Gender and Inclusion in the Colombian Peace Process

On 10 December, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was in Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. President Santos was awarded the prize in recognition of his government’s efforts to reach a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) after decades of armed conflict. Although a narrow majority of the public voted against the deal in a referendum on 2 October, the peace agreement has since been revised and signed again. The Colombian peace process is now increasingly referred to as a model for inclusive peace processes, and in particular for the inclusion of women and a gender perspective.

Julie Marie Hansen met with two experts to learn more about inclusion in the Colombian peace process where she focused on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. David Rodriguez Goyes is a lawyer and a doctoral researcher at the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law at the University of Oslo. His research focuses on indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant communities in Colombia. He has first-hand experience of the Colombian peace process, where he worked in all forums that involved citizen participation.

Including women and a gender perspective

The Colombian peace process has been called a ‘model’ for gender inclusion. Salvesen points to a Gender Sub-Commission which was established in September 2014 as an effective mechanism for including both women and a gender perspective. Part of the work of the Gender Sub-Commission was to review all peace accords from a gender perspective. Salvesen believes the Gender Sub-Com-
mission has been vital in ensuring a gender perspective has been integrated into negotiations and the initial peace agreement, which was signed on 26 September:

“The most important thing was for the Gender Sub-Commission to make sure its decisions were anchored into the negotiating party delegations. It's always a concern that when particular issues are assigned to a particular group – in this case, gender seemed to be assigned to women – that it will not be sufficiently anchored within the broader delegation. But this risk is minimised when the sub-commission consists of members from the negotiating parties themselves.”

“Gender was a key issue during the civil society forums and there's a lot of gender in the final agreement because of that. It’s not the other way around; it's not the negotiators who came out with this great idea of including a gender perspective. It was because of civil society.”

In terms of the role of Norway and the international community in the Colombian peace process, Salvesen warns against overestimating the influence of outsiders. This is important to keep in mind, she explains, as influence from outside can have unintended effects:

“One of the main drivers was the mobilisation of women’s groups in Colombia through mechanisms such as debate forums, Salvesen views women’s groups and the negotiating parties themselves as the main driving forces behind the inclusion of women and a gender perspective:

“The main drivers were the mobilisation of women’s groups in Colombia towards the negotiating parties, and the parties themselves realising that inclusion is important. I saw a growing awareness among both delegations of the importance of gender and including women, if not for any other reason than for the legitimacy of the process.”

David Rodriguez Goyes also points to the role of civil society groups from both the women’s movement and the gender and sexual minorities’ movement in pushing for inclusion in the peace agreement:

“Inclusion of women and gender issues can be seen as something pushed by foreigners. When it’s pushed by foreigners, it can actually delegitimise efforts for inclusion.”

**A gender perspective also includes LGBTI issues**

The peace process has also recognised the impact of the conflict on gender and sexual minorities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Goyes argues that gender issues also include LGBTI issues: “The peace agreement reflects a gender perspective throughout. But it’s important to try to decipher what is meant by ‘gender perspective’. I think we should interpret it to also include LGBTI communities.”

Groups such as LGBTI persons have been affected differently by the armed conflict in Colombia. This is an issue severely understudied, according to Goyes:

“While the main focus in Colombia and around the world has always been on women, the LGBTI community has been far less researched. This is an issue that requires much more research.”

Nevertheless, Goyes explains what is known about the harmful effects of conflict on LGBTI persons:

“The paramilitary forces, which are con-
servative, have reinforced gender stereotypes through violent action and the use of weapons. The paramilitaries have carried out something they called *limpieza social* – social cleansing – in which they go to well-known neighbourhoods where people from the LGBTI community live and kill them. That’s quite a dramatic effect of war on LGBTI persons, where one of the actors involved in the conflict is trying to impose gender stereotypes through eliminating its enemies in this way.”

LGBTI persons have also been symbolically affected through stigmatisation. “Many politicians and other political forces, such as the church, promote a discourse about the need to protect the family as the basic unit of society. And so they have directly attacked the LGBTI community which they see as a threat to the family,” explains Goyes.

