

Colombia in Context / Factsheet #1

Colombia in Context is a project of the Colombia Human Rights Network, to provide information and analysis about issues in Colombia that affect human rights. In this Factsheet we bring you information provided by the organization Corporación Viso Mutop.

Overview of illegal armed actors in Colombia and current peace efforts

by Corporación Viso Mutop (Organization that monitors the impacts of drug policies on the human rights of peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities)

There are several ongoing armed conflicts in Colombia, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The national government has implemented a peace policy that contributes to reducing violence and enabling regional social and economic reforms with the communities as protagonists. Several negotiations are under way between the government and armed groups with political connotations, but there are also other armed groups that are classified as high-impact criminal structures. Although some factions persist in their bellicose actions, President Petro remains willing to find political solutions. For some in the international community, the current situation is unclear and confusing, given that it was believed that the 2016 Agreement definitively ended the conflict. We have published this article to help those interested in peace in Colombia in the United States and internationally better understand the current situation.

1. Armed groups with some political connotation and territorial control

Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)

The national government had established negotiations with the ELN, leading to a ceasefire, which expired in August, 2024. Then the President suspended talks following attacks committed by this group in Catatumbo, in January 2025.

The Frente Comuneros del Sur, which operates in Nariño, split from the ELN, in May 2024. The national government maintains peace talks with this group.

Context: The ELN accuses the Colombian government of having prioritized the separation of Frente Comuneros del Sur and of engaging in a politics of encouraging their split. At present, negotiations with the ELN are not continuing. The Peace Commissioner recognized "Comuneros del Sur" as an independent group, noting that this armed group intends to disengage from the war and become a peace movement for Nariño.

Groups that split off from the FARC and did not avail themselves of the 2016 Peace Agreement (as per the language used by the ICRC), popularly known as dissident groups of the former FARC EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia).

These groups are organized in several factions:

One, named **Estado Mayor Central de las FARC EP (EMC)**, brought together the Bloque Suroccidental, the Comando coordinador de Oriente, and the Frente Carolina Ramírez. The seed of this faction was the Frente 1, under the command of Iván Lozada alias Mordisco; it separated from the FARC Secretariat negotiating in Havana in early 2016.

Then others joined, under the command of alias Gentil Duarte, Calarcá Córdoba, John Mechas, Danilo Alvizú and Cabuyo. Alias Gentil separated from the FARC after its 10th Conference (September 2016). He died in May 2022, but others signed the peace agreement and even laid down their weapons but later rearmed as of late 2017.

The Estado Mayor Central split into two groups in 2024, and from that point on peace talks continued with one part, called **Estado Mayor de Bloques y Frentes**, under the command of alias Calarcá. President Petro suspended the ceasefire with the faction led by alias Mordisco, leading that group to step away from the peace talks. At present, there is no ceasefire in place with either of these factions. They are fighting with one another, with serious repercussions for the civilian population. Mordisco's faction is present in Cauca, Valle, Nariño, Huila, parts of Guaviare, Meta, Arauca and Casanare. Calarcá's faction is present in Catatumbo, Bolívar, Antioquia, Guaviare, Meta, and Caquetá, among other parts of Colombia. The Government maintained a bilateral ceasefire with this group from October 2023 to April 2025. In the framework of ongoing peace talks, the parties agreed on several projects in which peasant rights and the protection of the Amazon have been central. In Tibú, Catatumbo, the 33rd Front of the Magdalena Medio Bloc (which is part of these talks) agreed with the Government on a temporary settlement zone.

The second group of dissident former FARC forces was the **Segunda Marquetalia**, which formed after what Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich called their "entrapment" by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, DEA, and the Colombian justice system. They rearmed in August 2019, in response to what they considered a betrayal by the Colombian State. They were joined by other former FARC commanders with the aliases of Romaña and el Paisa. They have a presence in parts of Vichada, Guainía, Meta, and Cauca.

This faction fractured in 2024. The Government has maintained dialogues with those who moved away from Iván Márquez, who now call themselves **Coordinadora Nacional Ejército Bolivariano**. They have ordered from a unilateral ceasefire against the National Army. This grouping currently brings together the Coordinadora Guerrillera del Pacífico (a coalition of 11 armed groups in Nariño) plus the Comandos de la Frontera that operate in Putumayo. With them, the national government has reached crop substitution agreements (announcing the eradication of 15,000 hectares in Nariño to replace them with cacao), plus a commitment to destroy war materiel. There are also expectations of establishing a Temporary Training Zone in Nariño and another in Putumayo as part of a gradual disarmament process.

2. Groups with military capacity and territorial control, but no political recognition

Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC) (also called **Clan del Golfo**, Urabeños, or AGC): Many of the members of this paramilitary group were part of the former AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia). They operate mainly in the Caribbean coast region and are the illegal armed group that has grown the most in recent years. With them, the national government began what it has called a socio-legal dialogue (*Espacio sociojurídico*), which has faced challenges. (Socio-legal dialogue is a concept introduced in the law on Total Peace, precisely for negotiating with criminal groups.) The central difference with the dissident factions of the FARC is that the EGC is an organization that emerged from the paramilitarism of the 1990s.

Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada: This paramilitary group operates in Magdalena and Guajira in Northeast Colombia. A ceasefire is in place with this group. It faces off against the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia, also a paramilitary group, in those two departments. Talks are just beginning with this group, also socio-legal process, for talking with criminal groups.

3. Other armed groups with the capacity to exercise violence and control over urban areas

Urban gangs in the Valle de Aburrá (Medellín and environs)

Urban gangs of Buenaventura

Urban gangs of Quibdó

Urban gangs of Barranquilla

The government has begun “socio-legal” dialogues with these groups. In Buenaventura, Medellín, and Quibdó there have been ceasefires among gangs. In May the President announced the government’s intent to establish talks with the gangs in Barranquilla.

4. Armed groups that demand legal alternatives involving truth and closure

The former paramilitary chiefs of the AUC, like Salvatore Mancuso and others who availed themselves of the Santa Fé de Ralito Agreement (2003). In this case, the Peace Commissioner is in charge of coming up with different options. They argue that the Ralito agreement was breached by the Colombian State and that they are willing to contribute to telling the truth of what happened conditioned on getting legal closure in their own cases; the proposal is under consideration by the government.