

WEEKLY UPDATE: January 1-7

This callout box includes a weekly update on news and work specifically related to implementing the Peace Accord between the Government of Colombia (GOC) and the FARC.

Last year was characterised by mounting uncertainty, but also **progress in the implementation of the Peace Accord**: the reincorporation of former combatants continued, despite delays in productive projects; the FARC political party entered Congress, but gained less than 1% of votes during legislative elections; two key transitional justice mechanisms (the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission) began operations, but continue to struggle for legitimacy;¹ almost 100,000 families signed crop substitution agreements, but rising coca cultivation has led to greater emphasis on forced eradication; and changes to the Accord have been largely symbolic, but there is resistance to structural changes in the rural sector, for example.² Key challenges for 2019 include budgeting and balancing security concerns with those of implementing the Accord, particularly in defending social leaders and promoting the Accord's gender approach.³

Thirteen of the 16 Development Plans with Territorial Focus (PDET) outlined in the Peace Accord for regions most affected by the armed conflict are now complete. PDETs are innovative in that they are compiled by inhabitants of the 170 municipalities with the highest violence and poverty indices, and aim to respond to their real needs. More than 235,000 people have participated so far, and 11 of the 13 completed PDETs were delivered under the Duque administration. The task now is to articulate their 23,000 initiatives with the National Development Plan, scheduled for discussion in Congress in February.⁴

According to the Land Restitution Unit, **330,856 hectares have been returned to 42,565 victims of dispossession during the armed conflict** since the Victims Law was enacted in 2011. However, claims involve over a million hectares, and this land restitution policy expires in 2022. The greatest obstacles include restituting lands which are now planted with coca, contain landmines, the presence of armed groups, and threats against social leaders. Solutions have included the delivery of lands seized from drug traffickers to victims unable to return home, and the implementation of the "Secure Harvest and Sale" project to support the commercialization of returnees' agricultural products.⁵

The GOC awaits confirmation of the presence of ELN members with Interpol Red Notices against them in Venezuela, and continues to demand that the guerrilla group cease kidnappings and criminal activities before peace talks can resume.⁶ The **ELN affirmed they had fulfilled their year-end ceasefire** on 3 January, demonstrating their unity and discipline, and denouncing GOC bombardments and responsibility in the deaths of social leaders. However, authorities continue to investigate the death of a soldier shot in Norte de Santander,⁷ and the possible involvement of the ELN in the assassination of six social leaders and 12 former FARC combatants, for which the Office of the Attorney General has released 18 and 26 arrest warrants respectively.⁸

Six social leaders were assassinated in Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, and Magdalena over the New Year period,⁹ days after the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, reiterated his concerns with regards social leaders and human rights defenders. In his quarterly report, Guterres called for the effective implementation of the Timely Prevention and Protection Action Plan (PAO) launched by the GOC on 19 November, and for a meeting of the National Security Guarantees Commission (CNGS).¹⁰ According to a report covering the period 2011 to 2017, assassinations increased after the FARC's final ceasefire in December 2014, and have largely occurred in areas previously controlled by the FARC and close to other illegal groups, while declining where illegal groups operated in the absence of the FARC; they also increased in areas where justice is most questioned. Most leaders were killed because of land, particularly by criminal groups; and community leaders are the principal victims.¹¹