**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** Challenges regarding the peace process in Colombia

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**Introduction**

Colombia has been in a constant state of internal conflict between the government, pro-state paramilitary forces and guerilla groups for more than 50 years, causing more than 220 000 deaths and displacing over 7 million people. (Strasser, 2019)

Thankfully, over the last years, there have been gigantic leaps towards peace. Between 1990 and 1991, the state reached agreements and signed peace treaties with many guerilla groups such as the M-19, the Movimiento Armado Quintin Lame (MAQL), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), lowering tensions between the parties. (Bell, O’Rourke, Matzner, 2015).

In 2016, after 4 years of negotiations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC for short) and Colombia’s government reached a peaceful solution: They signed a peace deal, ending the long-fought conflict. (BBC, 2016).

However, the situation is still extremely complex. Other Rebel groups, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) have continued their fight against the government, and some FARC dissidents have not given up their weapons.

It is of utmost importance that the United Nations Security Council helps Colombia deescalate the situation and reach a peaceful solution.

 **Definition of Key Terms**

**Guerilla**

A guerilla can be defined as an unofficial military group that fights against other military forces such as the official military of the government. One of the usual tactics employed by guerillas is using small forces to make unexpected attacks on enemy forces. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

**Paramilitary Forces**

Paramilitary forces have been described as: “a force formed on a military pattern especially as a potential auxiliary military force” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) In Colombia, paramilitary forces have aided the government's forces against the guerillas.

**Issue Overview**

The conflict started over 60 years ago making it incredibly difficult to understand as many things have changed over time.

**Historical Background**

The history of Colombia is full of internal armed conflicts. It is generally accepted that the current conflicts in Colombia started in the 1960s due to various factors: “a left/right, authoritarianism/democracy dispute; a conflict with elements of identity-conflict in particular with relation to indigenous groups; a conflict over resources; and increasingly over time a conflict interwoven with narco-trafficking and organised criminal activity.” (Bell, O’Rourke, Matzner, 2015). The civilians have been the most affected by these disputes, as they have been forced to move for various reasons, which add up to over 7 million displaced citizens (Strasser, 2019).

In the late 1980s, the government began negotiations with some of the smaller rebel groups. Between 1990 and 1992, the M-19, the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) and Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL) where successfully demobilized (Bell, O’Rourke, Matzner, 2015).

The conflict between the government and the FARC (Colombia’s biggest rebel group at the time) continued, and throughout the year’s various attempts at negotiation have been made. The 2016 agreement succeeded in ending the 50-year long conflict. In the agreement, it is stated that the FARC has to declare all of their resources, including weapons, and hand them over with the intervention and monitoring of the United Nations. In exchange, the FARC members have been allowed to form a political party and form a part of the government. About 2 000 FARC members did not comply with the peace agreement. These FARC dissidents continue to rebel against the government.

At the moment, the biggest rebel group is the National Liberation Army (ELN), with an estimated 2 000 members. While they are much smaller than the former FARC rebel group, they still pose an enormous threat. (BBC, 2020)

