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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Author)

Colombia: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) [also called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP)], including dissident groups; activities, areas of operation and influence, and demobilization of former combatants; ability of FARC dissident groups to track individuals who move to other areas of the country; profiles of individuals they would be motivated to track and target; state response, including the peace agreement; state protection for victims (2022–June 2024) [COL201939.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023* identifies the FARC as what was once Colombia's "largest guerrilla insurgency group," engaged in a "52-year internal armed conflict" with the government (US 2024-04-22, 13, 14). This conflict ended in 2016 with the signing of a peace accord between the government and the FARC, demobilizing [translation] "some 13,000" former members and reintegrating them into various civilian activities (France 24 2021-02-16; US

2024-04-22, 13). For instance, according to a June 2023 periodic report by the UN Secretary-General on the verification mission in Colombia, "[s]ome 500 former combatants" were said to be "expected to run" for political office in 2023 in various parties and under different coalitions across the country (2023-06-27, para. 39). According to *US Country Reports 2023*, although elections "were widely reported to be fair" in 2023, FARC dissidents [see section 2 of this Response], among other criminal groups, "threatened and killed government officials" (2024-04-22, 26). Another UN Secretary-General report on the verification mission in Colombia, published in March 2024 and covering the period between 27 December 2023 and 26 March 2024 provides an update: "In January [2024], the regional and local authorities elected in October 2023 took office without incident around the country, including 18 former combatants" (2024-03-27, para. 15).

US Country Reports 2023 writes that the 2016 peace agreement "continued to [be] implemented" despite the FARC's disarmament having been "completed" since 2017 (US 2024-04-22, 13). For its part, International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) states that the agreement has "faltered" in its implementation (Crisis Group 2023-02-24, i). In an interview with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor in the Professional Security Studies Department at New Jersey City University whose research focuses on drug trafficking, organized crime, and security in Latin America, stated that the reintegration of former combatants into society has proven "difficult," as "not all FARC members" were welcomed into communities, and "questions of impunity and justice" for the armed conflict remain (Assistant Professor 2024-06-18). In addition, Crisis Group indicates that although a "reduction in conflict" followed the 2016 signing of the peace accord, the emergence of "new factions" and the growth of "existing outfits" of the FARC has brought about an increase in fighting "in recent years" (2023-02-24, i). The same report notes that through decades "of state and military offensives," the front lines of the armed conflict have mutated to "the most peripheral parts of the country, inhabited by some of the country's least protected people – including Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, particularly along the Pacific coast and in border areas" (Crisis Group 2023-02-24, i). For information on the situation of Afro-Colombians, including treatment by armed groups, see Response to Information Request COL201565 of August 2023.

The UN Secretary-General writes in their March 2024 report on the verification mission in Colombia that since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, the mission has confirmed a total of 416 killings of former combatants (including 11 women, 57 Afro-Colombians, and 50 Indigenous persons), 137 attempted homicides (including 12 women), and 37 forced disappearances (all men) as of March 2024 (2024-03-27, para. 54). The same source states that 87 of the 416 former combatants were killed "while under or awaiting protection measures," and notes a case in which a "former combatant leader and delegate to the Commission for

Monitoring, Promoting, and Verifying the Implementation of the Final Agreement [2016 peace accord]" was murdered in Huila "along with his protection detail" (UN 2024-03-27, para. 54–55).

According to a 2024 report on FARC dissident groups authored by Fundación Conflict Responses (CORE) [1], 2023 data from the National Police of Colombia shows that there were 3,030 homicides recorded in municipalities identified as "PDETs" [2] in 2023, and 3,489 in 2022, [the highest rate of homicides recorded since 2010] (2024-03-01, 21). Data as of June 2022 obtained from the Special Investigations Unit of the Office of the Attorney General (Fiscalía General de la Nación) [also translated as the Office of the Prosecutor General] and published in the CORE report indicates that FARC dissidents [translation] "were responsible for 51 percent of [homicide] cases in which a perpetrator was identified, followed by the [National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN)] and the [Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo), also known as the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), Los Urabeños, and Clan Úsuga], each with 9 percent" (CORE 2024-03-01, 23). For information on the ELN, including their activities, areas of operation, and ability to track individuals, see Response to Information Request COL201938 of July 2024.

