

## Where are the Women in the Colombia Peace Process?

The peace talks that have begun in Colombia have ignited optimism in over 70% of the population and organized us as women. We have expressed our full support of the process, knowing that the enemies of a negotiated peace, and these peace talks, are strategic and powerful. We do not want to compromise this fragile and complex dialogue, however we have to criticize the fact that women are excluded from these negotiations.

The process does involve two women from the government of Colombia and one from the guerillas, but they are part of the second tier of the talks. Peace remains a matter of men, as has been the constant in eleven previous peace processes and this time, we did ask both parties to nominate women to be at the forefront of the negotiations. This is one place where the international community can play an important role.

After a year of rapprochement between the government and the FARC, the two parties met and agreed, under the strictest confidence, on an agenda for negotiation beginning with five issues:

- Rural development
- Guarantees for the political participation and legitimacy of opposition groups
- Drug trafficking
- The rights of victims and
- The end of the armed conflict

The entire civilian population, particularly women, children, rural communities, indigenous and LGBT people have been severely affected by the ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

This is a negotiation with no civil society involvement, with a restricted schedule, and designed for a short timeframe. It is a space to discuss the end of armed conflict, not to address every issue in Colombia. The Government and insurgency have also accepted that the end of the conflict is not peace, but rather, an essential condition for its construction. In this, we are in full agreement. The silence of arms is essential. After these long years, the war is not only useless, it continues to corrupt all actors involved.

Within la Red Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Network), which has over 20 regional nodes, we have agreed on several aspects concerning the peace talks:

- We are in full support of the negotiations
- We request the presence of women from both the government and the guerrillas at the negotiating table,
- A ceasefire, or de-escalation of conflict,
- The Compliance of international humanitarian law
- And truth, justice and reparations for victims.

There are more than 15 active networks and hundreds of national and local women's organizations working to build peace and justice throughout the country. The involvement of these groups in the peace process is not just a claim to be considered, is a right they have earned.

And right now, facing these ongoing talks, the following positions are especially timely.

- Respect for international humanitarian law and decreased hostilities.
- The advancement of a list of humanitarian actions for the protection of civil society, including, A) the cessation of sexual violence against women. B) the Elimination of recruitment of women and children. And C) the Suspension of the use of landmines in inhabited areas, among others.

We are interested in prioritizing the issues of victims in the agenda of the talks. It is necessary to make a clear assessment of the affects of conflict on women by all players involved, taking into account the rights to truth, justice and reparations and then share this report with the members of the talks through the channels provided for it. It is also important to stand with the least visible and least organized victims.

Key tasks remain to be done.

- The full assessment of the Law for Peace, Transitional Justice, and Statuary Laws.
- Advocacy within Congress in order to prioritize and highlight the issue of sexual violence in the Law of Armed Conflict

Sexual violence is one of the most frequently committed crimes by all armed actors, including government forces, and it is where the highest rate of impunity is found.

This is a key moment for the leadership and empowerment of women.

- It is necessary to convene and gather the efforts of Colombian women working on peace in order to raise awareness and change public opinion.
- The women of Colombia, as well as millions of afro colombians, indigenous and rural communities, and labor unions have all suffered from this conflict. They do not want to simply observe the peace process from afar. Their aspirations for justice should be included in the negotiations in order to assure a lasting peace.

And so, this is the time for women to PARTICIPATE. There are a number of spaces and scenarios for participation. The National Council of Peace and the Territory Councils are places where both national and regional peace proposals can be introduced and advocated for. Another advocacy and participation opportunity are the regional consultations done by the national congress throughout the country.

Another idea could be to start a parallel peace table that monitors the results of the negotiations. Civil society must produce concrete proposals related to the issues on the table. The parrallel table could consider proposed mechanisms to collect and validate the agreements as a way to monitor the information and promote responsible and transparent

information. We as women also need to establish ourselves as a political voice, made up of both national and regional perspectives.

We must also prioritize protection mechanisms for victims, as well as women leaders and human rights defenders. There is a continuum of violence and post-conflict situations are also dangerous for women. Demobilized combatants return to their families and communities with warlike practices. An early warning system should be developed.

We must push for the completion of the peace talks, making sure that neither of the parties get up from the table before they are completed. Alliances with other civil society actors in the international community are also important in order to make both the parties at the table understand that they also have a responsibility to civil society.

Finally, we believe that Norway, Venezuela, Cuba and Chile should appoint women in their delegations as well, and perhaps form a school of peace that works for world peace.