



## ETHNIC GROUPS IN PEACE PROCESSES: INTERNATIONAL CASES

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnic groups such as indigenous and Afros are among the most heavily affected by conflict in Colombia and abroad. Often politically underrepresented, ethnic minorities are more frequently the targets of violence, live on disputed lands, or can be caught up in violence between warring sides. The interaction between indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations and the conflict has been complex. Many groups have been displaced from their ancestral lands by the violence. Others, determined not to leave their territories, have become subsumed in conflict, with their communities becoming targets for illegal recruitment, control by illegal armed groups, and other affectations.<sup>i</sup>

*A GOC-FARC peace agreement must take ethnic groups' interests into account in the Colombian context to ensure that peace is **relevant, inclusive, and beneficial to the country's diverse ethnic groups**, and that the physical, structural, and cultural violence that has affected these minorities in the past is resolved, thereby **strengthening their social position for the future**. Lessons learned from Colombian and international peace processes are useful to guarantee the inclusion of this perspective.*

### GUATEMALA

Guatemala's 1990-1996 civil war saw one million people displaced, 200,000 dead, and more disappeared, raped, and otherwise victimized. Approximately 83% of the victims were from an indigenous group, compounding the centuries of discrimination, exclusion, and inequality experienced by the indigenous majority. During peace negotiations, a Civil Society Assembly (ASC) was therefore created by 100 organizations from sectors including the indigenous population, to engage these groups in the construction of a peace agreement.<sup>ii</sup> In total, the ASC produced five documents: i. The democratic role of civil society and the army; ii. Indigenous rights; iii. Constitutional and electoral reform; iv. Resettling of displaced people; and v. Socioeconomic and agrarian reform. All of these directly addressed the damages caused to the indigenous population during and previous to the conflict. Most recommendations in the documents were included in the final Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace (AFLP), signed on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1996, which included an Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, and another agreement addressing rural and agrarian inequality. This gave great hope to the indigenous majority that their social and political situation would improve after implementation of the agreement.<sup>iii</sup>



However, almost 20 years after the signature of the AFLP, indigenous Guatemalans continue to face profound disadvantages, discrimination, and structural exclusion from politics and institutions. Indigenous organizations have not had the support necessary to consolidate and act as a united force with sufficient political clout to impact and encourage implementation of the AFLP. The Guatemalan government has complied with few of the commitments made in the AFLP, and much work remains to be done to fulfill indigenous rights in the country.<sup>iv</sup>

### MYANMAR

In contrast with Colombia, Myanmar's conflict is ethnic in nature, but the issues over which the country's ethnic groups have based their armed campaigns - greater autonomy and self-determination - apply equally to Colombia's ethnic groups, who struggle to strengthen these aspects of their position in the broader political context.<sup>v</sup> Over the last few years, especially since the transition away from Myanmar's military dictatorship beginning in 2010, talks have been held between the Myanmar government and a coalition of 16 ethnic armed groups, in hopes of reaching a ceasefire agreement to generate space for political dialogue. However, as of June 2015 some coalition groups remained in disagreement with aspects of the agreement, and the ceasefire had only been implemented by a handful of the armed groups. In addition, the government says it could exclude some members of the coalition from further efforts to meet ethnic demands, angering the majority. Some groups have now said they believe political consensus is necessary before a ceasefire is implemented, presenting obstacles to both accords. Moreover, presidential elections in November 2015 present added political motivations for the government to reach the strongest agreement possible.<sup>vi</sup>



Analysts agree that excluding some of the ethnic groups from the negotiations risks perpetuating the exclusion that led them to take up arms in the first place. With so many groups and interests at play, the subject of peace in Myanmar is extremely complex.<sup>vii</sup>

### RWANDA

One of the most recognized cases of ethnic division in war is that of Rwanda, where the Hutu government, which represented a Hutu ethnic majority, in 1994 carried out a bloody genocide targeting the Tutsi minority. Approximately 800,000 people died - approximately 75% of the Tutsi population at the time, and many Hutus who expressed



disagreement with the ethnic cleansing campaign. The violence, which lasted only three months, was a sharp representation of decades of ethnic social and political tensions stemming from the colonial era.<sup>viii</sup>

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel group who had warred with the national government for years, took control of Kigali in July 1994 and installed a coalition government. Despite initial appearances of political integration of Hutus and Tutsis, RPF leaders soon banned political opposition parties and removed Hutu members of government. Despite internal and external criticism of President Kagame's authoritarian style, no serious competition to the RPF has been able to consolidate in the face of opposition prohibition. In addition, the government has banned not only discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion, but also the expression of Hutu or Tutsi ethnicity. Many believe that this repression of ethnic differences contributes to a repression of memory of the genocide, and impedes non-official expressions of historical memory as components of transitional justice to complement criminal sentences, government-sponsored memorials, and other representations.<sup>ix</sup>