Recognition that LGBTI individuals have been impacted differently by the conflict is reflected in the peace agreement. Goyes points to some specific provisions for LGBTI persons in the peace agreement:

“The peace agreement mentions the need to study and try to dismantle the gangs that have victimised the LGBTI population. It also states the need to study and understand how LGBTI persons have been particularly victimised. It’s interesting to see how the peace negotiators noticed that there’s a gap of knowledge on this issue.”

However, Goyes also points towards important challenges in the implementation phase of the peace agreement:

“In Colombia there is a phenomenon called legal fetishism, in which the government tries to please and quiet social movements by including very nice laws but then never implements them. So it’s always risky to just feel satisfied that the LGBTI population was mentioned in the peace agreement. That doesn’t mean it will necessarily be transformed into a reality.”

**After the referendum: Gender in the revised agreement**

The first peace agreement was rejected in the October referendum. Those campaigning against the agreement saw gender as a controversial issue, and the campaign against the agreement gained a lot of votes by portraying the gender perspective as undermining societal values and family values.

The agreement has since been renegotiated and a revised agreement has been signed. Both Salvesen and Goyes say they were concerned that gender issues would be sacrificed to appease the ‘no’ campaigners. However, a gender perspective has been kept in the revised agreement, as Salvesen explains:

“In renegotiations, the negotiators have tried to accommodate the perspectives of the ‘no’ campaign – especially those from the conservative religious sectors such as the evangelical churches. They have done this by underlining in some places in the agreement the respect for family, for religious freedom and religious practice. I was concerned that the gender perspective would be something the negotiating parties would easily give away. But I think in many ways it’s now better than it was. The language is actually more clarified and more specific than in the first agreement. For example, terms like ‘equality in the participation of’ or ‘equal opportunities for participation’ are now used instead of ‘gender’. I feel confident that there’s still a good gender perspective in the agreement.”

Goyes, however, points to an example where the peace agreement has been changed due to ‘no’ campaigners’ views towards the LGBTI community:

“The first peace agreement mentioned that the government should put efforts into the creation and strengthening of new social movements of the LGBTI community. However, this has been removed in the revised version of the agreement. This is mainly because the church, which opposes LGBTI groups, argued that such movements would create a risk to the church and therefore it was an unfair item to include in the agreement.”

Despite this, Goyes believes that provisions for LGBTI persons in the revised agreement remain strong:

“The negotiators changed the terms of the document in some key issues and replaced LGBTI for other expressions such as vulnerable population, marginalised population, and so on. Comparing page by page the initial agreement signed in
September and the new revised agreement, you actually find that LGBTI issues are included in more parts in the new agreement than in the original one. LGBTI issues are not only mentioned in more places and more times than in the first agreement, but some paragraphs also state a refusal to take out the LGBTI population from the agreement. Before the revised agreement, I was afraid that if the negotiators took out mentions of the LGBTI community, it would have sent a strong message of the illegitimacy of the population. But that didn’t happen.”

The concern now, however, is the harmful effects that the referendum debate has had on Colombian society, according to Goyes:

“The LGBTI community has been used as political leverage to advance other interests. The ‘no’ campaign played on the sensitivities and emotions of a large part of the Colombian population by stigmatising the LGBTI community. These messages can remain in Colombian society and may have long-term negative effects.”

Annual Meeting of Nordic Women Mediators

On 7–8 December, members of the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) network convened in Stockholm for their annual meeting. Since Norway hosted the network’s first meeting in 2015, the number of members has grown significantly. The NWM includes more than 40 women from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden with expertise from mediation and peacebuilding. The 2016 gathering was an opportunity to further strengthen the network through interaction with key international political figures, researchers, practitioners and representatives from state and civil society organisations.