2. FARC Dissident Groups

According to InSight Crime, a think tank and media organization that studies organized crime in the Americas (Insight Crime n.d.), FARC splintered into dissident groups during and following the 2016 peace process, and are made up of "former FARC members that occupy formerly FARC-controlled areas" (2024-03-11). *US Country Reports 2023* estimates that 800 to 1,500 FARC dissidents did not engage in the 2016 peace process; as of October 2023, NGOs reported that "approximately 5,500 FARC dissidents" remain, and that they are made up of "new recruits, combatants who refused to sign the peace accord, and former combatants who signed the accord but returned to arms," among others (2024-04-22, 13). The same source adds that a "significant" portion of FARC dissidents "were unarmed members of support networks that facilitated illicit economies" (US 2024-04-22, 13). For its part, the 2024 CORE report notes that [translation] "few" FARC dissident groups "did not participate in the laying down of arms," and "most have had to 'reconstruct themselves' [following the 2016 peace agreement]: some have leaders who laid down their arms and returned to armed conflict, some are the result of a split, and others were created from scratch" (CORE 2024-03-01, 5). InSight Crime further indicates that despite the existence of multiple factions, "all ex-FARC factions now have some connection to the two main dissident groups," the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central, EMC) and the Second Marquetalia (Segunda Marquetalia, SM) (2024-03-11). The same source notes that the departments of Cauca, Nariño, and Putumayo are among the

"battlegrounds for armed confrontations" between ex-FARC groups associated with EMC and SM (InSight Crime 2024-03-11).

2.1 Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central, EMC)

InSight Crime indicates in its profile of the group that the EMC is a "federation of dissident fronts" of the FARC that "decided not to embrace" the 2016 peace process, led by Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, "alias 'Iván Mordisco'" [or Iván Lozada] (2024-06-14). Sources indicate that the federation has expanded "throughout Colombia" (InSight Crime 2024-06-14) or [translation] "into several regions" of the country (CORE 2024-03-01, 50). InSight Crime notes that the group is formed by "four national blocs, grouping a total of 24 substructures or fronts," and "has significant armed power" (2024-06-14).

Sources report that some of the EMC's national blocs, under the leadership of Iván Mordisco, have ended peace negotiations with the government, namely the Amazonas Bloc (Bloque Amazonas), the Isaías Pardo Central Bloc (Bloque Central Isaías Pardo), the Eastern Joint Command (Comando Conjunto del Oriente), and the Jacobo Arenas Western Bloc (Bloque Occidental Jacobo Arenas) [3], while under half of its units led by Jhon Mechas and Calarcá and their respective Magdalena Medio Bloc (Bloque Magdalena Medio) and the [Southeast (Indepaz 2024-06, 4)] Jorge Suárez-Briceño Bloc (Bloque Jorge Suárez-Briceño), remain at the negotiating table (CORE 2024-04-25; Indepaz 2024-06, 4). A report by the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, Indepaz), an NGO that promotes peacebuilding in Colombia (Indepaz n.d.), indicates that the blocs led by Iván Mordisco, which are no longer in a ceasefire agreement with the government, cover areas in the departments of Cauca, Valle [del Cauca], Nariño, Putumayo, Huila, Tolima, Guaviare, and Meta; the blocs led by Mechas and Calarcá, which are still in negotiations with the government and under a ceasefire agreement, operate in the regions of Norte de Santander, Caquetá, Meta, Guaviare, Huila, Putumayo, Bolívar, northern Antioquia, and Bajo Cauca in Antioquia (Indepaz 2024-06, 4). A table featured in an article published by CORE lists the EMC's national blocs and their corresponding fronts (*frentes*) and units operating in Colombia, including the year they were established, their areas of operation, and their leader, organized by which groups are participating in negotiations with the government, and which are not:

