. Of these, 30 percent were girls and one in six children were from Afro-Colombian or indigenous backgrounds.⁹⁶ The average age of recruitment into armed groups was 13 years old.⁹⁷ Girls as young as nine have been recruited into combat, and while they received training to take part in military operations, girls are also subject to sexual abuse from their commanders.⁹⁸

⁹¹ See October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, section II, para. 4. See also Dr Natalia Springer, ‘Como corderos entre lobos: Del uso y reclutamiento de niñas, niños y adolescentes en el marco del conflicto armado y la criminalidad en Colombia’ (Springer Consulting Services, 2012), available https://www.centrodehistoria.gov.co/descargas/informe_comoCorderosEntreLobos.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017; Human Rights Watch, ‘Colombia: Armed Groups Send Children to War’ (21 February 2005), available <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/02/21/colombia-armed-groups-send-children-war>, accessed 18 January 2017 (‘Human Rights Watch: Groups Send Children’).

⁹² Human Rights Watch: Groups Send Children.

⁹³ Dr. Natalia Springer, ‘Como corderos entre lobos: Del uso y reclutamiento de niñas, niños y adolescentes en el marco del conflicto armado y la criminalidad en Colombia’ (Springer Consulting Services, 2012), available https://www.centrodehistoria.gov.co/descargas/informe_comoCorderosEntreLobos.pdf, accessed 18 January 2017, p. 31.

⁹⁴ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, p. 91.

⁹⁵ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

⁹⁶ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

⁹⁷ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 6.

⁹⁸ Juan Arredondo, ‘Child Soldiers in Colombia’ (ICRC, September 2016), available <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/child-soldiers-colombia-juan-arredondo>, accessed 18 January 2017.



As part of the recent peace process, FARC-EP committed to stop the recruitment of children under 17 into its forces and agreed to release children under 15 from its ranks.⁹⁹ In September 2016, FARC-EP released 13 minors to the Red Cross.¹⁰⁰ Without support, some children may be tempted to return to the ranks.¹⁰¹

Initially, children recruited into armed groups had been prosecuted by the State as criminals and were not treated as victims.¹⁰² However, a decision of the Constitutional Court on 18 February 2016 found that children recruited by all armed groups, including post-demobilisation groups, are victims and have the right to reparations guaranteed in the Victims' Act (No. 1448 of 2011).

2. Trafficking and Child Labour

Colombia is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.¹⁰³ Colombians have been trafficked internally, but also to countries in Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and within the Americas.¹⁰⁴ The sex trafficking of children is especially common in high tourist areas and areas where there is a large extractive industry.¹⁰⁵ In 2015, 39 girls and six boys were identified as active in forced prostitution, whereas 108 children were identified the year before.¹⁰⁶ A high number of children are employed as child labourers.¹⁰⁷ Children who work in the informal sector are susceptible to labour trafficking. Children are also used in bullfighting.¹⁰⁸ Both armed groups and organised criminal groups recruit children into highly dangerous situations.¹⁰⁹ Children have been used as combatants, exploited in the illegal drug trade, including the cultivating, selling, and transport of narcotic drugs, and used as assassins.¹¹⁰ Some child victims of trafficking have been treated as criminals, preventing them from receiving assistance.¹¹¹

⁹⁹ UNICEF *Childhood in Time of War: Colombia*, p. 8; see also 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict Report.

¹⁰⁰ Sheena McKenzie and Rachel Clarke, 'Colombia's FARC rebels release child soldiers in potential peace deal' (CNN, September 2016), available <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/10/americas/farc-colombia-release-child-soldiers>, accessed 18 January 2017.

¹⁰¹ International Center for Transitional Justice 'In Reintegration Programs, Seeing Child Soldiers As More Than Just Victims' (ICTJ November 2013), available <https://www.ictj.org/news/more-than-just-victims>, accessed 18 January 2016.

¹⁰² January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 65.

¹⁰³ US Department of State, 'Trafficking in Persons Report' (June 2016) ('2016 TIP Report'), p. 134.

¹⁰⁴ 2016 TIP Report, p. 134.

¹⁰⁵ 2016 TIP Report, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ 2016 TIP Report, p. 136.

¹⁰⁷ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 59.

¹⁰⁸ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 27(f).

