



Women For Disarmament

Summary Report

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



WILPF has been working for world peace for more than a century by tackling the root causes of conflict, including arms proliferation and gender inequality, stigmatising war and violence and supporting meaningful participation of local women in peace processes. In our 2015 Manifesto, we stated the following: “To pursue our task of ending war we have to be able to imagine peace. Although weaponry and standing armies are an immediate source of danger in themselves, making an armed response likely when a conflict of interests arises, the long-term causes of war are more deeply rooted in our social, economic and political systems”.

This is why WILPF has committed itself in favour of total and universal disarmament and demilitarisation and dismantling institutions that support war and conflict in favor of feminist peace based on gender equality, justice and demilitarised security. This publication is part of our action aimed at bringing to light women’s experiences in the peacebuilding context in Colombia in the context of the ongoing disarmament process, showing thereby the necessity of the adherences to the principles of UNSCR 1325 and the Arms Trade Treaty for sustainable and feminist peace.

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Women For Disarmament: Summary Report

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Index

Introduction	3
Localising United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Colombia for Disarmament and Peace	5
Legal Framework for Disarmament in Colombia	7
The Impact of Arms Proliferation on Women	10
Experiences of Women in Meta	10
Experiences of Women in Bolívar	11
Experiences of Women in Caqueta	11
Conclusions and Recommendations	12

Introduction

In 2016, there was a historic peace agreement in Colombia between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP) to end an armed conflict that was tearing the country apart since 1964. Thanks to long and hard advocacy by women's organisations, the accords addressed several issues important for women, including political participation of women and gender-based violence in the implementation phase. However, signing the Final Peace Agreement is only a first step towards sustainable and long-lasting peace in Colombia.

The process of laying down of weapons by the FARC-EP, which ended in September, 2017, contributed significantly to the beginning of a social transformation that is required to change arms for dialogue. According to local women peace activists in Colombia, arms regulation in communities and territories constitutes a positive instrument for improving the lives of women and guarantees their effective participation in peacebuilding processes, including their increased access to employment opportunities in the countryside, the general reduction of violence and an increase in security for children. Disarmament also contributes to improved gendered power relations and prevents violence against women while promoting gender equality.

However, the initial phase of the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement has not been able to address threats associated with the existence of other illegal armed groups in the country, including organised crime groups, new forms of paramilitary and another guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN). Many women in rural areas and in some urban areas still experience fear because of the presence and circulation of illegal arms. Although the process of laying down by the FARC-EP demonstrated a substantial success recognised by the UN Verification Mission, much more disarmament remains to be done, and continued legal and practical issues remain to be addressed before sustainable peace and prevention of further conflict is possible.

This summary report is based on the report entitled “Women For Disarmament: A Look Into Disarmament from Resolution 1325” authored by Angélica Suárez, Diana Salcedo and Katherine Ronderos from the WILPF’s section in Colombia (LIMPAL Colombia) and drawn from the consultations with local peace activists who have been part of public debates related to the peace process in Colombia. The analysis and evidence presented in this report highlight the experiences of local women and the impact of the current disarmament process on their lives, as well as demonstrate key compliance gaps with international human rights and humanitarian treaties ratified by the government of Colombia.

Localising United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Colombia for Disarmament and Peace

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)¹, adopted in 2000, recognises women's needs in all stages of conflict and demands relevant action on conflict prevention, as well as women's meaningful participation in disarmament, negotiations and peacebuilding programmes. The principles enshrined in UNSCR 1325 have been introduced in the Final Peace Agreement after strong advocacy work by women's organisations and the international community².

Using UNSCR 1325, Colombian women impacted the negotiation process by: sending proposals to the Havana peace table; raising awareness of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls; increasing women's participation in peace processes; and advocating for meaningful participation of women in the post-conflict period and in the process of the Peace Agreement implementation. A gender sub-commission was later involved in the negotiations, ensuring that the agreement had an "adequate gender focus".

