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Human rights defenders continued to face attacks, threats and harassment because of their work; defenders of the land, territory and environment were particularly at risk. Killings and threats targeting former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Army of the People (FARC-EP) combatants persisted. Attacks on media workers and outlets continued, threatening freedom of expression. Excessive and unnecessary use of force by state officials was reported. Indigenous leaders and defenders were attacked and killed and, in areas where armed opposition groups continued to operate, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities were forcibly displaced and some faced humanitarian crises. A final report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledged that violations of reproductive rights had been committed during the decades-long armed conflict (1964-2016). Several former army members, civilians and former FARC-EP commanders were charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the conflict before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP). Abortion was decriminalized. Attacks on LGBTI people continued. Gender-based violence persisted and survivors faced ongoing barriers to accessing justice, truth and reparation. Venezuelan refugee women faced violence and discrimination on grounds of nationality and gender.

Background

Parliamentary elections were held on 13 March. Some seats in parliament were reserved for former FARC-EP combatants and for victims of the armed conflict, as stipulated in the 2016 Peace Agreement.

In June, the Colombian Truth Commission released its final report, highlighting the need to address historic inequalities, discrimination,

racism, gender-based violence, violence against Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants and to guarantee the rights to truth, justice and reparation of victims of the armed conflict.

Gustavo Petro, former mayor of Bogotá and former M-19 guerrilla fighter, won the presidential election and began his four-year term in August. He was accompanied by Francia Márquez, environmental defender and the country's first Black woman vice president.

In August, authorities recognized the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and examine individual complaints regarding victims of enforced disappearance. In September, Colombia also ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of Human Rights of Older Persons. In October, Congress approved the Escazú Agreement.

President Petro restored diplomatic relations with Venezuela and in September some border operations between the two countries were re-established.

In October, President Petro reinstalled and reinitiated meetings of the National Commission for Security Guarantees, established by the Peace Agreement to create a public policy for dismantling armed groups.

In October, the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) recommenced peace talks and proposed a "multilateral ceasefire". The government also explored negotiations with other armed actors in the context of a "total peace" policy.

Colombia is one of the South American countries with the highest recurrence of extreme weather events. Approximately 84% of its population is exposed to multiple environmental hazards. According to the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies of Colombia (IDEAM), coastal and insular areas are most sensitive to climate change, as well as high mountain ecosystems.

Rights to truth, justice and reparation

In January, the Constitutional Court declared an unconstitutional state of affairs due to the constant and massive violations of fundamental rights to life, physical integrity and security of former FARC-EP combatants. The Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (INDEPAZ), a civil society organization, reported 42 killings of former combatants during the year. The UN Security Council stressed its concern regarding the persistent threats, attacks and killings targeting former FARC-EP combatants who had signed the Peace Agreement.

According to the Kroc Institute, compliance with the 2016 Peace Agreement between FARC-EP and the Colombian state remained slow, particularly regarding the implementation of ethnic and gender-based approaches. The Institute reported that 37% of the Agreement's provisions had been minimally implemented and 15% uninitiated.

From January to December, the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing (UBPD) recovered 185 bodies of people reported missing in the context of the armed conflict, in regions such as Antioquia, Santander and Sucre. In June, the UBPD also reported it had handed the remains of 167 victims back to their families and loved ones since its creation in 2017.

Freedom of expression

In May, the Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) expressed alarm at the arbitrary detention of journalists Luis Ángel and Luna Mendoza, who were covering the high-profile murder of Paraguayan prosecutor Marcelo Pecci near the city of Cartagena.

In May, media outlets in Antioquia and Córdoba departments received death threats in the context of an armed strike declared by the paramilitary group the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AGC – also known as the Gulf Clan).

In July, the Colombian Council of State declared the state responsible for psychological torture, threats, persecution, exile and illegal interception in the case of journalist Claudia Julieta Duque and her family between 2001 and 2010.

In August, journalists Leiner Montero and Dilia Contreras were killed in Magdalena department. According to FLIP, the killings were related to their journalistic work.

In September, FLIP reported threats against Telemundo journalists covering the Darien Gap migration route.

As of September, FLIP had reported 595 violations of freedom of expression against journalists, including two cases of sexual violence. In the first five months of the year, FLIP reported a 59% increase in threats against media workers covering the electoral process compared with 2018.