[translation]

Unit	Year Est.	Leader	Areas of general activity
		Iván Mordisco	
Bloque Amazonas		Alonso 45	

Unit	Year Est.	Leader	Areas of general activity
Frente Primero Armando Ríos	2016	El Paisa Duver	Guaviare, Vaupés, Guainía, Amazonas, Solano (Caquetá)
Frente Carolina Ramírez *	2019	Danilo	Puerto Guzmán, Puerto Caicedo, Puerto Asís (Putumayo), Río Caquetá in Caquetá and Eje Caquetá in Amazonas
Frente Arcesio Niño	39 2022	Robledo	Mapiripán, Puerto Gaitán (Meta), Maní (Casanare), Cumaribo (Vichada)
Frente Amazónico Jhonier Arenas	2023		Amazonas
Frente Antonio Ricaurte	44 2024	Yimy	Retorno and San José del Guaviare (Guaviare)
Bloque Central Isaías Pardo	2024	Marlon	Tolima and Huila
Frente Ismael Ruíz	2020		Southern Tolima; La Plata, Nataga, Argentina, Iquirá, Teruel (Huila)
Frente Adán Izquierdo	2020	Eiber Salazar	Highlands of Tuluá and Sevilla (Valle del Cauca)
Frente Héroes de Marquetalia **			
Frente 26 de Marzo **			
Frente Hernando González Acosta **			
Frente Geronimo Galeano **			
Comando Conjunto del Oriente	2021	Willy Romero	
Frente 28	2018	Antonio Medina	Western and northern Casanare, savannahs of Arauca, lower Apure
Frente 10	2018	Pescado	Savannahs of Arauca, lower Apure
Bloque Occidental Jacobo Arenas	2020	Andrés Patiño	

Unit		Year Est.	Leader	Areas of general activity
Frente Martínez	Jaime	2018	Marlon (until April 2024)	Northwestern Cauca, Río Naya
Frente Patiño	Carlos	2019	Kevin (Andrés Patiño holds much influence)	Argelia, Patía, Balboa, el Tambo and Rosas (Cauca)
Frente Rafael Aguilera	30 -	2019	Mahecha	Timbiquí, Guapi (Cauca); Iscuandé, el Charco and the Patía Viejo region (Nariño)
Frente Benavides	Franco	2020	Esteban González – Don Mata	Cordillera de Nariño, and Magüí Payán (Nariño)
Frente Dagoberto Ramos		2018	David Arenas	Northern Cauca, eastern Huila
Frente Rondón	Urías	2020	Gerson	Rural area of Tumaco and Barbacoas (Nariño)
Frente Rodríguez	Alan	2022	Wilmer Castillo	Patía Viejo region, municipality of Olaya Herrera (Nariño)
Frente Manuel Vargas **	Urbano Cepeda	2024		

Not participating in the negotiation process

Unit		Year Est.	Leader	Areas of general activity
Bloque Suárez Briceño	Jorge	2016	Calarcá	
Frente Linares	Jhon	2016 / 2020	Very close with Calarcá	Southern Meta, Caquetá, northwestern Guaviare
Frente Cadete	Rodrigo	2022		Piedemonte de Caquetá, Cartagena del Chairá and Solano (Caquetá), Garzón (Huila)
Frente Gutiérrez	Darío	2023	Cipriano Cortés	Baraya, Aipe, Villavieja (Huila)
Frente Iván Díaz		2023		Hobo, Campoalegre, Gigante (Huila)
Frente Gutiérrez	Gaitán	2023		Lejanías, El Castillo, El Dorado (Meta)
Frente Ramírez *	Carolina	2019	Danilo	Puerto Guzmán (Putumayo), Río Caquetá in Caquetá and

Unit	Year Est.	Leader	Areas of general activity
			Amazonas
Frente Aurelio Buendía	2024	Marco	Vistahermosa (Meta)

Bloque Magdalena Medio	2021	Jhon Mechas	
Frente 33	2018	Andrey	Catatumbo and Zulia
Frente 37	2021		Southern Bolívar, Eastern Antioquia
Frente 24	2021		Southern Bolívar
Frente 4	2020	Jhon Fiera	Lower Antioquian Cauca
Frente 36	2017	Leo	Northern, lower Cauca and eastern Antioquia
Frente 18	2017		Northern Antioquia

Participating in the negotiation process

*= Fronts reported to be divided with regards to the process.

