



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Colombia: Challenges for Peace and Human Rights**  
**Virtual briefing**

**Wednesday July 23, 2025**

**2:00 – 3:00 p.m. ET**

**Zoom**

**As delivered**

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission briefing on Colombia. This Commission last held a briefing on peace and human rights in that country six years ago. A lot has changed. I welcome our outstanding panel of participants, two of whom are joining us from Colombia.

During more than a half-century of violence, Colombia was the longest-running conflict in Latin America. It has produced one of the largest numbers of displaced persons in the world.

The historic signing of the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC represented an important milestone on the journey to peace. But a written document does not bring about peace on its own. This requires

investment in implementation over time and political will to build a better country.

Colombians have worked hard for peace in the long term. The United States has been an important partner, providing technical assistance and foreign aid, and supporting the work of academic and civil society institutions like the ones represented on today's panel.

Colombia has been one of the top recipients of U.S. foreign assistance over the past 25 years. We are invested in a safer, more secure, and more peaceful Colombia.

I have traveled to Colombia many times. I have seen some of the results of this investment in Bogota as well as in communities all throughout the country.

In addition to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration into society of some 13,000 former FARC combatants, the 2016 peace agreement created transitional justice institutions designed to sustain a just peace.

This integrated system included tribunals to bring accountability for those who committed atrocities, and a unit to search for those who have been disappeared. It also included a truth commission whose 2022 report gave voice to tens of thousands of Colombians in the country and around the world whose lives were affected by the conflict.

The truth commission's report recognized the importance of the peace agreement while underscoring that the violence would only go away once the underlying root problems are addressed. It concluded, "In order to resolve them, we need to be a society that makes the pain of the victims our own, that says 'No More', that takes on the task of transitional justice."

Both the peace agreement and the truth commission report were important steps forward, but their potential has not yet been fully realized. And I am worried that progress in Colombia's peace process is moving in the wrong direction.

Human rights defenders and social leaders are still being killed with impunity. Illegal armed groups have fragmented and grown in number. Much of the violence comes from them fighting each other for control of territory. Just last year, more than 58 thousand people were forcibly displaced from their homes by the violence, nearly half of whom were indigenous and Afro-Colombian people.

What worries me the most from the perspective of the U.S. Congress, though, is that we have been turning away from our leadership role in supporting and investing in the consolidation of peace in Colombia. The Trump administration has eliminated USAID, interrupting midstream so many programs that were working to improve peace and security in Colombian communities. The recent reorganization of the State Department has weakened our ability to lead on human rights and peace.

This makes Colombia, the region, and the United States less secure and less prosperous.

The impact of these cuts is most apparent when we listen to the stories of those directly affected by them. One organization had been working with rural women who were victims of the armed conflict in the southwest of Colombia to provide training and loans to encourage entrepreneurship and help communities develop alternative sources of livelihoods.

A member of this group said, “the news of USAID’s shutdown hit us like a bucket of cold water... It wasn’t just the 150 women we were training who were harmed...Our organization was also harmed because some people no longer trust us.”

The harmful ripple effects of the U.S. walking away from being a reliable partner for peace in Colombia go beyond the affected programs. It erodes our credibility and puts at risk the trust that we built with communities all over Colombia. We cannot afford to abandon Colombians, and we should continue to support the peace process. It is essential that we continue to lift up the protection of human rights defenders whose lives are at risk.

Today, we have representatives of civil society organizations who have been at the forefront of building peace in Colombia to share their knowledge of the challenges and

opportunities they face on the ground. Many of them are long-time friends.

We will hear ideas and policy proposals that Congress can follow up on. The United States and Colombia are key partners, and I believe strongly that we can and should do more to help improve the situation in the country for peace, security and human rights.

I thank all of you for joining us here today. This is an important topic. This is an important briefing. I now turn to our moderator, Clare Seelke, from the Congressional Research Service, who will take it from here. Clare?