



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**

### **Update: Peace and Victims' Rights in Colombia**

**Monday, April 8, 2019**

**3:00 – 4:00 p.m.**

**2172 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **Opening Remarks as Prepared for Delivery**

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us today for a look at the implementation of Colombia's peace accord from the perspective of advocates for the victims and communities affected by that country's decades-long internal armed conflict.

I especially want to thank our four panelists, all of whom have traveled from Colombia to be with us today.

I have seen the work of Colombian human rights defenders and social leaders up close and personal for years.

Without their tireless efforts – including all the cases they have brought before the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights over the last 25 years – there would not be progress against impunity in Colombia. Without them, there would not be a peace process with the FARC guerrillas.

Human rights defenders and community leaders are the lifeblood of progress in Colombia. It is always a privilege to welcome them to this People's House.

Last July, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a [hearing](#) on peace and victims' rights in Colombia. We were already concerned at that point that the implementation of the historic 2016 peace accord between the government of Colombia and the FARC was too slow – especially with regard to the commitments meant to address the root causes of the 60-

year-old conflict and ensure non-recurrence, such as rural reforms and the complete dismantling of illegal paramilitary forces.

We were also concerned because so many human rights defenders and social leaders were being assassinated – 311 between January 2016 and June 30, 2018, according to the Colombian ombudsman’s office.

Nine months later, we are not seeing the improvements we need to see. Rather than do everything in its power to abide by the spirit of the peace accord and fully implement its provisions, the government of Ivan Duque seems determined to return to policies that failed before, like forced eradication of illicit crops.

According to reports, resources earmarked for implementation were not included in the national development plan. Budgets for the transitional justice institutions have been cut.

As of last December 2018, only one-tenth of former guerrillas were benefitting from the productive projects that are supposed to facilitate their reintegration to civilian life.

The Land Fund, created in the peace accords to increase small farmer land ownership, has officially received less than 7 percent of the 3 million hectares it is supposed to disburse by 2028.

Progress of crop-substitution programs has been slow, in part due to the failure to provide communities financial and technical assistance.

And human rights defenders and community leaders continue to be killed – 15 in January alone. Some 4,000 social leaders currently have protection measures provided by the government. 4,000 – what that tells me is that the government’s security policies are not working.

So I am even more worried than I was a few months ago. Today I look forward to hearing from our panel as to what more we in the U.S. government should be doing to make sure the hard-won formal peace with the FARC translates into real progress in people’s lives.

We must not stand by and watch the opportunity for real peace slip through our fingers.

I turn now to Lisa Haugaard of the Latin America Working Group who will introduce the panelists and moderate the discussion.