**= Front announced but no confirmation of its existence.

***= Formerly a commission, but [has been called] a front. (CORE 2024-04-25)

CORE reports that since 2021, the EMC has focused on its territorial expansion, improving its internal cohesion and economic activities, and consolidating the political and social control of its territory (2024-03-01, 5). The same source notes that the group is active [translation] "most notably" in eastern Antioquia and southern Bolívar, where "Frente 2, 24, and 37 now operate" (CORE 2024-03-01, 8). In an October 2023 interview with CORE, the Office of the Ombudsperson of Colombia (Defensoría del Pueblo) indicated that

[translation]

in 2023 the Frente Darío Gutiérrez and Frente Iván Díaz were created in Huila, in order to establish a clear corridor between [the EMC's] units in Cauca and those in the east; recently the Frente Primero and the Frente Carolina Ramírez began to have greater influence in Amazonas, especially in the neighbouring areas of Guaviare, Caquetá and Putumayo. (CORE 2024-03-01, 8)

CORE also states that the EMC is involved in drug trafficking, illegal mining, extortion, and deforestation (2024-03-01, 33). InSight Crime indicates that

the group has also expanded into Venezuela and collects revenue "mainly" from drug trafficking in southern areas of Colombia, illegal mining, and extortion activities (2024-06-14).

InSight Crime reports that the ELN is the EMC's "main rival," despite "unstable" agreements it has with the group "in some parts of the country, such as southern Bolívar"; in addition, the SM and its "allied dissident structures" are also rivals of the EMC, and armed conflict between satellites of each group are taking place in Putumayo and Caquetá departments (2024-06-14). The CORE report indicates the EMC is engaged in armed conflict with the ELN in Arauca, and in Cauca, with the ELN and the SM (2024-03-01, 21). InSight Crime notes that the EMC has also forged "alliances" with criminal groups in Brazil and Mexico "to supply them with cocaine shipments" (2024-06-14).

2.2 Second Marquetalia (Segunda Marquetalia, SM)

According to Insight Crime, "little is known" about the number of fighters the SM commands, its presence, "or the criminal economies it is involved in" (2022-07-05). Media sources report that the SM has 1,751 members (Reuters 2024-06-14) or "around 1,000 fighters" (BBC 2024-06-06).

The SM leader participated in the 2016 peace agreement, but later abandoned it and took up arms again in 2019 (BBC 2024-06-06; InSight Crime 2022-07-05; Reuters 2024-06-14). According to sources, since 2021, several SM senior leaders have been killed (BBC 2024-06-06; InSight Crime 2022-07-05). Sources report that the SM was led by "Luciano Marín Arango, alias 'Iván Márquez'" until he was rumoured to have been killed [in 2022 (InSight Crime 2022-07-05)] (InSight Crime 2022-07-05; BBC 2024-06-06), before later resurfacing in a May 2024 video released by the SM, which the Colombian defence ministry "confirmed was real" (BBC 2024-06-06). The new "allege[d]" SM leader is "veteran FARC commander, José Vicente Lesmes, alias 'Walter Mendoza'" (InSight Crime 2022-07-05). Walter Mendoza is identified in a BBC article as the "main negotiator" of the SM in its peace talks with the government (2024-06-06).

