

Women at the frontlines, building peace in Colombia

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Representatives of women's organizations and networks that were part of the first delegation of gender experts at the talks in Havana present their proposals for building a peace deal with the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP negotiators in December 2014. Photo courtesy of the Peace Talks, Havana, Cuba.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence Zainab Hawa Bangura, will visit Havana, Cuba, from 23-24 July. The UN representatives will join the event organized by the parties, which will publicly present the important achievements made by the Gender Sub-Commission composed of representatives of the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). After more than 50 years of armed conflict, the Government of Colombia led by President Juan Manuel Santos signed a bilateral cease-fire agreement with the FARC insurgency group in June 2016. While all agreements are still in draft form, the latest peace talks signal hope for a final agreement to be concluded in August, followed by a referendum. This is a critical moment for the women peacebuilders of Colombia, whose advocacy resulted in the establishment of a dedicated gender sub-commission with a mandate to ensure that gender perspectives and women's rights are included in all agreements.

Spotlighting the voices of Colombian women peacebuilders

Bibiana Peñaranda Sepúlveda is a peacebuilder from Buenaventura, Colombia, and a founder of a women's network called "Red Mariposas de Alas Nuevas." The network exposes incidents of violence against women, creates safe spaces for women to talk about their experiences and assists them in seeking justice and in rebuilding their communities. The network also examines how the war in Colombia exacerbated racism and machismo. "All the women in the network have experienced some form of violence," said Ms. Peñaranda, in an interview with UN Women. The network offers hope to every woman who arrives defeated and tired by the war, she adds, "we say, 'come on, together we will hold hands and move ahead'...we are transforming the concept of power."

Nelly Velandia leads the National Association of Indigenous and Peasant Women of Colombia. She is one of 16 women who participated as gender experts in the historic Peace Talks taking place since October 2012 in Havana, Cuba, between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. As part of a delegation of women peacebuilders, she will be meeting with the gender sub-commission in Havana this week. Constant death threats from various illegal armed groups have not deterred Ms. Velandia's determination to ensure that women take an active part in peacebuilding. "War is not only fought with bullets, war is also [about] the public policies against the interest of communities..."she says. "Society has to understand that if we don't reduce women's burden of domestic work and time poverty, we cannot move forward. And if [women] don't move forward, economy moves backwards."

Ms. Velandia's voice is featured among six other Colombian women peacebuilders in the video series "1325: Mujeres resueltas a construir paz," created by Lula Gómez as part of the "Overcoming violence against Women" programme by UN Women in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Swedish Embassy in Colombia.

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See more at:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/7/women-at-the-frontlines-building-peace-in-colombia#sthash.3TG19rr3.dpuf>

