

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Briefing
Update: Peace and Victims' Rights in Colombia

Monday, April 8, 2019 – 3:00 p.m.
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Introductory Remarks of Lisa Haugaard, Moderator
Executive Director
Latin America Working Group

We are very grateful to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and to the Co-Chairs, Representatives Jim McGovern and Chris Smith, for the opportunity to be here with you today.

The peace accord signed between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas over two years ago offers a tremendous opportunity to end the longest running war in the Western Hemisphere and to bring justice, truth, reparations, and the guarantee that the brutal past will not be repeated to the 9 million victims of violence in Colombia. The peace agreement requires the Colombian state to provide, in areas affected by the conflict, the basic services and protections that all governments should offer to their citizens, such as education, roads, a justice system, public security, opportunities to make a living, and protection for citizens' rights.

For the United States, peace that is fully consolidated in Colombia would also offer some tangible, practical benefits. Colombia would become a more stable regional partner—the kind of stability that exists in a country where rights of all citizens are respected and protected. And the peace accord if fully implemented offers real opportunities to address drug trafficking and organized crime in a much more sustainable way.

But peace accords require national and international commitment and attention. They cannot be signed and forgotten. Our guests here today are here to issue a wake up call to the international community to help ensure that the promise of Colombia's peace accords is fulfilled. Here in the Congress, it is worth remembering that the U.S. government and the Congress have played a vital role in encouraging Colombians to build peace, supporting negotiations and providing essential assistance, especially via USAID's programming for constructing peace on the ground and for victims of the conflict and Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. This wise U.S. investment in the construction of peace should not be undercut, it should be continued and strengthened.