Excessive and unnecessary use of force

In May, Indigenous leader Luis Tombé was shot dead in the context of an environmental protest in the town of Miranda, Cauca department, when

members of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) opened fire on protesters calling for the release of fellow demonstrators held by police.

In June, civil society platform Campaña Defender la Libertad criticized ESMAD's excessive use of force against protesters, which resulted in one person sustaining eye trauma at Distrital University in Bogotá. Protesters were calling for more resources and improved infrastructure for the university.

Arbitrary detention

According to Campaña Defender la Libertad, arbitrary detentions by state security forces increased between March and June, in the context of the upcoming elections.

Indigenous peoples' rights

Killings and threats targeting Indigenous leaders and defenders continued.

In January, the Totoroez Indigenous people reported the killing of Albeiro Camayo, a member of the Indigenous Guard, by FARC-EP dissidents in Cauca department.

In February, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reported the killing of Julio César Bravo, a human rights defender and leader of the Pastos people in Nariño department.

ELN combatants in Chocó department killed Luis Chamapuro, a member of the Wounan people, in February.

Also in February, Dilson Arbey Borja, an Indigenous leader, human rights defender and member of the Indigenous Guard, was killed in the city of Turbo, Antioquia department.

The OHCHR condemned the killing of Miller Correa in March, in the context of constant threats against his community and its leaders. Miller Correa was a human rights defender and member of the Nasa people in Cauca department.

In September, two Wayuu Indigenous infants died of malnutrition in the northern region of La Guajira, taking the death toll among young children there to 39 since January. On 6 September, the Ombudsperson's Office issued a public warning asking the government to take action to address the humanitarian situation in the region.

In June, at least 100 Indigenous people from Alto Andagueda reserve in Chocó were forcibly displaced following clashes between state security

forces and illegal armed groups.

Indigenous organizations in Chocó highlighted the risk of displacement faced by Emberá Indigenous families due to the presence of illegal armed groups in Chocó in the Jurubida Chori Alto Baudó reserve.

In September, Awá peoples highlighted the continuing humanitarian crisis and violence affecting them because of the presence of illegal armed actors on Indigenous reserves in Nariño and Putumayo departments.

Gender-based violence

In July, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) announced the opening of Case 11, relating to sexual violence, grave violations of reproductive rights and violence motivated by the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of the victims in the context of the armed conflict.

The Feminicides Observatory reported that there were 557 feminicides in 2022.

Victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, by state officials in the context of the 2021 national strike faced continuing obstacles in accessing justice and reparation.¹

Sexual and reproductive rights

A ruling by the Constitutional Court in February decriminalized abortion up to the 24th week of pregnancy. The historic decision came in response to a lawsuit filed by the Causa Justa movement.

The Truth Commission's final report recognized that grave violations of reproductive rights, including forced abortions, forced sterilizations and forced contraception, had occurred in the context of the armed conflict. The report recommended that the state avoid restarting aerial fumigation programmes to eradicate illicit crops using the herbicide glyphosate as it has negative effects on people's reproductive health.

LGBTI people's rights

According to the NGO Caribe Afirmativo, between January and July, 15 gay men were killed and LGBTI people faced heightened risks in the city of Medellín.

The JEP opened an investigation (Case 7) into sexual crimes and discrimination against forcibly recruited LGBTI children and adolescents during the armed conflict.

The Constitutional Court recognized a non-binary gender marker for ID registration, establishing legal precedent for gender diversity.

In March, lesbian rights defender Paola Andrea Jaraba Martínez faced violence and threats, allegedly related to her sexual orientation and work in Córdoba department.

According to the NGO Trans Action and Support Group (GAAT), between January and August, 16 trans women were killed in Colombia.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders continued to face attacks, threats and harassment because of their work. Defenders of the land, territory and environment were particularly at risk.

In February, several human rights defenders in the Magdalena Medio region were targeted in a pamphlet circulated by an armed group calling itself the United Self-defence Forces of Colombia. The pamphlet referred to human rights defenders as military targets and gave them and their families 48 hours to leave the area or face the consequences. Targeted defenders included Carolina Agón Ramón Abril. Ten days later, Yuvelis Natalia Morales, a 21-year-old environmental defender, was forced to flee Colombia after her home was broken into.

In May, unidentified people shot at four environmental defenders belonging to the Federation of Santander Fishers for Tourism and Environment (FEDESPAN), an environmental organization which operates in the city of Barrancabermeja, and assesses possible environmental damage in the Magdalena Medio region.

