



## SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERT GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

### Summary of the meeting on the situation in Colombia, held on August 21, 2023

On 21 August 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG) convened a meeting on the situation in Colombia. The members were briefed by Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, accompanied by the Resident Coordinator and representatives from UN Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Council Members exchanged questions and answers with the briefers, and UN Women and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict presented recommendations and shared additional observations at the end of the meeting.

#### Questions from Council Members:

Security Council members asked several questions about women's participation in the current dialogues with the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) and other armed groups, expected or planned synergies between the upcoming national action plan on women, peace and security and the implementation of the total peace policy and the announced feminist foreign policy, and measures taken to address targeted violence against women human rights defenders, social leaders, former combatants, and in public life and politics, especially ahead of local elections in October and including in the digital space. Several Council Members asked about the capacity and resources of the gender unit in the Verification Mission in light of the multiple expansions of the mandate of the mission in recent years, and about the preparations for macro-case 11 on conflict-related sexual violence by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace as well as the follow-up to the recommendations of the final report of the Truth Commission. Council Members also inquired about the UN's capacity to support the government in the protection of Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities, especially those defending land and environmental rights in territories affected by the presence of armed groups, and the impact of continued reports of sexual violence in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

#### Main points raised in the meeting:

- Recalling recommendations raised at the previous meeting of the IEG to urge the government of Colombia to provide adequate technical and financial support to accelerate the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement, several developments have shown renewed attention to the women, peace and security agenda. This includes the development of Colombia's first-ever National Action Plan on 1325, recent government decisions to address women's representation and violence against women in politics, increased support to the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, and the identification of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the four priorities set by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, including the activation of local action plans in 18 municipalities to implement the gender provisions of the reintegration policy. In current talks with the ELN, the government's delegation has reached parity and 40 percent of the ELN's delegation are women. Women are also 44 percent of the members of the committee set out to define the methodology for the participation of civil society and Colombians in general in these

new peace negotiations. This includes representatives of five women's platforms and organizations, who are already being supported by UN Women.

- Despite these efforts, progress in the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement continues to be slower than other provisions, and this has been observed by the Verification Mission, women's organizations, and academic centers like the Kroc Institute, which issues quarterly reports. This includes barriers hindering efforts to include women equitably in rural reform, and especially indigenous and afro-descendant women, despite the organization of consultations with rural women and the peace agreement's stipulations to take women into consideration in land title formalization and land delivery and redistribution. The participation of women former combatants in productive projects stands at a positive rate of 86 percent, but only 13 percent of collective projects are led by women, in part because more than a third of women provide unpaid care services.
- Insecurity continues to be one of the main challenges to the implementation of the peace agreement. 11 women former combatants have been killed since the agreement was signed (out of nearly 400 former combatants). In recent months, 6 members from political parties have been killed, including one woman. There are reports of trafficking and sexual violence within the areas of reintegration, in some cases followed by arrests of alleged perpetrators, as well as forced recruitment of girls by armed groups and femicides of women accused to be in relationships with members of armed groups or public security forces. In the first semester of 2023, OHCHR has so far verified 27 out of 42 allegations of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of girls and adolescents, public rapes of women and girls, forced recruitment of girls through grooming and sexual harassment, femicides and torture by non-state armed groups. In 2022, the National Victims Unit identified 453 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, compared to 293 in 2021. From January to June 2023, OHCHR also verified the killing of 46 human rights defenders and social leaders, a 19 percent decrease compared to the previous six months but still alarmingly high. Among these were seven women, like Edilsan Andrade Avirama in Cauca and Mariela Marínez Gaviria in Nariño, as well as Franklin Pavón, a defender of LGBTIQ rights. In spite of political will and many efforts, the reality for women and girls in many regions, disproportionately affected by violence, displacement, and poverty, has not fundamentally changed yet.
- In current talks with the ELN, apart from women's participation, it is important to ensure that gender equality and women's rights issues are part of agenda, and taken into consideration in the ceasefire monitoring arrangements, and that the standard set for women's participation be replicated in talks with other armed groups. In addition to pressuring the parties, the UN has also tried to lead by example, noting that women were under-represented at the start of the talks even in UN teams and among the representatives of guarantor countries, and taking measures to address that. The UN will also continue to advocate for the inclusion of the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence as well as violence against women and LGBTIQ individuals in any new ceasefires with other armed groups.
- Ahead of local elections in October, the UN is supporting an initiative that builds on the success of the national elections, in which women's representation jumped from 20 to 30 percent approximately, which includes measures to prevent violence against women in politics. It is especially important that the highest authorities continue to deliver messages and take a strong stance against any stigma on women former combatants or women in politics.
- The government expects to present an outline of the draft National Action Plan on women, peace and security in October 2023 in the Security Council. The process of its elaboration has been highly participatory so far, with a steering committee made up of 23 women's organizations and almost 1,000 women taking part in forums and consultations, including various sectoral forums to ensure the inclusion of indigenous and afro-descendant women, young women, former combatants, and many others, and six regional forums culminating in a national forum planned

for the end of September. It is hoped that this plan will be strongly connected to all existing relevant policies, such as the new national development plan, Colombia's feminist foreign policy, and the total peace policy, and help address implementation gaps.

