

FOCUS ON

COLOMBIA



L'OSSERVATORIO

Associazione Nazionale
Vittime Civili di Guerra
ONUS

RESEARCH CENTRE
ON CIVILIAN VICTIMS
OF CONFLICTS



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THE COUNTRY AT A GLANCE

Colombia, officially the Republic of Colombia (Spanish: República de Colombia), is a transcontinental country largely situated in the northwest of South America, with territories in Central America. Colombia shares a border to the northwest with Panama, to the east with Venezuela and Brazil, to the south with Ecuador and Peru. It shares its maritime limits with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Colombia is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse countries in the world, with its rich cultural heritage influenced by Colombia's varied geography, and complex history. After the creation of the Viceroyalty of New Granada by the Spanish, which arrived in 1499 and initiated a period of conquest and colonization, the country gained its independence in 1819, with the creation of the "Gran Colombia" Federation, dissolved in 1830. From this dissolution a new country, called the Republic of New Granada, was formed, including what is now Colombia and Panama. The new nation experimented with federalism as the Granadine Confederation (1858), and then the United States of Colombia (1863), before the Republic of Colombia was finally declared in 1886. Panama seceded in 1903 in a conflict over the strategic creation of the Panama Channel, that also involved the United States. Since the 1960s, the country has suffered from an asymmetric low-intensity armed conflict, which escalated in the 1990s, but then decreased from 2005 onward. After many failed peace processes, in 2012 the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP) started a new series of secret negotiations in La Habana, Cuba, that resulted in a general ceasefire being agreed on in 2016. The final Peace Plan proposal, although broadly supported by the international community, was turned down by a narrow margin in a national referendum. With the ceasefire due to end by the end of October 2016, the future of the Peace Process looks uncertain despite the renewed engagement by main actors involved to quickly find a new solution. A similar negotiation, involving the Colombian Government and the other main guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), is scheduled to start in Ecuador on October 27th.

FLAG

NAME	Republic of Colombia República de Colombia (Spanish)
CAPITAL	Bogotá, D.C.
OFFICIAL AND VERNACULAR LANGUAGE	Spanish 68 ethnic languages and dialects. English also official in the archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina.
POPULATION	48.7 million
ETHNIC GROUPS	86% Mestizo and White; 10.6% Black (includes Mulatto); 3.4% Amerindian; 0.01% Roma
NEIGHBOURS	Panama Venezuela Brasil Peru Ecuador
TOTAL OF CIVILIANS AFFECTED	n/a
GDP (2016)	USD 253.2 billion
PEOPLE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE (2014)	13.5 million
LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH	74.8 years
COLOMBIAN REFUGEES (2013)	70,000
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX	0.7/1 (ranking 97/188)
IDPS (2015)	1,174,306
GLOBAL PEACE INDEX	2.7 (ranking 147/163) ¹
CORRUPTION PERCEPTION RANKING	83/168

¹ The world's leading measure of national peacefulness, the GPI measures peace according to 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators.

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitical context

Historically an agrarian economy, Colombia urbanised rapidly in the 20th century, by the end of which just 17% of the workforce were employed in agriculture.² Colombia is rich in natural resources, and its main exports a broad variety of products, including mineral fuels, oils, precious stones, military products, chemicals and health related products, petrochemicals, agrochemicals, inorganic salts and acids, perfumery and cosmetics, medicaments, plastics, among others.³ Colombia is also known as an important global source of emeralds.⁴ Principal trading partners are the United States, China, the European Union and some Latin American countries.⁵ Colombia was one of the 4 founding members of the Pacific Alliance, which is a political, economic and co-operative integration mechanism that promotes the free circulation of goods, services, capital and persons between the members, as well as a common stock exchange and joint embassies in several countries. Colombia is also a member of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Organization of Ibero-American States, the Union of South American Nations and the Andean Community of Nations.⁶ In December 2007, ICJ intervened on a series of transnational issues. It allocated San Andres, Providencia, and Santa Catalina islands to Colombia but did not rule on 82 degrees W meridian as maritime boundary with Nicaragua; managed dispute with Venezuela over maritime boundary and Venezuelan-administered Los Monjes Islands near the Gulf of Venezuela. Colombian-organized illegal narcotics, guerrilla, and paramilitary activities penetrate all neighboring borders and have caused Colombian citizens to flee mostly into neighboring countries.⁷