In July, Yuli Velásquez, president of FEDEPESAN, was the victim of an armed attack in which her bodyguard was injured.²

In August, the minister of the interior installed the first Unified Command Point for Life in Caldonio municipality, Cauca department. The aim of this space, and similar spaces that followed in other regions, was to listen to the demands and concerns of communities and protect the lives of social leaders, human rights defenders and others at risk.

According to the NGO Programa Somos Defensores, between January and September there were 621 attacks targeting human rights defenders.

INDEPAZ recorded the killings of 189 social leaders and human rights defenders in 2022.

Forced displacement

OCHA reported that from January to July, there were 220 humanitarian emergencies relating to confinement (meaning people were forced to stay in their territories because of the armed conflict and had limited access to food, drinking water and basic services) and forced displacement, affecting at least 249,106 people, mainly in the Pacific region and near the Venezuela-Colombia border.

In January, clashes broke out between FARC-EP dissidents and the ELN in Arauca, forcibly displacing 3,860 people.

In May, 7,989 people were prevented by non-state armed groups from leaving their homes or moving freely in the zones of Nóvita and San José del Palmar in Chocó.

Violations of international humanitarian law

Between January and June, the ICRC recorded 377 victims of explosive hazards, including anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, in 16 departments. Cauca, Antioquia, Arauca, Norte de Santander and Meta were the most affected departments.

According to the human rights NGO Attorneys Collective José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR), on 28 March, 11 people were extrajudicially executed during a military incursion in the Puerto Leguísimo municipality, Putumayo department.

The National Ombudsperson issued an alert over the presence of the paramilitary group Border Command in Caquetá region and the grave risk to the lives and physical integrity of civil society leaders and former FARC-EP combatants.

On 5 May, the AGC imposed a four-day curfew across 10 departments in northern Colombia, following the announcement of the decision to extradite its commander "Otoniel" to the USA. During this so-called armed strike, at least 127 acts of violence were reported in 73 municipalities, including four killings, five death threats, 36 cases of restriction of movement and one case of torture and another of kidnapping.

In May, Afro-descendant communities reported armed clashes in Istmina, Sipí, Nóvita, Medio San Juan and Litoral del San Juan in Chocó department, resulting in collective forced displacements and the confinement of several Black communities. In June, unidentified armed actors killed Jesusita Moreno and Rómulo Angulo López, members of Malaguita Afro-descendant collective territory, in Bajo San Juan, Chocó department.

As of 1 December, INDEPAZ reported that 91 massacres (that is, killings of three or more people at the same time and place and by the same alleged

perpetrator) had resulted in the deaths of 289 people.

Impunity

On 18 February, the JEP announced the opening of new cases on the responsibility of FARC-EP combatants for sexual violence, forced displacement and enforced disappearances and other crimes committed by state security forces and officials in coordination with paramilitary groups; and crimes against ethnic communities and territories.

By the end of the year, the JEP had charged 79 former army members (including officials), four civilians and one former intelligence agent with crimes against humanity and war crimes in relation to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in Norte de Santander, the Caribbean Coast, Casanare and Antioquia departments. The JEP also charged eight former high-ranking FARC-EP commanders with crimes against humanity and war crimes in the context of a policy of kidnapping and hostage-taking, among other crimes.

In September, former FARC-EP combatants accepted responsibility for homicides, forced displacement, forced recruitment and other crimes against civilians in Northern Cauca.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

In June, UNICEF declared that the number of children crossing the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama had reached more than 5,000 since the beginning of 2022, twice the number recorded for the same period in 2021.

Authorities stated that 2,477,000 Venezuelans were living in Colombia in July, 96% of whom had applied for Temporary Protection Status.

Gender-based violence against Venezuelan refugee women persisted and Colombian authorities failed to guarantee Venezuelan women's rights to a life free from violence and discrimination.³

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1. *Colombia: The Police Does Not Care for Me: Sexual Violence and Other Gender-Based Violence in the 2021 National Strike*, 1 December
 2. "Colombia: Protect environmental defender at risk", 15 July
 3. *Americas: Unprotected: Gender-based Violence against Venezuelan Refugee Women in Colombia and Peru*, 12 July

Associated documents

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Report on the human rights situation covering 2022

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