In its report, CORE writes that it is [translation] "unclear" how the group is internally organized, including in terms of its structures of command and control, and states that since 2021, the SM has "stagnated in its territorial expansion" (2024-03-01, 5). The same report specifies that in 2021, the SM had [translation] "12 confirmed units" and that it now has "a maximum of 15" (CORE 2024-03-01, 8). An organigram of the SM's three major blocs and their respective substructures or fronts can be found in CORE's 2024 report on FARC dissident groups (CORE 2024-03-01, 10).

According to CORE's reporting, the SM is the [translation] "strongest" criminal group in the department of Nariño, though it "has not expanded sustainably" in the region; however, since 2021, the report notes a "clear territorial expansion" of the group in Caquetá (2024-03-01, 9). The same

source notes that the SM has a presence in Cauca, where they are engaged in armed conflict with an EMC-allied unit, and in the rural areas of Buenaventura since 2022, [translation] "although only by some rivers" (CORE 2024-03-01, 9).

CORE writes in its 2024 report that [translation] "[a]ll three blocs of the SM are involved in drug trafficking, illegal mining and extortion" (2024-03-01, 32). According to the BBC, the SM reportedly engages in "cocaine smuggling and kidnapping for ransom, and is known for attacking Colombia's security forces" (2024-06-06). Sources state that the SM is "most active" (BBC 2024-06-06) or has "strong operations" (InSight Crime 2022-07-05) along the Colombia-Venezuela border, although the BBC adds that "it also has units operating in other parts of the country" (2024-06-06). In a profile on the group published in 2022, InSight Crime specifies that it controls "much of the cocaine trafficking" moving through Arauca (Colombia) and Apure (Venezuela) (2022-07-05). The same source notes that the SM has ties with the ELN and commands the Frente 18 dissident group, which has by proxy extended the SM's "presence in municipalities in the north of Antioquia" and in the "southern part of Córdoba department" (InSight Crime 2022-07-05).

3. Activities and Areas of Operation

In a Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) report published jointly by the Centre for Policy Research of the UN University and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research [4], and authored by Javier Cárdenas et al., key findings from a "phone survey of community members in 19 municipalities across Colombia" conducted from April to May 2021, and from November to December 2021, found that "[t]wo thirds of community member respondents reported that there is no difference in the operations of the dissident groups compared to the former FARC-EP" (Cárdenas, et al. 2022-10, 2–3).

US *Country Reports 2023* specifies that "unlawful killings" committed by criminal groups like FARC dissident groups, ELN, and the Gulf Clan were perpetrated "primarily in areas with illicit economic activities and without a strong government presence" in 2023 (2024-04-22, 16). The same source points to information from the Colombian security forces showing that FARC dissident groups, among other "armed actors" taking part in the "illegal mining" of gold and other minerals, "were particularly common" in Antioquia, Boyacá, Chocó, Cundinamarca, and Valle del Cauca departments (US 2024-04-22, 49). Similarly, the Assistant Professor noted that in rural areas "where state institutions are weaker" relative to cities like Medellín and Bogotá, communities "have been hit harder" due the presence of criminal groups like the ELN and FARC dissident groups (2024-06-18). Additionally, Human Rights Watch indicates that FARC dissident groups continued "fighting" in the southern state of Nariño, where "thousands" of people have been displaced, "mainly Afro-descendants

and Awá Indigenous people, who also suffer threats, confinement, kidnappings, and killings" (2024-01-11).

Human Rights Watch states that FARC dissident groups, together with cattle ranchers, were among the "major drivers of deforestation" in Colombia, "pressuring residents to fell trees, extorting farmers, promoting coca crops to produce cocaine, or threatening people who defend conservation" (2024-01-11). Similarly, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), "an independent civil-society organization, headquartered in Geneva" (GI-TOC n.d.), writes in its 2023 crime index for Colombia that deforestation by criminal groups like FARC dissidents, which are among "the major players" along with the ELN, is conducted "primarily through extortion practices" (GI-TOC 2023, 4). The same index states that groups like FARC dissidents also "clear land for other illegal economies" including mining, coca cultivation, and cattle raising to launder money; consequently, "Colombia is the most dangerous place in which to be an environmental activist" (GI-TOC 2023, 4). Finally, Crisis Group reports that in terms of social control over local communities where they operate, FARC dissident groups offer "'services' such as the provision of justice and the prevention of crime; most offer salaries to those who join their ranks and economic opportunities for anyone along their trafficking supply chains," but also "impose curfews, recruit, demand collaboration and forcefully silence anyone who would question their authority" (2023-02-24, 9). For instance, in Arauca where Crisis Group conducted an interview in November 2022, and where FARC dissident groups and the ELN operate,