- The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has included sexual violence and gender persecution in some of the indictments of ongoing macro-cases, but has not yet formally opened a macro-case on conflict-related sexual violence, which is expected to be opened soon as Case 11. In May 2023, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict visited Colombia and amplified the urgent need to open this macro-case, after hearing directly from survivors and their challenges to access justice, reparations, or socioeconomic reintegration. The UN system and international partners have already met a few times to discuss follow-up to the final report of the Truth Commission and its gender-related elements.
- The Verification Mission continues to maintain gender parity, including in senior leadership positions, and a relatively high percentage of women among international observers (39 percent). As the number of international observers will grow with the new mandate, it is important to reach out proactively to contributing countries to ensure that this percentage of women is maintained or increased and that international observers have the necessary gender expertise. In terms of the gender unit and the mandate expansion, any reinforcements of existing capacity or resources would be helpful, but it is important that all components and units of the mission understand that it is their responsibility to deliver on the gender-related aspects of the mandate.
- The UN's Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace in Colombia, set up to help implement the 2016 peace agreement, requires that 30 percent of its contributions have a gender focus and has so far channeled 46 million dollars to projects that have that lens, as well as a requirement that all partners receiving funds have measures in place to address sexual exploitation and abuse. While the UN has not had cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, this remains a problem among the broader humanitarian community. The Peacebuilding Fund is also activating new resources to support women's participation in the new dialogues and women's access to the processes led by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. One of the most important initiatives to provide protection to women human rights defenders, now replicated in other countries in the region like Mexico and Honduras, continues to be Prodefensoras, a programme led by UN Women and funded by Norway that will expand its geographic coverage in its second phase and pay special attention to violence in the digital space and threats or attacks against women journalists and environmental rights defenders.

### **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations were presented by UN Women, as the secretariat of the IEG.<sup>1</sup>

In the negotiations on the mandate renewal for the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and any decisions regarding Colombia, the Security Council should consider the following elements:

- Demand the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the implementation of the peace agreement and the negotiations with other armed actors in Colombia.
- Urge the adequate implementation of the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders and measures to integrate a gender perspective in the work of the National Protection Unit.

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<sup>1</sup> These recommendations are suggestions from UN participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, in consultation with other UN entities, including the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council Members.

- Request the UN Verification Mission in Colombia to continue to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue into its planning, verification and reporting, and note the importance of ensuring adequate expertise as appropriate to adequately perform the functions added to the mandate, and commending the Mission's efforts to achieve gender parity and engage systematically with women's and LGBTIQ organizations.

In addition, Security Council Members and the IEG co-chairs could:

- Inquire about the institutional set up planned for by the current government to ensure women's active participation in monitoring and tracking the implementation of gender-related provisions in the peace agreement, as well as in the national commission to determine the participation of Colombian civil society in the talks with the ELN and other armed groups, and encourage the government to expedite the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement.
- Encourage the Government to continue to ensure the inclusion of the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women and LGBTIQ people in all future ceasefire agreements, and that these issues be discussed early on in the negotiations with armed groups.
- Inquire about the opening of macro-case number 11 on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and ensure the integration of these issues in all other relevant cases, highlighting the need for women's and LGBTIQ organizations and victims' representatives to be involved at every step.
- Urge the authorities to ensure comprehensive assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence that continue to experience severe physical and mental health consequences of rape and other brutal forms of sexual violence, as well as challenges in accessing socioeconomic reintegration, particularly in areas controlled by illegal armed groups and criminal networks.
- Support the call by the Office of the Ombudsman to develop a collective reparations plan with a gender focus, with the input of women and LGBTIQ representatives from conflict-affected territories.
- Partner with the Government in the full implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, the recommendations of the final report of the truth commission, and the national development plan, including the implementation of rural development plans targeting gender issues in the territories most affected by the conflict.
- Advocate for increase funding to strengthen and expand coverage of gender-based violence service provision and coordination efforts under the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, and direct humanitarian funding to local women-led organizations to provide gender-based violence assistance.

The Co-Chairs thanked the participants and encouraged all Council Members to follow-up on the important issues raised in the discussion.