Main UN documents on Colombia

- **UN Secretary-General's report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Colombia [S/2016/729]**, 18 August 2016
- **UN Security Council resolution establishing a political mission to monitor and verify the laying down of arms and the bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities [S/RES/2261]**, 25 January 2016
- **UN Security Council press statement that welcomed the historic agreements reached in Havana between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP [SC/12419]**, 23 June 2016

The genesis of the conflict

The Colombian Conflict began approximately in 1964 or 1966, and it is historically rooted in the conflict known as La Violencia, which was triggered by the 1948 assassination of populist political leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. It also received propulsion by the United States-backed strong anti-communist repression in rural Colombia in the 1960s that initially led liberal and communist militants to re-organize into FARC-EP,⁸ although the reasons for fighting have evolved in time

² http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/ayudadetareas/economia/productos_economia_colombiana

³ http://tradecompetitivenessmap.intracen.org/TP_EP_CI.aspx

⁴ http://aplicaciones1.ingeominas.gov.co/Bodega/i_vector/220/04/1000/23452/documento/pdf/2105234521101000.pdf

⁵ http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/exportaciones/bol_exp_dic14.pdf

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombia>

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

⁸ Mario A. Murillo; Jesús Rey Avirama (2004). Colombia and the United States: war, unrest, and destabilization. Seven Stories Press. p. 57. ISBN 978-1-58322-606-3.



Street in Salento, in Quindio, Colombia.

*Credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, Pedro Szekely
Source: Flickr*

from group to group. The five-decade-long conflict between government forces and antigovernment insurgent groups, initially linked to Cold War dynamics, was later on mainly powered by the drug trade, and escalated during the 1990s because of the appearance of paramilitary forces. Although paramilitaries had demobilized by the end of 2006, in the wake of the paramilitary demobilization these organizations were replaced by criminal groups, whose members also included former paramilitaries. Large areas of the countryside are still under guerrilla influence or are contested by security forces, in what is commonly considered a asymmetric low-intensity non international armed conflict.

Peace talks and agreements

In 1990 and 1991, peace negotiations with several smaller guerrilla movements, such as 19th of April Movement (M-19), most fronts of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL), resulted in their demobilization and transformation into civilian political actors. However, repeated attempts at finding a negotiated settlement through formal peace talks between the government and the FARC have all been unsuccessful. The most important attempt at peace talks with the FARC was the 1999-2002 peace process under the government of President Andrés Pastrana, who had conceded a demilitarized zone to the FARC to facilitate peace talks within Colombian territory. Although the peace process continued for three years, no kind of agreement was reached between the two sides. The paralyzed peace process coincided with an escalation of the conflict, also due to the rapid numerical and geographic expansion of paramilitary groups.⁹

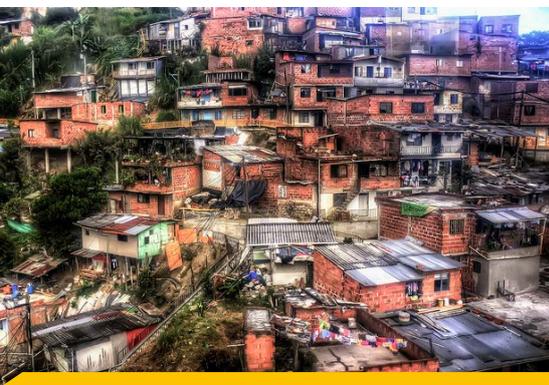
⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombian_peace_process

Testimony from the field

As day broke in the small town of Toribio, a voice on the loudspeaker warned the civilian population to flee. The FARC was preparing to attack the Colombian security forces' headquarters in the town center. As people fled, homemade mortars began to rain down on the humble buildings and homes. Colombian troops returned fire. Civilians, as always, were caught in the crossfire of Colombia's brutal war. One ten-year-old boy was killed. More civilians would certainly have died during the ten hours of fighting if not for the heroic efforts of a group of nonviolent indigenous guards that marched into town and led civilians to safety. The Nasa people of southwestern Colombia took the world by surprise when they developed a pacifist army of 5,000 guards to protect their communities and other civilians in the midst of the Western hemisphere's longest-fought internal war, subsidized since 2000 by U.S. military aid. Thanks to their work nonviolently protecting 305 communities and 93,000 hectares of territorial reserve, they were awarded Colombia's National Peace Prize.¹⁰

HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

According to a study by Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory, 220,000 people have died in the conflict between 1958 and 2013, most of them civilians (177,307 civilians and 40,787 fighters) and more than five million civilians were forced from their homes between 1985 – 2012, generating the world's second largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹¹ 16.9% of the population in Colombia has been a direct victim of the war.¹² Humanitarian consequences are recorded even during current negotiations, which are held in the midst of hostilities and other sources of violence such as the post-demobilization armed groups. Land distribution inequality, drug trafficking, illegal mining and other illegal economies, limited State presence in remote areas, poor socioeconomic opportunities in rural isolated areas and new dynamics of violence in urban centres are also among the main drivers of the conflict in Colombia. Despite increased national prevention and response efforts, there are still unmet humanitarian needs for women, men, adolescents, girls and boys, and new victims of violence and natural disasters in need of assistance. Response gaps are particularly severe in the hardest hit municipalities which are often in hard to access rural areas and urban areas controlled by non-state armed groups. As of mid 2016, 16.9 million people are living in areas affected by the conflict.¹³



A view of Medellín from the Metro Cable

*Credit: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, Pedro Szekely
Source: Flickr*

Shelter

Between January 2013 and August 2015, on average, almost 15,000 people were forcibly displaced every month in Colombia, while official data report 11,873 IDP's for the first semester of 2016. OCHA estimates that once the registry is updated, the number of IDP's during the semester will likely reach 89,392, based on past trends. During the first six months of 2016, more than 2.5 million people were affected by constraints related to movement restrictions or access limitations on basic goods and services due to armed violence.¹⁴

¹⁰ <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/article.php?id=1205>

¹¹ <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/estadisticas.html>

¹² <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/RUV>

¹³ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/es/system/files/documents/files/160808_snapshot_volencia_dic_2016.pdf



River boat health care in Caquetá

Credit: CC BY 2.0, CICR

Source: Youtube

Health

Healthcare services in rural communities impacted by armed conflict and natural disasters lack adequate access to basic and specialized healthcare. Mental healthcare, assistance to survivors of sexual violence, assistance to landmine victims; and reproductive health service are particularly needed. The lack of infrastructure, medical supplies and qualified personnel; attacks against medical facilities and protection risks limit access to healthcare. There is inequality in access for ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities and the elderly.¹⁵ Tropical diseases are a major causes of death. Malaria affects nearly 85% of the national territory, mainly the Pacific ocean coast, the Amazon jungle and eastern savannas, with an estimated of 250,000 cases/year and a mortality rate of 3/100,000.¹⁶



A community well in Puerto Triunfo, Antioquia

Credit: CC BY 2.0, R.A. Hencker Merchan

Source: Youtube

Water and sanitation

Water supply and sanitation in Colombia has been improved in many ways over the past decades. Between 1990 and 2010, access to improved sanitation increased from 67% to 82%, and access to improved water sources increased only slightly from 89% to 94%. However, rural areas of Colombia impacted by the armed conflict and natural disasters still suffer limitations in access to water and sanitation. The availability and quality of water deteriorated due to attacks on oil infrastructure, fumigation of illicit crops, the presence of extractive economies, in particular illegal mining, and the placement of landmines.¹⁷ Furthermore, despite improvements, the quality of water and sanitation services remains inadequate, with only 73% of those receiving public services receiving water of potable quality.¹⁸



Port of Cartagena

Credit: CC BY-SA 3.0, Pe-sa

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Food security

There are gaps in adequate and timely food assistance, with a deterioration of agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods in many rural communities in Colombia. This situation disproportionately impacts Indigenous and Afro-colombian populations as well as children under five, the elderly, and pregnant and nursing mothers living in rural areas, along with areas impacted by both armed conflict and natural disasters.¹⁹

¹⁵ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf

¹⁶ <http://web.unab.edu.co/editorialunab/revistas/medunab/pdfs/ed719.pdf>

¹⁷ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf

¹⁸ https://web.archive.org/web/20080227182208/http://www.superservicios.gov.co/siteSSPD/documentos/documentos_pub/87_1763.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf



