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Colombian Peace Negotiators Urged To Reconsider Gender in Next Deal

The United Nations is urging Colombia's government and FARC rebels to quickly reach a new peace deal, which women's rights advocates are hoping will include a more progressive consideration of gender.

A gender subcommission took part in negotiations for the first accord, which Colombians [voted down](#) on Oct. 2. It brought women and LGBT groups into the discussion, and it ensured that gender-based violence that took place during the war was addressed in the accord.

Some Colombians – namely evangelicals and conservatives – opposed these gender provisions, particularly items that protected people of “diverse sexual orientations and identities.” They viewed this and other statements referring to LGBT groups as a deviation from ‘normal’ gender roles and a threat to the traditional family structure.

Other Colombians, feminists and some in the international media say they hope to see a more progressive perspective on gender issues in the next accord that will, among other things, reimagine traditional masculine and feminine gender roles. One critique of the last accord was that it boxed women into restrictive, narrowly conceived gender roles.

One official, Joshua Mitrotti, the head of the Colombian Agency of Reintegration, said female ex-combatants have “[sometimes lost their feminine features](#),” and that the agency's program puts “a strong focus on accompanying them and helping them again reconstruct those feminine features they want to reconstruct.”

This type of language from negotiators could hurt the willingness of female ex-combatants to reintegrate through the state's formal process.

[Roxanne Krystalli](#), a researcher on gender, violence, and transitional justice in Colombia, told Humanosphere that many female combatants are from rural areas of Colombia, from very patriarchal families.

“Some of the women did join [the FARC] because it promised this more equitable, almost feminist vision within the armed group,” said Krystalli, before clarifying that many of those promises were never actualized. “But for the ones who did experience it, or for those for whom the promise was attractive, the return to very narrowly, traditionally defined femininity isn't appealing.”

Krystalli said a more realistic goal for the next peace accord would be to settle for a gender provision, rather than the sweeping change advocates seek. Historically, she says, peace

documents put gender on the back burner in the urgency to end warfare, “which obviously is not a full understanding of how gender functions in violence, justice and peace.”

The alternative, she said, is to eliminate gender perspectives from negotiations altogether.

“I very much worry that any semblance of progress that we’ve made in getting a gender perspective included in the peace accord will be sacrificed in the merit of having any peace accord at all,” she said.

Krystalli and other experts warn that eliminating gender from the peace agreement would affect the quality of the transition and peace. Since the last peace accord, women’s groups and female ex-combatants are already becoming less visible in Colombia’s ongoing conversation about the peace negotiations. Without these groups engaged in the process, however, Colombia may see more women relocating to urban areas through the informal system, as opposed to their original communities, as a strategy for reinvention.

A vote of approval for the last accord would have brought an end to Colombia’s 52-year civil conflict and allowed thousands of rebel soldiers of the FARC to reintegrate into mainstream Colombian politics and society. Now, the country is left uncertain over the fate of the peace deal and of the FARC’s estimated 7,500 fighters who are to disarm under U.N. supervision.