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

* **Republic of Colombia:** The government of Colombia has tried to reach diplomatic solutions with the rebel groups while investing in its military to better counter their actions. The new government has shown little support for the 2016 peace treaties, saying that they were not harsh enough on the FARC. However, the treaty still stands.
* **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC):** It was Colombia’s biggest guerilla group. The FARC was formed in 1964 by farmers and rural workers who wanted to fight against inequality in Colombia. Over the years, their numbers have changed: it is estimated that there were around 20 000 fighters in 2002, and between 6 000 and 7 000 in 2016. Their numbers have been greatly reduced over the last years due to effective measures taken by the Colombian Government. Their reduced numbers seem to have been the main factor in their decision to start negotiations with the state (BBC, 2016). After the 2016 agreement, almost all of their forces were disarmed and some leaders formed a political party. They are no longer considered a rebel group after signing the peace agreement. They have been accused of terrorism and drug trafficking, and some of their members were arrested for those charges.
* **National Liberation Army (ELN):** It is currently Colombia’s biggest guerilla group, with an estimated 2 000 members (BBC, 2020). They are a leftist rebel group that was formed in 1964. “In 1975 and 1976, the ELN’s main activities were bank robbing, kidnapping, and assassinating military members'' (Stanford University, 2019). In the 1990s, they got into trafficking drugs. In 1999, they reached about 4 000 members, but their numbers began to decline. They got so weak that they were not invited to the negotiation talks between the FARC and the Government of Colombia. Since then, the ELN has become more violent: “killing police officers and blowing up oil pipelines in 2012. In 2013, the ELN continued to increase attacks and declared war on oil companies.”(Stanford University, 2019). In 2017, the ELN group began peace negotiations with the government, but the government ended the negotiations in 2019 due to an attack by ELN. ELN continues to be active.
* **United States of America:** The US has been an ally of Colombia’s government over the last years: “The Colombian army and police received millions of dollars in funding and training from the US government, much of which they invested in fighting the rebels” (BBC, 2016).
* **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:** Venezuela has shown support to the Colombian Guerilla groups: “It is widely believed that the dissidents are being sheltered in neighbouring Venezuela, and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has previously welcomed any guerrilla groups from Colombia, including left-wing ELN rebels, who say they would be willing to create an alliance with the FARC dissidents.” (Grattan, 2019) Colombia’s president Ivan Duque has criticized Venezuela and has accused them of protecting missing FARC leaders, he stated “Over there in Venezuela are Ivan Marquez, El Paisa, Romaña and they are not playing with dolls over there, they are protected by the dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro” (Alsema, 2019).

**Latest Events**

Some dissidents of the FARC remain, and continue fighting against the government: “The Colombian military believes there are now around 2,300 FARC dissidents, including some who never signed up to the peace deal in the first place” (Grattan, 2019). Some FARC leaders wish to continue the fight. Luciano Marín Arango, also known as Ivan Marquez, is a former FARC leader who: “appeared in a 32-minute YouTube video, surrounded by rifle-bearing men and women in military fatigues, to announce the rearming of the FARC and a ‘'new phase of the armed struggle”.” (Grattan, 2019). Furthermore, there are other Guerilla groups that have not been dissolved, the biggest and most dangerous being the ELN group which: “has an estimated 2,400 combatants and is still targeting government and foreign owned oil infrastructure around Colombia, partaking in kidnappings and extortion, and engaging in illegal mining and drug trafficking operations” (Grattan, 2019).

**Possible Solutions**

While some FARC dissidents remain, the 2016 peace treaties were extremely effective in disarming a large part of the biggest Guerilla group. The effectiveness of diplomatic solutions in the past suggest that these new issues can also be solved diplomatically.

Although a peaceful solution would be preferable, another possible solution would be to help Colombia’s Military fight against the rebels. The US has invested in Colombia's military and as a result the FARC forces diminished between 2002 and 2016, providing evidence that a military conflict may be the best solution. However, some think that this would only escalate the conflict and encourage more people to join rebel groups.

**Useful reference material**

* Report of the Secretary‑General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, 2 April 2018, (document [S/2018/279](http://undocs.org/S/2018/279))
* “Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace” (the Final Agreement) ([S/2017/272](https://undocs.org/S/2017/272)) between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP)
* Security Council, 25 January 2016, ([S/RES/2261](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2261%282016%29))
* Bell, C., O’Rourke, C., & Matzner, S. (2015). *A Chronology of Colombian Peace Processes and Peace Agreements*. Political Settlements Research Programme. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0898bed915d622c000287/61540-Briefing-Paper-Colombia-Chronology.pdf>
* Stanford University. (2019, July). *National Liberation Army*. Mapping Militant Organizations. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/national-liberation-army-eln#highlight_text_15728>

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Strasser, F. (2019, May 14). *Colombia Lawmakers Debate Peace Deal Challenges*. The United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved March 21, 2021, from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/05/colombia-lawmakers-debate-peace-deal-challenges>