Students in a rural area of Colombia

Credit: CC BY-NC-ND, World Bank

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Education

Colombia is home to 12,845 public high school and 9,530 private establishments, showing extremely marked differences in facilities, teaching standards, and parental involvement.²⁰ Although the education system has constantly improved its performances in last decades, most results are still far from OECD average data. For example, only 26% of 25-34 year-olds have attained tertiary education, against the 41% of the OECD area.²¹ Difficulties are still extremely relevant in rural areas, and especially in those areas affected by the conflict, where children face a series of obstacles to access educational services, such as security, lack of decent infrastructure, lack of means, and insufficient human resources.



German Valencia, coordinator of the Indigenous Guard of the Nasa people's Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca

Credit: Public domain, witnessforpeace.org

Source: witnessforpeace.org

Protection of civilians

Between 2013 and 2015, around 2.9 million people were directly targeted. In remote rural areas of Colombia, particularly in Indigenous and Afro-colombian territories, institutional and community-based capacities for protection are particularly limited. These communities suffer from displacement and other impacts related to the armed conflict that generate specific protection needs.²²



A Mangrove swamp

Credit: Public domain, Viajeminuto

Source: Pixabay

Access

According to OCHA's monitoring, between January 2013 and August 2015, about 480 events were reported causing restrictions on mobility or on access to basic goods and services, due to armed violence (69%), natural disasters (14%) or blockades in the framework of social protests (16%).²³ AfroColombian and Indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of restrictions.²⁴

²⁰ <https://panampost.com/maria-suarez/2015/05/18/colombian-education-in-crisis-on-all-fronts/>

²¹ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/Education-in-Colombia-Highlights.pdf>

²² https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf

²³ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_colombia_hno.pdf

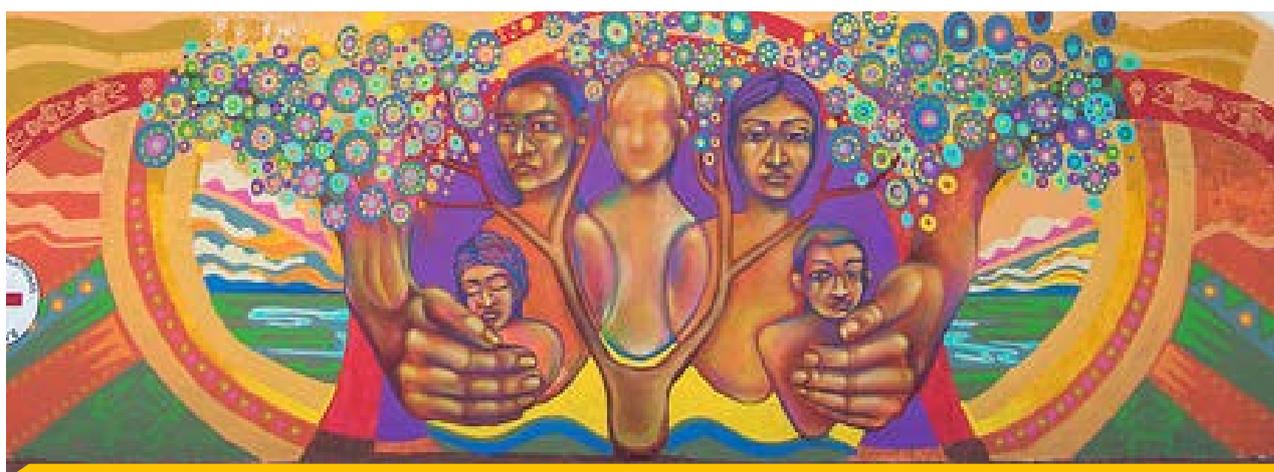
²⁴ https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/es/system/files/documents/files/160808_snapshot_volencia_dic_2016.pdf

TRUTH-SEEKING PROCESSES

Colombia began peace talks with the FARC to reach an end to the armed conflict, and has also been implementing mechanisms to establish the responsibility of demobilized paramilitaries since 2005 and provide reparations. Other proceedings have taken place in respect of both military and politicians.²⁵ In 2010, Congress enacted Law 1424, which established a non-judicial truth-seeking mechanism that provides legal benefits to members of illegal organized armed groups in exchange for agreeing to contribute to clarification of the truth about the conflict. The offer is not extended to those accused of crimes against humanity. Colombia also counts on several community-based human rights groups, including Colombian Commission of Jurists, the Confederation of Colombian Workers, the Corporación Reiniciar, the Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace, the Advisory Office for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), the Regional Human Rights Commission (CREDHOS), the Colectivo de Abogados “José Alvear Restrepo” and the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE).