The annual meeting, themed ‘Leadership for Inclusive Peace’, was opened by Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström. In her speech, Wallström referred to the NWM as a reflection of the Nordic countries’ shared commitment to international peace and security. She also pointed to one of the reasons the NWM was established – to disprove the “ridiculous claim”, commonly used to exclude women from peace processes, that there are no capable women. In fact, the NWM and similar networks of women mediators worldwide show that this is not the case. Already members of the NWM have contributed to various peace processes, including in Afghanistan, Syria and Cyprus.

The first day of the meeting included panel discussions with both NWM members and international guests from Colombia, Afghanistan, Morocco and South Africa. The second day involved closed discussions among members and some guests. Roundtables were organised between mediators and researchers to discuss thematic issues such as transitional justice, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and sexual and gender-based violence. This allowed for members to exchange their professional experiences and knowledge on topics related to mediation. Members also discussed organisational matters such as finding a common vision for the network and planning future activities. Representatives from a similar women mediators’ network in South Africa also participated in these discussions, which led to an exchange of ideas between both networks.

The idea for the NWM was first endorsed by the Nordic governments in April 2015 at a meeting between Nordic and African foreign ministers, and eventually launched in Oslo in November the same year. The network aims to strengthen women’s meaningful participation in peace processes and is designed to enable members to share experience and knowledge and to engage with similar initiatives in other regions and internationally.

Defining peace processes broadly as including a range of activities from preventing conflict to building peace, Neu drew on recent research which finds that peace processes that are more inclusive and that including women leads to better agreements and more sustainable peace. When women participate in peace negotiations, for example, the issues raised are often expanded to include security – for women especially in relation to sexual violence, but also security for ex-combatants – and economic issues, such as ways to financially assist local communities affected by conflict. Benefiting from this kind of inclusivity requires a change in the current composition of formal peace processes, where participants are almost always those who are waging the war – government and opposition leaders, armed forces, militias and rebel forces.

Neu then addressed how to increase women’s participation in peace processes, when women are not the negotiators or mediators. Women can serve as technical advisors to the negotiating parties, such as in Cyprus, or participate in commissions for various issue areas, like in Colombia. While advocates have been increasingly pushing for women’s inclusion in peace processes, Neu also pointed to some barriers. For example, capacity building training given to women is often not on peace and security issues, putting them at a disadvantage. Participating in negotiation processes can also be especially risky for women, as they may be ostracised from their communities due to suspicion as to their involvement. More pragmatically, peace processes are not designed for the participation of women.
with children – a lack of child care hinders women who might otherwise be willing and capable to participate.

Neu also drew on extensive first-hand experience from peace processes around the world. She has served as Team Leader for the United Nations’ Standby Team of Mediation Experts, advising Special Advisors and Envoys of the UN Secretary-General on peace processes in the Central African Republic, Comoros, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Somalia. She was also Senior Associate Director of the Conflict Resolution Program at The Carter Center where she advised former US President Jimmy Carter on conflicts in over twelve countries and led mediation efforts in DRC, Mali, Sudan and Uganda.

The seminar was chaired by the PRIO GPS Centre director Torunn L. Tryggestad.

First Meeting of NATO CSAP on Women, Peace and Security

The NATO Civil Society Advisory Panel (CSAP) on Women, Peace and Security met for the first time in Brussels, on 17-18 October 2016. The NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative (SGSR) for Women, Peace and Security, Ambassador Marriët Schuurman, has led the initiative to establish the CSAP. Its purpose is to provide feedback and recommendations to NATO on matters pertaining to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, including implementation of NATO policies in this issue area. The CSAP includes fifteen members who participate in their personal capacity comprising the Core Group, in addition to fifteen representatives of civil society organizations.

The meeting was opened by SGSR Schuurman, who gave an overview of the formation of the CSAP as well as the status of implementation of NATO’s 1325 Policy and Action Plan. Schuurman’s presentation was followed by a plenary discussion of CSAP’s role and strategic vision. The discussion emphasised the importance of the CSAP being able to consult beyond the individuals in the room, including being a voice for women in conflict affected countries.