In parallel to the peace negotiations, women-led advocacy groups have taken action to support the development of Local Action Plans (PLA) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 due to resistance by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. Unfortunately, slow and little advancements have been taken to comply fully with the PLAs. For example, in Cartagena, the capital of Bolívar region,

¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Available: <http://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1325>

² Despite the Loss of "Yes" in the Colombian Referendum, Women Continue to Resist and Promote Peace in Colombia (2016). Available: <http://wilpf.org/despite-the-loss-of-yes-in-the-colombian-referendum-women-continue-to-resist-and-promote-peace-in-colombia/>

of the Bolívar region, women and women's organisations, including LIMPAL Colombia, were able to ensure that in the 2016-2019 Quadrennial Development Plan, a chapter entitled "Primero tú mujer, constructora de paz" ("First you, woman peacemaker"), a UNSCR 1325 PLA was included. However, a year and a half after the start of the implementation of the Development Plan, multiple incidences of corruption have resulted in reduced opportunities for women's political engagement in a dialogue with the administration and in delayed the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 PLA.

Many challenges remain in the implementation phase of the Final Peace Agreement. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes only minimally included gender-based approaches and strategies. DDR programmes were criticised for the restricted implementation effectiveness and slow response by the government and for perpetuating traditional gendered approaches that leave little opportunities for women to engage in the public domain and that actually increase their insecurity. Corruption allegations started to appear. Corruption not only impedes proper implementation of any policies and legal frameworks promised in the Final Peace Agreement, but also puts women's rights and the gender perspective at risk.

Not having a Colombian National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 hinders the Colombian government acting on the principles of conflict prevention, participation and gender-sensitive disarmament set out in UNSCR 1325. This also makes monitoring and analysing of women's situation in the country difficult and constrains local and high-level advocacy, as women peace activists and human rights defenders cannot use the main pillars of UNSCR 1325 to guarantee women's rights in post-conflict Colombia.

Legal Framework for Disarmament in Colombia

The Final Peace Agreement guarantees the full integration of insurgents into civilian life and allows for gender-sensitive analysis of the situation. According to the analysis conducted by UN Women, there are 100 gender provisions in the text of the Final Peace Agreement³. These provisions are specifically related to the incorporation of a gender analysis in the Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities (CFHBD), disarmament, security guarantees and justice mechanisms to hold perpetrators and their supporters accountable for homicides, massacres and attacks against human rights defenders. Legislative Act 03 of 2017 specifically mentions a commitment to gender equality guaranteed by the Constitution and requires the FARC-EP, as a new party, to openly state its commitment to gender equality, in accordance with the constitutional principles of gender equality and universality of rights, and to integrate these principles into its internal policies by means of special financing.

However, the legal framework still poses several challenges for women's engagement in societal transformation, especially when it comes to disarmament. For example, the "End of the Conflict", the Third Point of the Peace Agreement, does not guarantee the rights of women ex-combatants in the process of reintegrating into society. To align with the provisions of UNSCR 1325, it must allow them to be involved in the peace and DDR processes. Women's participation in disarmament processes ensures that the needs of women ex-combatants are taken into consideration.

The re-drafting of the Peace Agreement prior to the referendum has limited the role of women in society. From the beginning, many conservative political actors

³ Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace process (2016). Available: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/2/gender-and-the-role-of-women-in-colombias-peace-process>

⁴ Mujeres por el Desarme: Una Mirada al Desarme Desde la Resolución 1325 (2017). Available: <http://peacewomen.org/resource/mujeres-por-el-disarme-una-mirada-al-desarme-desde-la-resoluci%C3%B3n-1325>

have been against the use of inclusive language on gender, which the women's movement and other parties have been working hard to ensure was included in the accords⁵. Their efforts led to the replacement of phrases like “gender perspective” and “gender-based focus” with “particularly against women” in the Final Peace Agreement. In another instance, “stigma related to sexual orientation and gender identity” was diluted into a more general “struggle against stigmatisation”. These generalisations have significantly impacted and limited opportunities for further integration of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda on the ground. The entitlements of many people have been lost, including the rights of members of the LGBTI community to claim their rights as victims of the conflict.

