



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

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

**July 19, 2018  
10:00 AM – 11:30 AM  
2255 Rayburn House Office**

#### **Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good morning. I would like to thank my co-chair, Jim McGovern, for bringing this important topic to the Commission this morning. In the wake of fifty years of violent internal conflict in Colombia, the world welcomed a comprehensive and victim-centered peace accord signed and ratified in 2016 between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Over the course of the conflict it is estimated that over six million people were forcibly displaced, 50,000 were disappeared, and 26,000 were victims of sexual violence. In short, the Colombian government has assessed that 8.6 million people, or 18 percent of Colombia's population, were victims of this conflict.

The peace talks were revolutionary because they sought to address the grievances of victims on both sides of the conflict by involving some of those victims, and particularly women, in the negotiation process. After four years of negotiations, the talks led to a variety of solutions aimed at victim redress, including the disarming of the FARC, and the launching of a transitional justice program opening judicial proceedings against those who committed gross human rights violations and war crimes.

The first cases to be addressed by judges began this month, and include cases against members of the FARC, members of the armed forces of Colombia, civil servants, and civilians. The peace accord is ground breaking and is moving in the right direction, but it still has a long way to go before full implementation is achieved.

In the midst of the recent political changes in Colombia, we urge the new administration to earnestly continue to implement the agreement despite the challenges of doing so.

Given the length of the conflict and the number of people affected, a peace accord of this magnitude will require strong government leadership to fulfill government promises that were made, sustained public support and political will, and the continued courage of all those Colombians who were affected by the violence and who are involved in the process of restorative justice.

Lastly, I am also very concerned by the recent increase in violence against human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia. Though the general homicide rate in Colombia is at a historic low, attacks against community leaders and activists rose by 30 percent between 2016 and 2017.

I would like to hear from our witnesses as to what they think accounts for this, and what linkages there are between the killing of social leaders and the implementation of the peace accord. Thank you.

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