¹⁰⁹ 2016 TIP Report, p. 135.

¹¹⁰ 2016 TIP Report, p. 135.

¹¹¹ 2016 TIP Report, p. 135.



3. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Notwithstanding gaps in data due to underreporting in Colombia, conflict-related sexual violence is considered to be widespread, predominantly in areas under the influence of armed groups.¹¹²

Girls recruited into armed groups are subjected to serious sexual violence in a repeated and systematic manner, including rape, sexual slavery and exploitation, forced pregnancy and abortion, and the passing on of sexually transmitted diseases.¹¹³ FARC-EP has reportedly employed a ‘guerrilla policy’ of sexual violence against children.¹¹⁴ As noted above, an investigation by Colombia’s acting Attorney General uncovered 232 cases of sexual crimes against children by FARC-EP, including rape, forced sterilisation, and forced abortion.¹¹⁵ In 2015, 1,973 cases of gender-based violence were reported by those previously demobilised and other armed groups and, in some cases, members of the Colombian armed forces.¹¹⁶

Threats of sexual violence have been reported against women leaders and activists.¹¹⁷ Structural discrimination in Colombian society, together with gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes, has resulted in high levels of violence against women and girls.¹¹⁸ Sexual and gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and children of Afro-Colombian and indigenous heritage.¹¹⁹ Such violence against children is endemic, with 18,000 cases reported in 2013.¹²⁰ Both boys and girls have been identified as victims of forced prostitution.¹²¹ A high number of girls give birth as a consequence of sexual violence committed against them, with many of the perpetrators being family members.¹²² Many children are commercially sexually exploited, particularly in the border region.¹²³ Research shows boys are victims of sexual exploitation in the city of Leticia, where perpetrators pay less than \$1 to abuse them.¹²⁴ Child marriage is

¹¹² April 2016 SG Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, para. 32.

¹¹³ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 65(c).

¹¹⁴ HRW Sexual Violence by FARC.

¹¹⁵ HRW Sexual Violence by FARC.

¹¹⁶ April 2016 SG Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, para. 32.

¹¹⁷ April 2016 SG Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, para. 32.

¹¹⁸ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 19.

¹¹⁹ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, pp. 87, 276.

¹²⁰ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 8.

¹²¹ 2016 TIP Report, p. 136.

¹²² January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 29.

¹²³ United States Department of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking, ‘The Department of Labor’s 2015 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor’ (30 September 2016) (‘2016 Worst Forms of Child Labour Report’), p. 283.

¹²⁴ 2016 Worst Forms of Child Labour Report p. 283.



also prevalent in Colombia. In 2016, UNICEF reported that six percent of girls under the age of 15 and 23 percent under the age of 18 y were married.¹²⁵

4. Education

Education has been greatly impacted by the ongoing conflict. UNICEF estimates that children living in conflict-affected areas make up 40 percent of out-of-school primary and lower secondary school students.¹²⁶ Factors such as displacement, insecurity, threat of recruitment to armed groups, sexual violence, as well as the presence of landmines and other explosive remnants of war in and around schools are hampering both access and attendance, inevitably causing children to drop out of school.¹²⁷ Armed groups have also threatened teachers. Ten teachers have been killed since 2013 and 65 schools have been damaged, mined, or used for military purposes.¹²⁸ Crossfire, landmines, and explosives caused damage to eleven schools and two teachers were killed.¹²⁹

Furthermore, if a child's first language is not Spanish, the child may face difficulties accessing education.¹³⁰ Structural discrimination against indigenous children, Afro-Colombian children, displaced children, children with disabilities, LGBTQ children, and children with HIV/AIDS also affects these children's right to education.¹³¹ According to a 2012 survey for children enrolled in primary and secondary school, child labour is a primary cause of school desertion in the Caribbean and Pacific regions of Colombia.¹³²

5. Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare and medical services is limited in areas affected by the conflict and many victims of massacres and sexual violence receive little to no medical care afterwards.¹³³ Discrimination against Afro-Colombian children and indigenous children creates challenges in accessing health care and many such

¹²⁵ UNICEF, 'The State of the World's Children 2016: A Fair Chance for Every Child' (June 2016), Table 9: Child Protection.

¹²⁶ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 8.

