Colombia

Form of Government: Presidential Constitutional Republic; President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-18).

Women’s Participation: Colombian law requires 30% of all executive appointments be women; no quota for women’s participation in elected office. In 2010, women had less than 12% of seats in Parliament.

Population: Over 47 million people

Context & Background
Following a decade of partisan violence that produced some 200,000 deaths during the period between 1948 and 1958, known as La Violencia, the Conservative and Liberal parties created a National Front (NF) government that alternated control of the government for the next 16 years. Beginning in the 1960s, revolutionary guerrilla groups – the largest of which were Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) – took up arms to pursue an agenda of social change and inclusion. The internal armed conflict has gained complexity with time, and conflict actors have also expanded to include paramilitary forces as well as drug traffickers. Since 1958, there have been 218,000 conflict-related deaths (80% civilians), 5.7 million internally displaced, and the disappearance of tens of thousands of civilians. In the 1980’s, the emergence of paramilitary groups (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUCs) with links to Colombian military forces exacerbated the conflict.

Inclusion of Women
Women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. As primary supporters of their families and communities, they often have to face the burden of economic hardships caused by war. The violence also deprived them of many opportunities of access to education, healthcare and social services, thus making them more vulnerable. Women and children make up 70% of displaced people. Women are also victims of widespread sexual and domestic violence. 76% of indigenous persons and 65% of Afro-Colombians murdered in the conflict are women.

Women were largely absent from the last two formal negotiation efforts with the FARC (1999-2002, 2012 on), despite their active role as peace activists. Peace attempts since the 1980’s saw little success. In 1997, civil society organized a mass campaign “Mandate for Peace, Life and Freedom” encouraging people to vote for peace in an informal ballot. Women’s associations such as the Red Nacional de Mujeres (National Women’s Network, RNW) played a leading role in the initiative. The campaign was widely viewed as one of the central factors that contributed to the initiation of peace negotiations between FARC and President Pastrana’s government in 1999. However, the negotiations themselves were not inclusive of women. There was only one woman on the government’s negotiating team and none on the FARC’s side. There were three other women in the commissions accompanying the negotiations. In total, only four out of 40 persons at the negotiating table were women.

In 2000, women organized a public forum which provided space for the presentation of women’s needs, and submitted proposals to the commissions accompanying the negotiating teams. After the break-up of negotiations in 2002, women associations co-organized a march for peace in Bogota. Women also engaged in creating so-called “peace communities” and regional negotiations with armed groups to ensure access to food and medicine. Despite limited involvement of women, the peace process has caused strong social mobilization, therefore creating more space for women’s grassroots activities. Recently, a gender issues mechanism was established to review the agreements achieved by the negotiating teams from a gendered perspective. It includes members of the FARC and government negotiating teams in consultation with national and international gender experts.

Key players
- **Colombian Government:** The government has taken some steps for greater inclusion of women. In 2003, it passed Law 823 on gender equity and equality. In 2008, the Constitutional Court issued the Auto 092 order, aimed at accelerating sexual violence cases. It has signed and ratified the CEDAW Agreement. However, it has not adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women in Peace and Security.
- **Paramilitary groups:** Paramilitary groups such as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) are allegedly linked to the government’s armed forces. The groups demobilized in 2006, but violent activity is perpetuated by...
paramilitary groups referred to as “post-demobilization groups”, known to target, rape and kill women. They are not part of the formal negotiations and their position on women’s inclusion is unknown.

- **FARC** – The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) is the biggest rebel group in the country, and the one currently engaged in the formal peace talks. It is estimated that at least one third of FARC fighters are women. FARC has previously included women in its negotiating teams and are now involved through participation in the advisory mechanism on gender.

- **ELN - National Liberation Army (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional)**, is the second biggest guerilla group. It is not currently involved in the peace talks with the FARC, but has been engaged in its own exploratory talks with the government. The ELN has long urged inclusion of civil society in peace negotiations.

- **Women’s organizations**: Examples include RNM (National Women’s Network), which is one of the organizations that has been most actively lobbying for the inclusion of women, and the Women’s Initiative for Peace (IMP), which has been supporting peace efforts since 2001 and issued a 12-point “Women’s Agenda for Peace” in 2002.

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### Timeline of Events

1964 – Colombia Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) is established by survivors of a government crackdown on a communist-inspired peasant collective and liberal party allies; National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) established

1980’s – Drug lords establish militias to fight FARC; the conflict exacerbates

1984 – First peace talks establish ceasefire between the Belisario Betancourt government and FARC; lasts until 1987

1997 – “Mandate for Peace, Life and Freedom” campaign; 10 million people take part in an informal ballot

1999 – President Pastrana announces the beginning of peace negotiations with FARC; one woman on first governmental negotiation team; however, it is soon replaced by another team, with no women in it

2000 – National Women’s Network (RNM) organizes a women’s forum which becomes a widely publicized event

2002 – End of peace talks with FARC; no success has been achieved

Feb 2012 – Colombian government representatives under President Santos and FARC representatives secretly begin informal talks in Havana, Cuba; FARC releases a statement announcing that it will stop kidnapping citizens for ransom

Aug 2012 – General Agreement signed for the Termination of the Conflict and Building of a Stable and Long-Lasting Peace signed by GOC and FARC representatives; the agreement lays out an agenda of five substantive items and one process-related point

Sep 2012 – President Santos and FARC leaders announce the start of formal negotiations

Oct 2012 – Formal talks are launched in Norway, then move to Cuba in November; no women are included in the negotiating teams themselves; however, four women are present at the negotiations in advisory roles

Oct 2013 – National Summit of Women for Peace discusses issues related to peacebuilding from a gendered perspective, calls for women’s participation at the peace table, and submits proposals to the negotiating teams

Nov 2013 – Agreement reached on political participation; contains a clause regarding FARC’s demilitarization and transformation into a political party; President Santos announces that, effective immediately, two women will join the government negotiation team (Maria Paulina Riveros and Nigeria Renteria Lozano)

Jun 2014 – The negotiating teams release the Joint Declaration of Principles on Victims; as one of the provisions of the Declaration, a sub-committee on gender is established; the sub-committee includes representatives of FARC and the government, as well as other women experts; its role is to review the existing and future agreement in the light of inclusion of women and gender issues

The negotiations are now ongoing. The two sides have not reached an agreement on other pending issues, including drug policy, justice and reparation for the victims. So far, no gender-specific agreements have been reached and no further progress regarding the inclusion of women has been made.

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### Relevant Documents

- President Santos’ announcement of the inclusion of two women in the negotiating team (Declaración del Presidente Juan Manuel Santos sobre los nuevos miembros del equipo negociador del Gobierno en La Habana), 2013  
  [http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co](http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co)
- Joint Communiqué from FARC and the government on the agreement regarding political participation, 2013  
  [www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co](http://www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co)
- Joint Communiqué from FARC and the government on the agreement regarding land and rural reform, 2013  
  [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org)
- General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and Building of a Stable and Long-Lasting Peace, 26th August 2012  
  [www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co](http://www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co)