



Executive Summary

FROM WORDS *TO ACTION*

THE EXPERIENCE OF UN SPECIAL POLITICAL MISSIONS IN COLOMBIA
ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY



Background

The Colombian peace process and its 2016 Final Peace Agreement are widely held to be an international model for gender-sensitivity and the inclusion of women's rights. The United Nations (UN) played an active role, along with others in the international community, first in encouraging and advising key actors to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda during the peace negotiations (2012 – 2016) and then through the establishment of two consecutive special political missions (SPMs) in Colombia to verify specific provisions of the Agreement. In its efforts to implement the WPS agenda in Colombia, the UN worked in close cooperation with the authorities and former guerillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), as well as with civil society and international stakeholders.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 establishing the WPS agenda. Accordingly, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) commissioned this study to reflect on the principal ways in which, after shared efforts to support women's participation in the peace process, its Missions have since 2016 conducted gender-sensitive monitoring and verification of the Agreement and supported implementation of the broader WPS agenda. The study identifies emerging lessons from this experience to strengthen support to women in peace processes and peace agreement implementation in Colombia and beyond.¹

¹ The study was conducted and written by Marcie Mersky, who has served as a member of the DPPA's Standby Team of Senior Mediation Adviser and provided strategic advice to senior UN officials and others in Latin America, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, as well as sub-Saharan Africa.

ADVANCING THE WOMEN, Peace and Security agenda in Colombia's peace process

THE FINAL PEACE AGREEMENT

Peace negotiations began in Havana with almost no direct participation of women in the negotiating teams. By their conclusion, women had taken on much greater protagonism, reinforced by strong advocacy by Colombian women organizations and the support of the UN and international stakeholders. Two years into the talks, the parties agreed to include at least two women in their ten-person negotiating teams and to create a Gender Sub-Commission (GSC) which integrated language across the five substantive chapters of the Final Peace Agreement committing the parties to specific affirmative actions as well as to strong gender mainstreaming. This resulted in a peace agreement with over 130 gender and women's rights provisions. For example, the GSC ensured that acts of gender-based violence were included in the list of actions that, if committed by either of the parties, would constitute a ceasefire violation.

The Agreement – which includes wide-ranging provisions intended to definitively end more than five decades of armed conflict between the Colombian State and FARC-EP – created a complex set of mechanisms to monitor and follow-up on implementation. The umbrella structure was the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Final Peace Agreement (CSIVI), with participation of the Government and FARC. Other entities, involving Colombian women's representatives, the Government, and several international actors, were created to monitor the specific provisions on gender.



With respect to the UN verification activities that are the focus of this study, the Agreement envisioned two successive Special Political Missions: initially, for monitoring of the ceasefire and laying down of arms of the FARC-EP; and secondly, to monitor implementation of provisions on the reintegration of former combatants as well as their security and that of conflict-affected communities.

FIRST MISSION: UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN COLOMBIA (UNMC – 2016 TO 2017)

Responding to the request of the parties, the Security Council established the UN Mission in Colombia, UNMC (the “first mission”), on 25 January 2016 through UNSC Resolution 2261. The resolution specified that the Mission was to be composed of “unarmed international observers, responsible for the monitoring and verification of the laying down of arms”, and as a “part of the tripartite mechanism that will monitor and verify the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities”.

UN Women, together with others in the UN Country Team, participated in the then Department of Political Affairs (DPA)-led planning process. Jean Arnault, who had served as the Secretary-General's Delegate to the Sub-Commission on End of Conflict Issues in Havana since August 2015, was appointed the Secretary-Secretary's Special Representative (SRSG) and Head of the new Mission. Practices such as the holding of regular meetings with women's organizations were soon initiated, and gender issues were included in reports to the Security Council, however a P4 Gender Adviser post did not get filled for several months.

The parties had agreed that the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM), would include similar components from the Government and the FARC (each with 323 members), and an international component of unarmed UN International Observers. After considerable discussion, tacit agreement was reached that each component of the MVM should include 20 per cent women.

Notwithstanding the strong gender content of the Agreement, the MVM was initially designed without an internal gender structure. A "gender group" was established to fulfil this need. Achieving the 20 percent of women in their MVM components agreed by the UN, the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP proved to be difficult. Meanwhile, the gender group faced persistent challenges relating to resources for training and uneven levels of interest amongst some of the MVM's leadership.