¹²⁷ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 8.

¹²⁸ UNICEF Childhood in Time of War: Colombia, p. 8.

¹²⁹ October 2016 SG Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia Report, p. 29.

¹³⁰ 2016 Worst Forms of Child Labour Report, p. 284.

¹³¹ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 19(a).

¹³² 2016 Worst Forms of Child Labour Report, p. 284.

¹³³ National Center for Historical Memory 2016, pp. 330-331.



children suffering from malnutrition.¹³⁴ Anaemia affects one third of all children in Colombia.¹³⁵ Those children who have been demobilised may lack access to adequate health and psychosocial programmes.¹³⁶ An attack on an oil pipeline by FARC-EP guerrillas in 2015 caused 200,000 people to have difficulty accessing clean water, creating a situation of lingering health problems.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 57; Save the Children, ‘Resource Centre: Colombia’, available <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/countries/colombia>, accessed 18 January 2017.

¹³⁵ Save the Children, ‘Resource Centre: Colombia’, available <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/countries/colombia>, accessed 18 January 2017.

¹³⁶ January 2015 UNCRC Concluding Observations, para. 29 (d).

¹³⁷ 2016 Human Rights Watch World Report: Colombia, pp. 188-189.



ANNEX I: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AUC | United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia |
| BACRIM | Paramilitary successor groups |
| ELN | The National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) |
| ERPAC | El Ejército Revolucionario Popular Antiterrorista Colombiano |
| FARC-EP | The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo) |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| US | United States of America |

ANNEX II: KEY FACTS¹³⁸

Colombia in a Snapshot

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| | Colombia |
| Geography | <p>Climate: Tropical along coast and eastern plains; cooler in highlands</p> <p>Border countries: Brazil 1,790 km, Ecuador 708 km, Panama 339 km, Peru 1,494 km, Venezuela 2,341 km</p> <p>Coastline: 3,208 km</p> |
| People | <p>Population: 47,220,856 (2016 est.)</p> <p>Median age: 29.6 years</p> <p>Languages: Spanish (official)</p> <p>Ethnic groups: Mestizo and white 84.2%, Afro-Colombian (includes multatto, Raizal, and Palenquero) 10.4%, Amerindian 3.4%, Roma <.01, unspecified 2.1% (2005 est.)</p> <p>Religions: Roman Catholic 90%, other 10%</p> |
| Economy | <p>Capital: Bogota</p> <p>Major urban areas: Bogota (capital) 9.765 million; Medellin 3.911 million; Cali 2.646 million; Barranquilla 1.991 million; Bucaramanga 1.215 million; Cartagena 1.092 million (2015)</p> <p>GDP: \$274.1 billion (2015 est.)</p> <p>GDP per capita: \$14,200 (2016 est.)</p> <p>GDP by sector: Agriculture 6.9%, Industry 34%, Services 59.1% (2016 est.)</p> |
| Children and youth | <p>Population under age of 25: 42.11%</p> <p>Unemployment (ages 15-24): 18.7%</p> <p>Child labour (ages 5-14): 9% (2009 est.)</p> <p>Legal age of conscription: 18-24 years of age for compulsory and voluntary military service; service obligation is 18 months (2012 est.)</p> |

Relevant UN Security Council Resolutions

On the UN Mission in Colombia – Resolutions 2261 (25 January 2016); 2307 (13 September 2016)

On the bombing in Bogota – Resolution 1465 (13 February 2003)

¹³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, 'The World Factbook: Colombia', available <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>, accessed 18 January 2017; 2016 Worst Forms of Child Labour Report; International Labor Organization, 'Unemployment youth total (% of total labour force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate)' (The World Bank, 2014), available <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>, accessed 18 January 2017.