### COLOMBIA

After more than five decades of conflict, the GOC-FARC peace process holds hope for Colombia's ethnic groups, which have been extremely affected by the violence. However, in the case of indigenous populations, this is not the first time they have looked to peace talks to resolve their vulnerable situation. Among the peace processes of the 1990s, the indigenous Quintin Lame Movement stands out as a case of uniquely indigenous involvement in and negotiation with the government as part of peace dialogues. Quintin Lame was established in 1984 in Cauca, in reaction to increasingly violent encroachment onto indigenous land by large landholders, and assassination of indigenous leaders by state and landholder representatives. After five years of fighting in the conflict, the group faced decreasing support for a violent solution to indigenous vulnerability, and the opportunity to negotiate territorial control through the 1990 talks. Quintin Lame eventually signed an agreement with the government and was incorporated into the 1991 Constituent Assembly, giving them a direct voice in shaping the new Constitution brought into effect that year.<sup>x</sup>

As part of the current dialogue efforts to incorporate the victims' perspectives into the talks, the teams invited five delegations of 12 victims to participate at the table in Havana. Ethnicity was among the criteria for participant selection, to ensure that Colombia's diverse population was properly represented, especially given their high proportions of victimization. In addition, brief mentions of considerations for ethnic minorities have been made in the agreements reached so far (rural reform, illegal drugs, and



political participation). However, at a recent inter-ethnic meeting in Bogota, indigenous and Afro-Colombian representatives stated that although they see the peace process as an important opportunity to end the conflict, they do not feel included or represented in the dialogue, and consider their increased participation and influence crucial if their victimization is to be redressed and their political and social exclusion to be reversed.<sup>xi</sup> As of late June 2015, no additional mechanism to increase ethnic participation in the peace process had been created.

### CONCLUSION

*The cases discussed here highlight important lessons about incorporating ethnic groups into Colombia's peace process, as well as in the later post-conflict transition. **Guatemala** shows how indigenous rights and interests can be included in a peace agreement, and emphasizes the need for sufficient **political will** to execute provisions to fulfill those rights in the post-conflict transition, and thereby rectify social injustices suffered during and prior to the conflict. The **Myanmar** case lends a number of lessons to Colombia's peace process, as it demonstrates the difficulties and importance of including diverse ethnic groups in an agreement. The controversy surrounding the possible exclusion of some ethnic groups from dialogue shows how crucial it is to use the peace process to **generate increased inclusion**, not continue excluding certain populations from discussions relevant to their demands for political participation and a role in peace. **Rwanda** provides interesting lessons on the importance of truly integrating ethnic groups in national politics, while upholding and **celebrating their diversity** instead of trying to assimilate them. The case also highlights the role that different ethnic groups' expressions of **historical memory** must play in the national narrative about conflict, as a way to complement official sources. Despite the country's previous experience with indigenous groups in peace processes, Colombia has made limited progress in incorporating its diverse ethnic groups' voices into the current peace process. More efforts must be made to ensure these populations' participation and the relevance of a final agreement to their needs and interests.*

<sup>i</sup> "Indigenous Peoples and Peacebuilding: A compilation of best practices." Generalitat de Catalunya Departament d'Interior, Relacions Institucionals i Participació. Barcelona, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Krznaric, R. Civil and uncivil actors in the Guatemalan peace process.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://goo.gl/SFP0bh>

<sup>iv</sup> Alvarez, E. The Civil Society Assembly: Shaping Agreement <http://goo.gl/BHIIRO>

<sup>v</sup> pp. 77-85. "Indigenous Peoples and Peacebuilding: A compilation of best practices." Generalitat de Catalunya Departament d'Interior, Relacions Institucionals i Participació. Barcelona, 2009.

<sup>vi</sup> *Myanmar's Peace Process*. National Bureau of Asian Research, February 2 2015. <http://goo.gl/SHp7fi>

<sup>vii</sup> *More process than peace*. The Economist, February 21 2015. <http://goo.gl/7B8P2v>

<sup>viii</sup> *Myanmar Ethnic Armies Call For All-Inclusive Cease-Fire, End of Hostilities*. Radio Free Asia, May 7 2015. <http://goo.gl/ujNPvN> and *Burma: Can the 2015 Elections Overcome the Legacy of 2010?* USIP, March 9 2015. <http://goo.gl/cfjMR>

<sup>ix</sup> *Genocide in Rwanda*. United Human Rights Council <http://goo.gl/53Aykm>

<sup>x</sup> *Rwanda: Assessing Risks to Stability*. Jennifer Cooke for the Center for International and Strategic Studies. June 2011. <http://goo.gl/9XtLnn>

<sup>xi</sup> Peñaranda Supelano, D. *El Movimiento Armado*

Quintin Lame (MAQL): Una guerra dentro de otra guerra. IOM: Bogota, Colombia, 2010.

<http://bit.ly/1Phpn8L>

<sup>xii</sup> Encuentro interétnico sobre el proceso de paz. Las 2 Orillas, May 7 2015. <http://goo.gl/eefbq1>