At the same time, weak legal framework enables arms proliferation, which has significant impact on women⁶. Article 223 of the 1991 Constitution establishes the state monopoly on all arms, which is administered by INDUMIL, a Colombian state-owned company and the main supplier of weapons to the Colombian military and police forces. However, according to the 2016 investigative report by LIMPAL Colombia, *Disarming Life*⁷, which analyses arms trade in Colombia, civilians may acquire arms permission under three categories. These permits are issued at the discretion of the military authority that evaluates individuals' reasoning for gun ownership.

Prevention and eradication of illegal arms trafficking also remain limited by legal and regulatory barriers, which prevent the state from properly exercising its obligations and commitments. Colombia failed to ratify several international instruments of arms regulation aimed at preventing the use of these weapons for committing human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. These instruments include the Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War and the UN Arms Trade Treaty, which specifically recognises a risk of possible use of these arms to “commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children” (ATT, 2013).

⁵ Second Round: New Peace Agreement Between Colombia's Government and the FARC (2016). Available: <http://wilpf.org/second-round-new-peace-agreement-between-colombias-government-and-the-farc/>

⁶ The Lack of Regulation of Firearms Possession and its Impact on Women's Human Rights. Available: http://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/the-lack-of-regulation-of-firearms-possession-and-its-impact-on-womens-human-rights/

⁷ Disarming Life: Reflections on Resolution 1325, Disarmament, and Women in Colombia, The latest Research Report of WILPF Colombia (LIMPAL) (2016). Available: <http://www.peacewomen.org/node/96855>

Explosive Remnants of War and the UN Arms Trade Treaty, which specifically recognises a risk of possible use of these arms to “commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children”⁸.

While some legal framework exist to address women’s victims rights in the post-conflict settings, outdated permits to buy arms, corruption, over-polarised political context and lack of commitments to comply with international frameworks on disarmament, among others, significantly impact prospects for peace and stability in the country.

⁸ Arms Trade Treaty (2013). Available: <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/att>

The Impact of Arms Proliferation on Women

Throughout the history of armed conflict in Colombia, arms proliferation has resulted in physical and psychological impact on the communities where the violence occurred. Arms proliferation also has had a different impact on women due to structural conditions of discrimination and inequality paired with gender-specific violence such as torture, sexual and gender-based violence, among others. The gender-specific effects on women make it important for women activists to push for and be involved in disarmament initiatives.

Following the laying down of arms by the FARC-EP, women have witnessed changes in the dynamics of the war. Some of these changes represent significant improvements in women's daily lives. According to the findings of consultations conducted by LIMPAL Colombia with women involved in local processes in Bolivar, Meta and Caquetá, women noted the positive impact of disarmament processes on the security of their communities, including their increased access to employment opportunities in the countryside, the general reduction of violence and the increase in security for children. However, these changes did not address insecurities for women associated with the existence of other armed groups and the uncontrolled proliferation of arms throughout the country.

Experiences of Women in Meta

Vista Hermosa, Mesetas and La Macarena in the Meta region are some of the areas that were most affected by the conflict. The Agreement focused on disarming the FARC-EP, but it did not address arms available to other violent groups. The process of laying down of arms has also been met with mistrust and uncertainty. Many women are still experiencing fear generated by the presence of weapons that remain in the hands of illegal armed groups, criminal gangs and FARC-EP dissidents. These actors are still threatening to occupy the spaces previously dominated by the FARC-EP. The threat of armed violence is not limited to rural areas. It extends to

urban areas where other types of violence occur, including violence generated by criminal activity, micro-trafficking, sexual violence and the prevalence of patriarchy.