Colombian Child Protection Legislation

| Colombia | |
|----------------------|--|
| National | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colombian Constitution (Article 42, 44, 45, 93) ▪ Law 98 of 1920 Establishment of Juvenile Courts ▪ Law 79 of 1926 Creation of a Ministry of Education for the education and care of orphans ▪ Law 129 of 1931 Protection of the Working Minor ▪ Law 83 of 1946 Organisation of the Child’s Defense ▪ Law 140 of 1960 About Adoptions ▪ Law 1818 of 1964 Colombian Council of Social Protection of Children and Family ▪ Law 7 of 1979 Creation of the Family Welfare System ▪ Law 418 of 1997 Defines the crime of child recruitment ▪ Law 724 of 2001 Institutionalisation of the Day for Children and Recreation and other provisions ▪ Law 679 of 2001 On Prostitution, Child Pornography and Sex Tourism ▪ Law 1098 of 2006 Code of Childhood and Adolescence ▪ Law 1329 of 2009 On changes the title of Act 599 and other provisions to counter commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents ▪ Law 1336 of 2009 Adding and strengthening the law 670 of 2001 to combat exploitation, pornography and sex tourism with children and adolescents. ▪ Law 1719 of 2014 Access to justice and other matters for victims of sexual violence and especially sexual violence related to armed conflict |
| International | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ILO C. 138, Minimum Age (ratified 2 February 2001) ▪ ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor (ratified 28 January 2005) ▪ UN CRC (ratified 28 January 1991) ▪ UN CRC Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in Armed Conflict (ratified 25 May 2005) ▪ UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (ratified 11 November 2003) ▪ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (ratified 4 August 2004) |

ANNEX III: TIMELINE OF NOTABLE EVENTS¹³⁹

1819-1902

¹³⁹ BBC Colombia Profile: Timeline; Stanford University, ‘Mapping Militant Organizations, ‘Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army’ (15 August 2015), available



After defeating the Spanish, the Republic of Gran Colombia is formed together with Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. A decade later Venezuela and Ecuador split off. The Liberal and Conservative parties are formed which eventually leads to the 1899-1902 war, around which time Panama becomes an independent state, leaving present day Colombia.

1948

Presidential hopeful, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, is assassinated, sparking riots and the beginning of a civil war known as La Violencia.

1958

After 250,000-300,000 people are killed in civil war, the Conservatives and Liberals agree to form the National Front, banning all other political parties. This political pact excluded poor farmers and labour unions.

1964

The leftist National Liberation Army (ELN) and Maoist People's Liberation Army (EPL) are formed.

May: The Colombian Military attack a group in Marguetalia who declared their intention to overthrow the government. The Marxist group fought back against the military and guerrilla war begins.

1966

May: The Marxist group, originally known as the Southern Bloc, became the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

1972

FARC establishes guerrilla training camps.

1978

Colombia's President Julio Turbay begins an intensive fight against drug traffickers after groups such as FARC began trafficking in cocaine to fund their activities. The new-found wealth led to many new recruits joining FARC, which becomes the largest guerrilla group in Colombia.

1982

FARC changes its name to FARC-EP. President Belisario Betancur starts the first peace talks, granting the guerrillas amnesty and freeing political prisoners. In response to FARC-EP's violence, right-wing

<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/89>, accessed 18 January 2017; BBC 'Colombia peace deal: Government and Farc reach new agreement' (13 November 2016), available <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37965392>, accessed 18 January 2017.



paramilitary groups such as Death to Kidnappers (MAS) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) are formed. These groups align with the Colombian military.

1984

May: The Uribe Accords, calling for a bilateral ceasefire, are signed. The campaign against drug trafficking increases.

1985

FARC-EP, together with the Colombia Communist Party, co-found the Patriotic Union (UP).

1986

May: The UP gains unprecedented support in the elections. The army, right-wing paramilitary groups, and drug cartels begin a campaign of murder and forced disappearances against UP politicians.

1992

Between 4,000-6,000 UP members are murdered, including a presidential candidate.

1998

January: Andres Pastrana Arango, a conservative, is elected president and begins peace talks with the guerrillas. These peace talks continue to stop and start over the next several years.

November: Government grants FARC-EP a large safe haven zone in the southeast of the country. The zone is off-limits to the military.

1999

October: A quarter of Colombians take to the streets in the 'No Más!' (no more) protests against injustice and violence in the country

2000

July: The U.S. grants Colombia nearly \$1 Billion USD in mainly military aid to combat drug-trafficking and contribute to peace. The deal is known as 'Plan Colombia' and is criticised for its support of the Colombian army despite widespread human rights abuses and collusion with right-wing paramilitary groups.

September: The government freezes peace talks.