The MVM code of conduct, among other issues, established enforceable rules on gender, including: respect for all of its members, regardless of status, rank, ethnicity or nationality, gender or creed; respect for gender equality, within and outside the MVM; and a commitment to condemn all acts or

threats of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.² While sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) incidents were almost non-existent, there were more challenges with the first two elements of the code.

A separate problem affecting early implementation from a gender perspective was the insufficient preparations for the needs, such as childcare facilities, of the 23 percent of former FARC combatants who were women, many of whom were pregnant or with young children during the end of conflict phase.

The MVM nevertheless developed into a unique model for the gender-sensitive monitoring of a definitive bilateral ceasefire at the end of conflict. Its experience underlined the importance of involving women in such operations, not least to ensure strong attention to the emergent needs of women former combatants embarking on a transition to civilian life. It also demonstrated the capacity of women to lead and contribute equally with men in complex field operations.



² See, Protocol: Code of conduct for the members of the MVM, Final Peace Agreement, pp. 251-252. In addition, the Colombian government reinforced the seriousness of these commitments, especially on Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and SEA issues in trainings with its senior officials, stressing that the world would be watching, and that Colombia needed to set an example in its ability to maintain discipline. This emphasis in training and follow-up went beyond its MCM component to include the special police units, UNIPEP, and the troops that would be providing perimeter and other security to the FARC demobilizations sites, especially with regards to their interactions with nearby rural communities. Some 11,000 members of Colombian security forces received gender training in this context.



SECOND MISSION: UNITED NATIONS VERIFICATION MISSION IN COLOMBIA (2018- ONGOING)

The UN Verification Mission in Colombia, UNVMC (“the second mission”), began its mandate on 26 September 2017. As outlined in UN SC Resolution 2366, adopted on 10 July 2017, it was to focus on verification of Agreement provisions on reintegration and security guarantees, and its structure changed significantly. The balance between civilian and military components was inverted, with a larger civilian component and a much-reduced observer force. Gender parity was also enhanced having reached 49% female staff by end of 2019. The emphasis on territorial coverage was enhanced, with some offices relocated to ensure better access to sites with the largest presence of former FARC-EP combatants. The sections in the Agreement on reintegration and security guarantees included specific provisions on women’s rights and gender. Consequently, the change in the mandate created both greater space and new challenges for gender work.

The Mission continued to collaborate closely with UN Women, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other members of the UN Country Team (UNCT). It found welcome support from the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund, managed from within DPPA, for women-led reintegration projects, as well as from the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) on security and protection issues.

A Mission-wide Directive on Gender, Women, Peace and Security was approved by SRSG Arnault in December 2018, shortly before he left the Mission to be succeeded by Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu. The Directive formally mandated a network of Mission Gender Focal Points (GFPs), defined their principal tasks, and created a Gender Task Force headed by the Deputy SRSG. To strengthen overall responsibility and accountability for full implementation of the Directive, additional tools were instituted. Under the guidance of the SRSG through the Mission Gender Directive and in support to the Gender Unit, the network of GFPs became the backbone of the UNVMC’s gender mainstreaming effort, particularly at field level.

The Peace Agreement provided for the creation of a National Reincorporation Council (NRC), including two members each from the Government and FARC, initially without a dedicated gender structure. Women from the FARC and the Government proposed a Gender Technical Working Group (GTWG) which contributed substantively to the Government's reintegration policy. Significant progress was made in developing a strong set of gender-sensitive norms, procedures and indicators, yet converting those into effective action in line with the Government's national policy on women's economic empowerment proved challenging.

Meanwhile, the UNVMC took practical steps to address the critical lack of livelihood options for former combatants, both men and women, and to build partnerships to support income generating micro-projects for them. In a second phase, the Mission decided to support projects exclusively designed and led by women and encouraged others in the international community to do so as well. The Mission also verified political reintegration and women's participation in different decision-making processes. The local and departmental elections of October 2019 were a high priority, as they were the first elections at these levels in which representatives of the new FARC party ran as candidates.

Ensuring adequate attention to women's security issues and developing effective, differentiated approaches for the prevention, protection and investigation of security threats against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons has remained a critical challenge for the Mission and both parties. The Mission, in coordination with other UN agencies, maintained strong relationships with women's organizations at the forefront of work on security guarantees for women human rights defenders (WHRDs), social

leaders and their communities, as well the multiple national institutions involved. Early 2020 saw an important achievement with the launch of the action plan for the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, largely based on proposals from women's organizations and engagement with the authorities. Meanwhile, in light of the increasing risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a tactic for territorial and social control by illegal armed groups, the Mission developed specific guidance for addressing SGBV as part of its verification work and good offices efforts.