Experiences of Women in Bolívar

The experiences of women in the Bolívar region are also characterised by feelings of insecurity caused by the increase of criminal activity. In 2017, an increase in drug trafficking and theft was noted in Cartagena, especially in neighbourhoods with a large number of victims of armed conflict. Furthermore, there has been an increase in femicides and violence against women and girls, particularly sexual and gender-based violence. The main instruments used for coercion in these violent incidents are bladed weapons and firearms, both readily available.

Experience of Women in Caqueta

Women in the Caqueta region have stated that problems beyond arms proliferation remain evident in their areas. According to local women, after the laying down of weapons by the FARC-EP, violence against women in Caqueta actually increased. This demonstrates that it is not enough for the FARC-EP to set their arms aside. It is necessary for both the state and the general population to disarm by not only removing weapons from circulation, but also by changing social structures and ensuring gender-sensitive social transformation. As long as there are other armed actors, women will continue experiencing violence in urban and rural areas. Before or after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, women experience threats, intimidation and persecution.

The experiences of these women demonstrate that the laying down of arms by the FARC-EP does not represent the end of violence or solve inequality gaps and structural problems arising from the long history of conflict. New dynamics of violence are visible due to the emergence of new armed groups and criminal gangs, among others. The most vulnerable areas are villages in the south because they lack permanent state institutions and infrastructure, including roads, electricity and communication signals. However, the disarmament process generally gave women a feel of the peace process and the possibility to experience a new life in the country.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Peace is a process, and any progress towards achieving peace requires more than just signing the Final Peace Agreement. Structural problems within society require specific attention. These cannot be addressed by simply removing arms from societies, many areas remain neglected, guarantors and administrators of peace lack social and political purpose and corruption continues to limit the progress of the society and its transformation. Therefore, it is not enough for the FARC-EP to lay down their arms; it is necessary that both the state and the general population undergo total and complete disarmament, changing the current power relations and disarming their bodies, language and vision.

Weapons may seem to have no specific impact on the lives of women because weapons are used to commit violence against both men and women in the same manner. However, this assumption is flawed. While analysing the impact of small arms and light weapons on the lives of people, their impact on women is substantially higher because they are often used to commit sexual and gender-based violence.

Currently, the national legal framework developed on the basis of the Final Peace Agreement does not fully incorporate gender analyses or fully address women's specific needs. Despite opportunities, this limited scope presents new challenges for the effective exercise of women's rights and for strengthening gender equality overall.

The end of the conflict represents a historic opportunity for the country to establish new gender power relations and undergo a new gender-sensitive social transformation. Doing so will contribute to improving the lives of and the access to rights by women, and provides an opportunity for the society to find a new path for coexistence, building social cohesion and ensuring a proper foundation for sustainable and lasting peace.

In response to different challenges outlined in this report, the following recommendations of local women peace activists are proposed for the Colombian government:

1. Create and implement a **National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security** in consultations with civil society and with a sustained and allocated budget;
2. Generate programmes and strategies which **prevent new forms of violence**, including in the coca farming territories and rural areas;
3. Let **women ex-combatants** be involved in the DDR processes, including the verification of the disposal of arms caches;
4. Ensure a **gender-sensitive analysis and monitoring** throughout the implementation of all points included in the Final Peace Agreement;
5. Understand that **peace as a process** goes beyond disarmament of insurgent groups and requires the establishment of necessary conditions for social transformation based on the understanding of the impact of arms on women and the creation of conditions suitable for achieving gender equality;
6. Strengthen specific prevention, protection and justice mechanisms for **human rights defenders**. The threats, intimidation and persecution experienced by social leaders in Colombia cannot be hidden, either before or after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement;
7. Review and update **arms control regulations** to ensure the integration of gender analysis in their implementation;
8. Ratify the **UN Arms Trade Treaty** and the Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is a worldwide non-governmental organisation (NGO) with national sections covering every continent, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and an office in New York focused on the work of the United Nations (UN).

Since our establishment, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace. Our approach is always non-violent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.



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