2001

February: Peace talks resume. Demilitarised area is extended for eight months.

June: FARC-EP frees 359 police and army prisoners in exchange for 14 rebels.



October: The government and FARC-EP sign the San Francisco agreement, committing to negotiate a ceasefire. Life of the safe haven zone is extended until January 2002.

2002

February: Peace talks break down and the government revokes the demilitarised zone, ordering the rebels to leave. The south is declared a war zone after increased rebel attacks.

May: Alvaro Uribe is elected president, promising to crack down on rebel groups.

August: A FARC-EP suspected explosion goes off in Bogota moments before Alvaro Uribe is sworn in as president. Twenty people are killed and within days the president declares a state of emergency. The FARC-EP founded UP party's legal status is revoked.

2003

November: Fighters from the right-wing AUC begin to disarm.

2004

July: Right-wing AUC and government begin peace talks.

2005

January: A 15-day dispute breaks out between Venezuela and Colombia regarding the capture of a FARC-EP leader on Venezuelan soil.

June: A new law offering paramilitaries who turn in their arms reduced jail terms and protection from extradition is passed.

December: Peace talks begin with ELN, the second largest left-wing rebel group.

2006

May: President Uribe wins a second term in office.

December: Paramilitary leaders say they are pulling out of the peace process, while the government says the demobilisation of right-wing groups will continue.

2007

June: Government releases FARC-EP guerrillas with the hope that the rebels will reciprocate by releasing hostages. FARC-EP does not, but instead says it will only free hostages if the government reinstates a demilitarised zone.

July: Hundreds of thousands of people protest in Bogota against the ongoing conflict.

September: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez invites rebels for talks on hostage release.

2008

January: The FARC-EP releases two hostages as a result of Chavez's mediation.



March: A diplomatic crisis between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela arises after a cross-border strike by the Colombia military into Ecuador kills a senior FARC-EP rebel.

May: FARC-EP announces the death of Manuel Marulanda, its leader and founder.

November: The collapse of pyramid investment schemes, affecting some of the poorest Colombians, sparks violent protests.

2009

March: President Uribe offers peace talks if FARC-EP rebels agree to a ceasefire and halt criminal activities.

August: Venezuela withdraws its ambassador from Bogota over US-Colombia relations. The president accuses Colombia of carrying out a military invasion of Venezuela.

October: Colombia gives the U.S. military access to seven Colombian bases.

November: President Hugo Chavez amasses 15,000 troops on the Venezuelan-Colombian border.

December: FARC-EP and ELN agree to stop fighting one another and focus on attacking the Colombian military.

2010

July: Venezuela cuts diplomatic ties with Colombia after accusations of harbouring FARC-EP rebels.

August: Juan Manuel Santos is sworn in as president. He says peace talks can only occur if FARC-EP releases all hostages. Colombian and Venezuelan diplomatic ties are restored.

September: FARC-EP campaign of violence increases.

2011

August: President Santos outlines new plans to address rebels.

November: FARC-EP leader Alfonso Cano is killed by Colombian military. Timoleon Jimenez becomes the new leader.

2012

August: ELN and FARC-EP indicate readiness for peace talks.

November: A two-month ceasefire is declared by FARC-EP, while peace talks with the government begin in Cuba.

2014

June: President Santos is elected for a second term.

December: Unilateral ceasefire is declared by FARC-EP.

2015

January: President Santos announces bilateral peace talks with FARC-EP.



September: The government and FARC-EP announce intentions to set up a special court for crimes committed during the conflict, as well as a truth commission and amnesty laws.

December: A deal is signed regarding paying reparations to victims of the conflict and ensuring them justice.

2016

March: The signing of a peace agreement between the government and FARC-EP is delayed. The government begins formal peace talks with the ELN.

June: FARC-EP signs a ceasefire and disarmament agreement.

September: The government and FARC-EP sign a peace accord that formally ends the 25 years of armed conflict.

October: Colombian voters reject the peace deal with FARC-EP in a national referendum. Talks continue as President Santos is awarded the Nobel Peace prize for his efforts to end the conflict.

November: The government announces that a new, final peace agreement has been reached.



ANNEX IV: RECOMMENDED READING

Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2017: Events of 2016' (2017).

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