"people take their problems to the groups to solve," an Afro-Colombian community leader explained. "This has become highly legitimate within the community, because the state doesn't show up and because the group's decisions are more likely to be respected." Penalties for robbery, for example, can range from fines to labour in service of the community. More serious offences, including misuse of land belonging to others, might result in forced displacement. Alleged collaboration with the military or rival armed bands is punishable by death. (Crisis Group 2023-02-24, 9-10)

4. Ability to Track Individuals

Information on the ability and means through which FARC dissidents track individuals across Colombia was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Bogotá-based senior analyst at Crisis Group who conducts research on armed conflict and migration dynamics in Colombia, indicated that "[b]roadly speaking," FARC dissident groups "have the ability to track someone nationwide," depending on "how badly they want to" (Senior Analyst 2024-07-01). The Assistant Professor stated that FARC dissident groups "are able to track

people and locate them," noting that they have "communications" channels, as evidenced by the "countless cases of corruption" involving the Colombian government, in connection with ties between the "military, FARC, and different actors" (2024-06-18). The same source identified "intelligence, corrupt officers, and corrupt military units" as the means through which FARC dissident groups track and locate targeted individuals, explaining that tracking "is not just through physical presence [of the dissident group], but mainly through connections and shared intelligence with corrupt actors of the legitimate state" (Assistant Professor 2024-06-18). According to GI-TOC, corruption is "rampant" at "all levels of the state" and has "grown in recent years" to involve public figures in high positions, in addition to "various scandals" involving the police and military and their "collaboration with criminal networks" (GI-TOC 2023, 5).

4.1 Motivation to Track and Profile of Targeted Individuals

Information on the profiles of individuals targeted by FARC dissident groups was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Senior Analyst stated that cases that would motivate FARC dissident groups to track and retaliate against an individual include "if the person has committed a perceived or alleged offense" against the group's interests, if they are "of a certain gender identity," if they try to "avoid" being recruited, or "if they are accused of having informed or collaborated with the military or a rival armed organization" (2024-07-01). For further information on the security situation in Colombia, including victims of armed groups, see Response to Information Request COL201567 of August 2023.

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the Assistant Professor:

FARC dissident groups are motivated to track and target individuals for a "var[iety]" of reasons, including if they have "wronged" them, "not turned over their land" to them, owe them a debt, "cooperated with authorities" (there is "a litany of cases of corruption" whereby government figures share information with these armed groups), or because they wish to "silence" someone. There are no regions in Colombia which are "100%" beyond "the reach of these armed groups" and which "are safe for people to relocate" to. "Multiple" types of individuals are commonly targeted by armed groups like the ELN and FARC dissidents including "landholders, people who owe them money, people who they want to extort," as well as journalists, and union leaders, for instance (2024-06-18). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Peace Process

Sources report that the government and the EMC negotiated ceasefires over the course of 2023 (CORE 2024-03-01, 40; Human Rights Watch 2024-01-11). The June 2023 UN verification mission report on Colombia writes that the government and the EMC "announced the establishment of a monitoring and verification mechanism for a ceasefire that entered into effect" in January 2023, and by June of the same year, the Office of the Attorney General cancelled outstanding arrest warrants against 19 EMC members, allowing them "to become part of the monitoring and verification mechanism" (2023-06-27, para. 6). However, other sources indicate that a contingency of the EMC's national blocs, under the leadership of Iván Mordisco, ended negotiations with the government in 2024, while another, led by Jhon Mechas and Calarcá Córdoba, remains at the negotiating table (CORE 2024-04-25; Indepaz 2024-06, 4).