MEMORY

In response to the growing demands of the victims, the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos promoted the passing of Law 1448, or Victims’ Law, which established a Historical Memory Center.²⁶ Since then, institutions and communities have started to participate in a plural process of social memory building that is intended to help stopping the vicious cycle of war and seeking truth, justice, reparation. Among the many initiatives, we can mention Memoria Amazonas,²⁷ Memorias del Río Atrato,²⁸ Salon del Nunca Mas,²⁹ Rutas del Conflicto,³⁰ Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María.³¹ Countless projects and initiatives such as ICRC’s The Missing: The Right to Know,³² are dedicated to the issue of the missing persons, to support families in their quest for answers. Official figures indicate that more than 100,000 people remain unaccounted for.³³



A wall painting remembering missing persons

Credit: CC BY-NC-ND, CICR Colombia

Source: Flickr

²⁵ <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/colombia>

²⁶ <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/colombia>

²⁷ <http://www.memoriauitoto.com/>

²⁸ <http://www.memoriasdelatrato.org/>

²⁹ <http://salondelnuncamas.org/>

³⁰ <http://rutasdelconflicto.com/>

³¹ <https://montemariaaudiovisual.wordpress.com/>

³² <https://www.icrc.org/spa/resources/documents/feature/2014/08-25-colombia-missing-campaign-main.htm>

³³ <https://www.icrc.org/es/document/infografia-las-alarmanes-dimensiones-de-la-desaparicion-en-colombia>

FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY AND REPARATION

In 2005, Law 975 was enacted to facilitate the reincorporation of demobilized former combatants into civilian life, giving contemplated a special prosecution model that includes alternative sentencing for those demobilized former paramilitaries that contribute to clarification of the truth and reparations to victims. By June 2013, approximately 2,000 former paramilitaries had passed through the Justice and Peace tribunals, but only 14 had been sentenced. In response to the growing demands of the victims, the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos promoted the passing of Law 1448, or Victims' Law, which established a comprehensive reparations program and land restitution procedure. The government created new institutions to implement these programs, namely the Victims' Unit, and the Land Restitution Unit.³⁴

PEACEBUILDING

In 2005, Law 975 was enacted to facilitate the reincorporation of demobilized former combatants into civilian life, giving rise to the Justice and Peace process.³⁵ However, this has had little impact on the safety and security of peacebuilding and Human Rights organizations. Colombian organizations and activists continue to endure death threats, murders, and clandestine disappearances on a regular basis. Between 1994 and 2014, 745 human rights activists were murdered in Colombia, according to the United Nations.³⁶ In order to make room for their work in such difficult conditions, Colombian human rights activists have invited groups like Peace Brigades International, Witness For Peace, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, FOR Peace Presence and Christian Peacemaker Teams to partner with them.



Demonstration against violence

Credit: CC BY 2.0, Marco Suárez

Source: Wikimedia Commons

³⁴ <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/colombia>

³⁵ <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/colombia>

³⁶ http://www.hchr.org.co/publico/comunicados/2015/onu-ddhh_Comunicado_Homicidio_defensores_derechos_humanos_2015.pdf

“ WE MUST OPEN THE DEBATE BETWEEN ALL ARMED ACTORS. YOU HAVE TO ASK THE GUERRILLA WHY HE VICTIMIZES THE COMMUNITIES WHILE PRETENDING TO ACT ON THEIR BEHALF, AND THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MILITARY AS WELL FOR FAILING TO DEFEND THE PUBLIC GOOD BY FIGHTING AMONG US AND VICTIMIZING US.”

German Valencia, coordinator of the Indigenous Guard of the Nasa people's Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca³⁷

³⁷ <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/article.php?id=1205>



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