During the meeting, members agreed that the CSAP should hold NATO accountable for its commitments made in regards to the WPS agenda. The members also felt it would be important for the CSAP to document its own experience, to contribute to learning about how civil society consultation mechanisms can be effective. CSAP members decided to organize themselves in thematic subgroups and identified the upcoming review of NATO’s 1325 Policy and Action Plan as a particularly important process to engage with.

The two-day meeting was facilitated by Megan Bastick, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). The next meeting of the CSAP is planned to take place in May 2017.

– Torunn L. Tryggestad, Director of the PRIO Centre of Gender, Peace and Security

Cyprus Conference on UNSCR 1325 and Sustainable Peace

“We’ve seen that when women are involved in peace processes, a peace agreement is more likely to be implemented, more likely to be concluded and also to be sustained and provide sustainable peace,” said Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Cyprus and Head of UNFICYP, Elizabeth Spehar. Spehar gave the opening remarks during the ‘Pathways towards Sustainable Peace – United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325’ conference on 4 November in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The conference focused on the important role of women in peace and security, and brought together women from various backgrounds throughout Cyprus to gain a better understanding of Resolution 1325 as a means towards sustainable peace. Participants engaged in discussions about what Resolution 1325 is, why it matters, and, most importantly, how it can be implemented in the everyday lives of women in Cyprus.

“We continue to see a considerable lack of addressing the implementation of
Resolution 1325 to substantially include women in the peace talks and also across the board,” said Ambassador Mara Marinaki, the European External Action Service’s Principal Adviser on Gender and on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. During her keynote address, Marinaki also added that the absence of Cypriot women from the formal peace negotiations shows a gap between the endeavours of the international community and the realities of the overall peace process on the island.

Other speakers at the conference included Sabine Freier, UN Women Policy Adviser on Governance, Peace and Security; Emine Colak, founder of the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Association; Erato Marcoulis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs; Rada Boric, the Director at the Centre for Women’s Studies in Zagreb; and Yeshim Harris, Director of Engagement at the Conflict Management and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Kent’s Conflict Analysis and Research Centre.

The conference was organized by Sophia Papastavrou, Gender Technical Lead at World Vision International Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office, and Magda Zenon of the Cyprus Women’s Lobby, with funding from World Vision MEERO and with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - FES Cyprus (FES).

— Sophia Papastavrou, Gender Technical Lead at World Vision MEERO

International News

The African Union Commission Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and UN Women launched a Network of Reporters on Women, Peace and Security on 19 October, following a workshop for editors, journalists and bloggers from newspapers, radio, television and social media, covering conflict-affected countries and regions in Africa.


The United Nations Security Council convened for the annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 25 October, the 16th anniversary of the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. WILPF’s analysis of the debate is available online.

Michele Mitchell, film director, released the new documentary ‘The Uncondemned’ in November about sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide.

World Vision’s Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office and Cyprus Women’s Lobby held a conference on ‘Pathways towards Sustainable Peace: Building United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 into Cyprus’, in Nicosia, Cyprus on 3-4 November (see separate story).

The United States House of Representatives passed the Women, Peace and Security Act on 15 November.

The International Migration Institute at the Oxford University hosted a seminar on ‘Gender, violence and vulnerability: Examining the politics of protection in the current refugee ‘crisis’” given by Jane Freedman from the University of Paris VIII on 30 November. A podcast of the presentation is available online.

Uruguay organised an Arria-formula meeting for UN member states and civil society on ‘Synergies between Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)’ on 5 December.

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) launched a Security Council WPS Scorecard, which “aims to strengthen accountability for holistic implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda by addressing ongoing gaps between commitments and accomplishments, especially around conflict prevention and disarmament.”

Antonio Guterres, the new United Nations General-Secretary, has appointed an all-female leadership team: Amina Mohammed of Nigeria as Deputy Secretary-General, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti of Brazil as Chief of Staff, and Kyung-wha Kang of South Korea as special advisor on policy.

Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay and will from 1 January 2017 co-chair the United Nations Security Council’s Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security.

News from Norway

Yanar Mohammed was awarded the Rafto Prize for 2016 for her work defending the rights of women and minorities in war-torn Iraq.

Norwegian State Secretary Laila Bokhari gave the Nordic statement at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 25 October. The statement is available online.

The Mellom Amerika forum [Central America forum] held an event in Oslo on 5 December about violence against women in war and conflict in Guatemala, as part of a series of events marking the 20th anniversary of peace accords in Guatemala.

Major General Kristin Lund of Norway – the first woman Force Commander of a UN peacekeeping operation – took part in the United Nations’ HerStory exhibition on 13 December which showcased a ‘Celebration of Leading Women in the UN’.

News from PRIO

Jenny Lorentzen, Doctoral Researcher,
the new coordinator of the Gender Research Group at PRIO, taking over from Torunn L. Tryggestad.

Ragnhild Nordás, Research Director, has received a prestigious Young Researcher Talent grant from the Research Council of Norway to conduct research on the ‘Dynamics of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence’, which will build on and further develop the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset. Read more about the new project on PRIO’s website.

PRIO, together with the UN Department of Political Affairs and Crisis Management Initiative, organised the seventh UN High-Level Seminar on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Processes for special envoys, senior mediators and mediation experts in Oslo on 11-13 October. PRIO’s Torunn L. Tryggestad gave a presentation on ‘Global Normative Frameworks on Women, Peace and Security’ at the Research School on Human Security and Women’s Peace and Security in Eastern DRC. They presented their research findings to a range of stakeholders and conducted training on academic writing and publication at ICART.

The PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security held a seminar on Gender and Inclusive Peace Processes with guest speaker Joyce Neu, founder of Facilitating Peace, on 27 October (see separate story).

Jenny Lorentzen, Doctoral Researcher, wrote a PRIO Blog post entitled ‘Why Trump is Bad News for Gender Equality in Foreign Policy’, published on 18 November.

PRIO researchers Inger Skjelsbæk and Torunn L. Tryggestad organised and held lectures at the PhD course ‘Gender, Peace and Security’ at the Research School on Peace and Conflict, on 21-23 November.

Gudrun Østby, Senior Researcher, gave a talk on ‘Armed Conflict and Maternal Health’ at a meeting at the Norwegian Demographic Society, University of Oslo on 22 November.

Torunn L. Tryggestad, Senior Researcher and Director of the PRIO GPS Centre, gave a talk on ‘Gender in Peace and Conflict Research: Exploring the Gendered Impact of UN Peacebuilding’ at Aarhus University on 24 November.

Torunn L. Tryggestad, Senior Researcher and Director of the PRIO GPS Centre, participated at the second meeting in 2016 of the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group at UN Headquarters in New York on 1-2 December.

Gudrun Østby, Senior Researcher, gave a presentation on ‘Armed conflict and maternal health in sub-Saharan Africa’ at a workshop on female political leadership at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia on 28-29 November.

Senior researchers Siri Aas Rustad and Gudrun Østby visited Bukavu, DRC on 7-15 December where they attended a workshop and meeting with the International Centre for Advanced Research and Training (ICART) team to finalize the joint project ‘Female Empowerment in Eastern DRC’. They presented their research findings to a range of stakeholders and conducted training on academic writing and publication at ICART.

Gudrun Østby, Senior Researcher, presented a research paper and chaired a session at the conference ‘Transition and Local Development in Eastern DRC’ in Bukavu, DRC on 8-10 December. The conference was organised by PRIO together with the New York University Abu Dhabi, the Wageningen University and Research, and the University of Antwerp.

Recent PRIO Publications


Other Recent Publications

Aharoni, Sarai B. (2016) Who needs the Women and Peace Hypothesis? Rethink-


Meeting of Norwegian members of the Nordic Women Mediators network, at PRIO on 24 January 2017 (by invitation only).

More upcoming events at PRIO will be announced on www.prio.org/events.