According to sources, the government entered into peace negotiations with the SM in February 2024 (CORE 2024-03-01, 49; UN 2024-03-27, para. 13). Reuters indicates that the negotiations with the SM face "legal hurdles because its leaders first backed and then abandoned the [2016] FARC deal, potentially making them eligible only to surrender" (2024-06-14).

According to CORE, the Total Peace (Paz Total) strategy of the administration of President Gustavo Petro includes negotiations with not only FARC dissident groups, but also the ELN, though there is no existing [translation] "document defining the Total Peace policy and how all the processes interact and add up to achieve it" (2024-03-01, 48). The BBC reports that although talks with armed groups "have proved rocky," President Petro "has insisted that they are the only way to ensure peace in the conflict-wracked" country (2024-06-06). According to Human Rights Watch, since Petro took office in 2022, "his 'total peace' strategy has achieved limited results in curbing abuses against civilians" (2024-01-11). GI-TOC indicates that the government's "inefficiency in implementing peace deals and recommendations has also contributed to security concerns" (GI-TOC 2023, 6).

Indepaz documents that between 1 January and 31 December 2023, 363 [translation] "actions" [5] were committed by the EMC; the number rose to 582 by 12 June 2024, 415 of which "affected the civilian population" (2024-06, 6, 12). In the period following the breakdown of a ceasefire with some factions of the EMC, from 17 March to 12 June 2024, Indepaz found that the EMC carried out 149 actions, out of which 110 were committed by EMC substructures or fronts that were no longer at the negotiating table, perpetrated mostly by the Western Bloc (Indepaz 2024-06, 6).

6. State Protection

The June 2023 UN verification mission report states that in April 2023, Colombia's Ministry of Defence espoused a "new public policy on security and defence," that emphasizes "human security, strengthening territorial

control and dismantling criminal structures" (2023-06-27, para. 8). The report states that in the same month, Colombia's president replaced 7 out of 18 cabinet ministers in favour of "new ministers with significant peace-related responsibilities" (UN 2023-06-27, para. 11). For its part, GI-TOC notes that Colombia's judicial system is "considered stable and diverse" and the Attorney General's Office "has specialized divisions for dealing with organized crime" (2023, 6). However, Human Rights Watch indicates that despite the "broad range of policies, mechanisms, and laws" to protect human rights activists and former FARC combatants, "implementation has often been poor" (2024-01-11). The Assistant Professor similarly stated that "a lot" of state protection mechanisms "exist on paper," but they "have not always been effective" (2024-06-18). Finally, GI-TOC indicates that the judicial system "suffers from weak due process and a lack of adequate protection," and the Attorney General's Office from "corruption and insufficient resources," which make it "difficult for many Colombians to access the judicial system" (2023, 6).

According to the June 2023 report on the UN Colombia verification mission, the "serious security situation facing social leaders and human rights defenders in several regions remains unchanged" and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "received 57 allegations of killings of human rights defenders," occurring in "almost half of the country's 32 departments, with most cases registered in Cauca" (2023-06-27, para. 52). Among the 57 victims, 8 were women, 9 were Indigenous leaders, 6 were Afro-Colombian leaders, and 1 was an LGBTQI leader (UN 2023-06-27, para. 52). In terms of civil society and social protections, GI-TOC notes that the implementation of legislation aimed at protecting victims of criminal groups "often falls short" (2023, 7).