The security guarantees chapter of the Agreement had mandated the creation of a sub-directorate of close protection specialists to protect former FARC-EP members, their families and members of the FARC political party, within the National Protection Unit (UNP), the official body that provides security to persons with special security needs. The Mission strongly promoted the inclusion of women former combatants as part of the UNP's bodyguard scheme; by early 2020 they made up some 12 per cent of the total bodyguard cadre. In parallel, the Mission worked to raise the level of understanding of the important roles that women play within the military and police, and to encourage security forces to deploy women into field operations in strategic functions.



EMERGING LESSONS and recommendations

The Colombian peace process and Final Peace Agreement were ground-breaking in incorporating women's participation in peace talks and strong women's rights and gender provisions. The experience of successive UN Special Political Missions in supporting Colombia's parties and society in the verification and implementation of the Agreement has similarly broken new ground and provides lessons for the UN and broader international community on how to support the gender-inclusive implementation of peace agreements. The breadth and depth of the experience in Colombia offers valuable lessons for other contexts in advancing the WPS agenda, particularly where the UN is involved.

The following are the principle lessons that have emerged from the experience to date, together with some recommendations that build on the experience:

1. MISSION STRENGTHS FOR ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA IN THE PEACE PROCESS AND GENDER-SENSITIVE VERIFICATION

- *Strong UN leadership, both political and technical, is unquestionably the most important factor for advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.*
- *Coherence at all levels within the UN and coordination on the WPS agenda in the peace process are essential.*
- *SPMs can benefit from an extensive field presence, a well-coordinated network of gender focal points and high-level access when these are integrated as strategic resources for advancing the gender and women's rights contents of peace agreements and the WPS agenda.*
- *Highlighting progress and challenges in gender-sensitive implementation of peace agreements in the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council, together with a strong Mission communications strategy, is an effective means for raising awareness and advancing the process.*
- *Extra-budgetary funds are valuable for supporting strategic gender work, and the Colombia experience may provide an example for other missions in this regard.*

2. ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA WITH INTERNAL MISSION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- *Mission-wide internal gender policies are essential and are supported by the strong alignment within the UN and new tools for accountability; the greatest challenges are often concentrated in aspects of internal culture.*
- *The ambitious gender content of a peace agreement requires that an SPM have commensurate resources and specialized capacity to support implementation.*
- *More systematic internal training on gender can help mainstream a high level of gender-sensitive analysis, reporting and verification.*
- *The experience of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism during the first SPM demonstrated the multiple benefits of including women in such operations and underscores the importance of including gender criteria in the selection and posting of UN observers, especially for leadership roles.*

3. ADDRESSING SOME CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

- *Even with significant national ownership of the women's rights and gender provisions in the Agreement and strong national institutions and organizations, implementation is challenging and requires dedicated resources; at the same time early gender-sensitive analysis to identify contextual obstacles and suggest mitigating strategies could be helpful to pave the way.*

4. SPECIFIC THEMATIC WORK IN COLOMBIA: CHALLENGES FOR REINTEGRATION AND SECURITY GUARANTEES

- *Economic empowerment is a key focus for the reintegration of women former combatants; the Colombian experience also suggests a need for a broader rethinking of reintegration models for women.*
- *Security and protections for women are essential for their ability to participate meaningfully in the implementation of a peace agreement and should be a priority; women's direct participation in the official structures that define protection and security policies aid in ensuring attention and a differential approach to their risks and needs.*
- *Careful consideration should be given to addressing Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and SGBV in a systematic fashion, as well as to the limiting effects of domestic violence on the possibilities for participation and reintegration by women former combatants.*

5. STRONG PARTNERS AND A GENDER ARCHITECTURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- *SPMs are strengthened through strong relationships with national women's organizations, whose efforts can lay the foundations for strong national ownership of gender and women's rights content in peace agreements and their gender-responsive implementation.*
- *Specialized and well-resourced gender architecture is essential for peace agreement implementation and is a strategic partner for UN missions; such gender structures merit all technical and political support to enhance their role.*
- *Women former combatants play an exceptional role in Colombia; their experience can be helpful for women in other contexts who face many of the same challenges in transitioning to civilian life.*
- *The critical support for the WPS agenda by members of the international community can complement and magnify the work of SPMs on gender and women's rights; it represents an essential partnership.*

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