

Women in peace processes and peace building:

COLOMBIA'S GENDER SUBCOMMISSION IN HISTORICAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTION

Women have historically been involved in conventional and non-state armed groups across all continents, with more contemporary actions in countries ranging from El Salvador to Uganda, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nonetheless, women have also been vastly underrepresented in the peace processes following these wars. To begin correcting this imbalance, GOC and guerrilla FARC-EP peace negotiators in Havana, Cuba, implemented the Gender Subcommission two years into the peace talks with the mandate of ensuring a tailored approach to gender in the peace accords.

On July 24, 2016, the Gender Subcommission released the results of its work revising three aspects of the peace accords developed to date: comprehensive rural reform, political participation, and drug production and consumption. Additionally, the Subcommission accompanied from the start the development of two additional points on victims and the end of the conflict. The accompanying figure includes key points within each of these items. The release of the Gender Subcommission's findings met with general acclaim in Colombian and international press for progressive advances in the participation of women in the peace process and for guaranteeing their rights through the development and implementation of the peace accords.

This Spotlight critically examines the points included in the July report as they are embedded in the historical trajectory of women's participation in politics in Colombia; it includes both victims' and ex-combatants' perspectives (acknowledging that many women may occupy both categories). It then offers a set of recommendations for ensuring that the work undertaken to date finds purchase in the implementation phases of the peace accords.

POINT 1 COMPREHENSIVE RURAL REFORM

1

- Preferential access to Land Trust
- Dedicated subsidies and credits
- Differential access to economic projects
- Facilitated access to legal representation
- Dedicated education programs

POINT 2 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

2

- Guarantees for opposition
- Access to attention routes
- Promotion of social organizations
- National identification card initiative

POINT 3 END OF CONFLICT

3

- Separate transitional housing
- Tailored psychological and physical attention
- Examination of link between GBV and drug use & consumption

POINT 4 DRUG PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION

4

- Tailored crop substitution programs
- Differential treatment for addiction

POINT 5 VICTIMS

5

- Tailored return processes for displaced women
- Dedicated gender group on Truth Commission
- No amnesty for gender-based violence
- Dedicated investigations into sexual violence

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COLOMBIAN POLITICS AND PEACE PROCESS

Women in general face significant social and political challenges in Colombia. The country ranks 97 out of 188 countries on the Gender Inequality Index¹ and, despite two laws passed in 2000 and 2011 that require women in at least 30% of top decision-making positions in public administration and electoral lists for political parties, these quotas have yet to be met in many regions and sectors of political life.² However, the country has a vibrant women's rights movement, and several national mechanisms for advancing women's rights and political participation, including,

though not limited to, the Gender Legal Committee in Congress and the Presidential Department for Women's Equity.

Despite the fact that women comprise more than half of the victim population, and likely far more than the reported 8,500 ex-combatants,³ zero women had been included as direct negotiators in large peace negotiations (FARC 1999-2002, ELN 2006-2007, and AUC 2004) until the present dialogues in Havana⁴ (women did participate as signatories in proportions between 0-7%).⁵ Some experts suggest that prevail-

ing chauvinistic climates are to blame, in that they erase the fact that women comprise more than half of the population, the majority of surviving victims, and between 35-40% of FARC members. Based on this social and historical context, the present female participation rate in the peace talks (14%) soars over its predecessor (0%), which was the negotiated demobilization of the 35,000 member paramilitary group the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia – a process led by ex-President, now Senator, and outspoken critic of the present dialogues, Álvaro Uribe.

¹ United Nations Development Program: Human Development Reports (2015). Gender Inequality Index.

² Cortés, Erika (2013). "Cumplimiento del Estado Colombiano con la Resolución 1325," Second Part: Women's Participation. Corporación Humanas - Colombia: Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género.

³ Observatorio de Paz y Conflicto (Universidad Nacional de Colombia – Bogotá) (2016). "Retos de las mujeres combatientes en el fin del conflicto." March.

⁴ Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2011). "Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2011 – Colombia."

⁵ Chaparro, Nina (2016). "La inclusión de las mujeres en el proceso de paz," Semana, July 19.

GENDER SUBCOMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of deliberations, the Subcommission received testimonies and recommendations from victims (60% of those who visited Havana were women), 18 women's and LGBT organizations, 10 experts on sexual violence, female ex-combatants from five other countries, and the permanent technical support of three experts from Colombia, Cuba, and Norway.

For female victims, the recommendations call for a dedicated gender work group within the truth

commission, the exclusion from amnesty of crimes of sexual violence and other gender-based crimes committed within the framework of the armed conflict, and tailored gender approaches to returning displaced persons to their lands.⁶ For female ex-combatants, who comprise an estimated 30-40% of FARC guerrilla ranks, among the more valued contributions of the Subcommission's work is the explicit recognition that these women are political subjects with a role in the present and future

peace building and social justice efforts, which is a notable departure from the standard "vulnerable victim" framing of their experiences.⁷ Given these women's experience with militarization, isolation, potential traumas, combat, and radically different understandings of gender norms and roles, a tailored approach to demobilization and reintegration should be included, and is hinted at – though only nominally so – in the protocols for laying down arms and gathering in transitional zones.

ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On one hand, the Subcommission's recommendations include significant advances in thinking about women's land titling, ownership, and personal and economic development, which has long been a deeply-rooted source of inequality in Colombia's vast rural regions. Additionally, dedicated commitments to including the stories of women in historic memory and truth commission projects, as well as differentiated attention to women in crop substitution and addiction treatment programs demonstrates a clear understanding by the Subcommission of the points in which the experiences of women have diverged from those of the men in similar contexts. However, the recommendations lack specificity. For example, there is no mention of the mechanisms through which women will participate in political life, nor is there any mention of parity. Additionally, there are no details included on how members of the aforementioned gender-focused truth commission and memory projects will be elected. Some analysts express concern that the content of the Subcommission findings thus "lacks teeth," and will see little real gains once the accords are actually implemented.⁸

With these concerns in mind, this Spotlight offers the following recommendations for gendered approaches to the peace process and the early stages of laying down arms and reincorporation, culled from international best practices in comparable settings, some of which are reviewed in the below figure:⁹

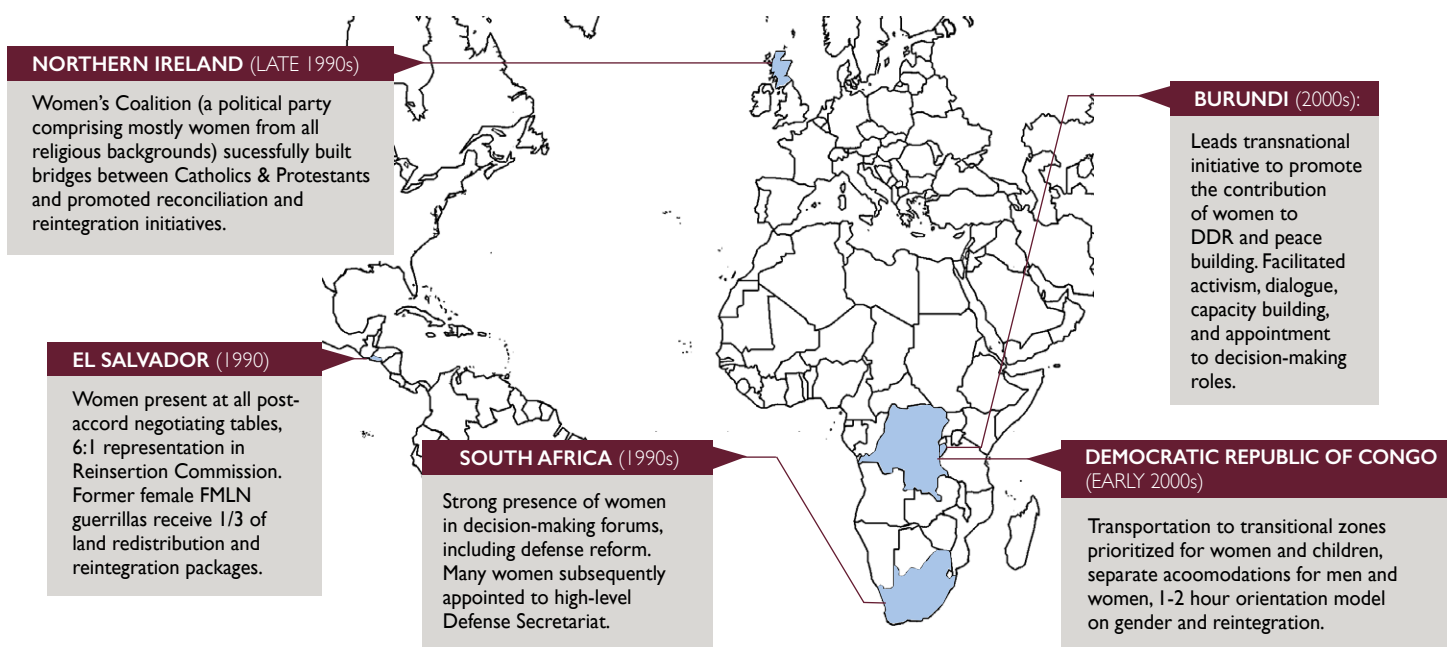
1. Integrate gender-sensitive programming into all aspects of the peace process.

2. Ensure that women comprise equal proportions as men in the monitoring and verification mission.

3. Place qualified women in visible positions of authority in the process of laying down arms, overseeing the transitional zones, and facilitating early reintegration processes.

4. Make information available to gender equality advocates and women's civil society organizations early on in the process so that they can support (but, importantly, not replace) government efforts.

5. Train all professionals involved in the transitional processes on gender-sensitive approaches to DDR.



⁶ Government Peace Team (2016). "ABC – Preguntas y Respuestas Sobre enfoque de género en los acuerdos de paz." July 23.

⁷ Observatorio de Paz y Conflicto (2016).

⁸ Vélez, Juanita (2016). "Las mujeres ganaron en los textos de La Habana, ¿ganarán en Colombia?" La Silla Vacía, July 26.

⁹ Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) (2016). "Women in armed groups and fighting forces: lessons learned from gender-sensitive DDR programs." June.