Regarding investigations into 765 murders of social leaders and human rights defenders since the peace agreement of 2016, the June 2023 UN report indicates that Colombia's Office of the Attorney General "has reported 153 convictions" with another 143 cases in trial (2023-06-27, para. 54). The same source then goes on to state that "[n]otwithstanding its critical importance," the Office of the Attorney General's Special Investigation Unit, which investigates "attacks against former FARC-EP members," has "limited" ability to "progress in prosecuting perpetrators" of such attacks (UN 2023-06-27, para. 57, 59). However, the report further states that beginning in July 2023, the Ministry of Defense would "gradually reinforce preventive security deployments" through "enhance[d]" police presence in all 24 former FARC areas and increase military presence "mainly in areas of Caquetá, Guaviare, Meta and Putumayo Departments" (UN 2023-06-27, para. 50). According to *US Country Reports 2023*, there were "alleg[ations] by "[s]ome" members of the FARC who took part in the peace process that "the government had not fully complied with its commitments, such as ensuring the security of demobilized former combatants and facilitating their reintegration," resulting in what "[i]ndependent observers" view as the "inadequate

security guarantees" that have "facilitated the killing of former FARC combatants" (2024-04-22, 16).

The MEAC survey findings indicate that "[p]ublic perceptions of FARC dissident groups as a community's main security threat varied across 11 particularly conflict-affected communities," which the report indicates is "possibly explained by the varied presence of FARC groups dissident in each location," as well as a "high percentage" of respondents who "refused to answer this question (24 per cent), raising questions about whether people were afraid" (Cárdenas, et al. 2022-10, 2, 7).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Fundación Conflict Responses (CORE) is a Colombian NGO that conducts research and seeks to better the understanding of criminal groups and peacebuilding in Colombia (CORE 2024-03-01, 2). The information in the report is based on [translation] "fieldwork in Catatumbo, lower Putumayo and Huila over the past six months and from field research that CORE has done in other parts of Colombia over the past three years," and was made with the support of the Embassy of Canada in Colombia (CORE 2024-03-01, 6).

[2] Municipalities in which Development Plans with a Territorial Focus (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial, PDET) are taking place are municipalities that were identified as being "significantly impacted by the conflict and most acutely in need of peace agreement implementation" (Cárdenas, et al. 2022-10, 7).

[3] The Jacobo Arenas Western Bloc (Bloque Occidental Jacobo Arenas) of the Central General Staff (Estado Mayor Central, EMC) is [translation] "the most powerful militarily and economically, since according to intelligence sources it accounts for 52 percent of the organisation's members" (CORE 2024-04-25).

[4] Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) is a "multi-donor, multi-partner initiative" led by the UN University's Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) "to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions" (Cárdenas, et al. 2022-10, 2).

[5] The EMC [translation] "actions" in the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, Indepaz) report are events that include threats, appearances of graffiti/street banners, confinement, killing of a civilian, kidnappings, forced displacement, extortion, massacres, destruction of infrastructure, issuance of [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC)] identity documents, and recruitment, among others (Indepaz 2024-06, 11).

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Internet sites, including: ACAPS; Al Jazeera; Associated Press; Austrian Red Cross – ecoi.net; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Center for Strategic and International Studies; Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular / Programa por la Paz; Colombia – Defensoría del Pueblo, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional; Colombia Reports; *El País*; *El Tiempo*; EU – EU Agency for Asylum; Freedom House; Infobae; Justice for Colombia; *Latin American*

Associated documents

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Colombia

Query response on Colombia: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC - Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) (2022 - June 2024) (overview; FARC dissident groups; activities and areas of operation; ability to track individuals; peace process; state protection)

[Colombie : information sur les Forces armées révolutionnaires de Colombie \(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC\) \[aussi appelées les Forces armées révolutionnaires de Colombie – Armée du peuple \(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP\)\], y compris les groupes dissidents; les activités, les zones d’opération et d’influence ainsi que la démobilisation des anciens combattants; la capacité des groupes dissidents des FARC à retrouver des personnes qui déménagent ailleurs au pays; les profils des personnes qui risquent d’être recherchées et prises pour cible; la réponse de l’État, y compris l’accord de paix; la protection offerte par l’État aux victimes \(2022-juin 2024\) \[COL201939.EF\] \(Response, French\)](#)

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