

COLOMBIA: AN ONGOING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Humanitarian and protection challenges continue in Colombia. Displaced persons deserve the international community's commitment to ensure their hard-won peace is consolidated, and not jeopardised. Support for humanitarian and protection programs should remain, in the context of continuing violence and displacement.

The international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), would like to draw attention to the continued protection needs and humanitarian situation caused by the internal armed conflict and on-going violence in Colombia.

The peace accord between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP represents a remarkable opportunity to find durable solutions for millions of people affected by the conflict.

Additionally, the landmark agreement did not, however, usher in peace. Colombia is witnessing increased numbers of displacement due to ongoing clashes. An estimated 130,000 people will likely be displaced by the armed conflict in Colombia at the end of 2017. The number of force displacement events increased by 36% per cent in the first nine months of the year, compared with the same period in 2016 (OCHA). This was despite a 60 per cent reduction in violent clashes between armed groups from 2012 to 2016.

The killing of activists and community leaders, and threats and attacks targeting civilians are also on the rise. Some 284 municipalities were identified by the Humanitarian Country Team with high and medium high needs in the country (HNO - 2018). 4,5 million ("people in need 2018") still depend on humanitarian aid. Over 78 known deaths of leaders and members of social organizations have been reported, and at least 13 other suspected murders. It is therefore vital that the international community does not prematurely withdraw its support. While development efforts will be needed to overcome the impact of decades of war, it is critical not to make the mistake of interrupting humanitarian aid and protection efforts before alternative mechanisms are in place. **A sudden reduction in humanitarian assistance and protection could jeopardize the safety and well-being of newly displaced as well as vulnerable communities, and harm the transition to peace.**

Despite the continuing and evolving dialogues, ongoing violence and conflict have been preventing vulnerable communities from accessing basic services – including clean water, food, shelter

and education. There are also very serious protection concerns in areas such as Chocó, Córdoba, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo, where the emergence of new non-state armed actors is leading to serious humanitarian and protection needs; such as killings, forced displacement, forced recruitment of children, mobility restrictions and gender based violence. A recent Protection Cluster Analysis indicates that attacks on civilian targets, increased of 17% (Jan-Jul 2017) compared to the same period of the previous year. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations are disproportionately affected by the conflict. Over 70 per cent of people displaced in 2017 are indigenous and Afro-Colombians. The pacific area of Colombia, where these communities live, is one the areas most affected by the conflict. A large displacement occurred in October, 2017 in which 1,500 Afro-Colombians fled from Tumaco's urban area in self-protection to avoid armed groups clashing in their neighbourhoods. Also 1,142 indigenous Embera were displaced after the recent killing of the village governor (Oct. 2017).

Areas left by the FARC have been taken over by new armed groups, competing violently, with often severe consequences for civilian populations. Elsewhere, FARC dissidents have regrouped and remain active. These surviving armed groups are motivated by drug production and trafficking, extortion, smuggling, and illegal extraction of natural resources; all criminal activities that now determine the dynamics of violence.

International humanitarian organizations fill an important gap in response, identifying and assisting people in remote areas with little or no state presence. Municipalities affected by the conflict lack the capacity and resources to implement the country's strong legal framework for responding to the IDPs crisis and frequently fail to provide IDPs with sufficient assistance. Furthermore, there is a need to provide a rapid emergency response in case of displacement and mobility restrictions as the authorities frequently fail to respond in a

timely and integrated fashion¹. The main gaps in protection are related to GBV, forced recruitment and utilization of children, in addition to risks related to weapons contamination.

Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been disproportionately affected. Seven out of ten people displaced this year come from these communities. INGOs have been providing shelter kits, hygiene kits, education in emergencies, as both local and national authorities have been unable to access the remote rural communities. In the same region, INGOs have been assisting indigenous communities left unattended after a natural disaster that contributed to a malaria epidemic, providing humanitarian assistance through hygiene and household kits, wash livelihoods and disaster risk reduction assistance. In both cases, affected populations cannot access the authorities and due to threats, increasing numbers of affected people do not register as internally displaced. The lack of registration means no assistance is received from the national response system, an important gap that international humanitarian organisations continue to struggle to close.

9 in 10 people displaced by Colombia's civil war (7.2 million total) have yet to receive compensation promised for crimes committed against them. This situation should be addressed with agile funding instruments, solid needs-based programs and stakeholders involved in all parts of the country. A sustainable peace can only be achieved if extreme vulnerabilities, still widespread among conflicted affected populations, are effectively overcome.

In the context of the political efforts to end five decades of armed conflict we would like to highlight the importance of a humanitarian and a protection response in the context of continuing humanitarian needs, specially at a time when

humanitarian funding is under pressure and key factors such as OCHA and ECHO have faced budget cuts. This coupled with reducing capacity in the national response to new internal displacements is threatening to leave important humanitarian and protection needs unmet. Further reduction in funding and presence would have a very serious negative impact on the international humanitarian community's ability to respond to existing and new humanitarian needs in Colombia. In the fragile period while the peace agreement is implemented it is essential to ensure that humanitarian and protection needs are met to prevent destabilisation of the situation on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. While we remain optimistic about the prospects for a sustainable peace in Colombia the shift from a humanitarian to a developmental paradigm will be a long-term process. Support for humanitarian programs therefore should not be reduced until adequate systems are in place to ensure the needs of vulnerable communities are met.
2. International community have a respected voice that should continue being used for the benefit of the affected people. Advocacy is necessary to address the needs of those who need it the most.
3. We strongly recommend the extension of the current designation of RC/HC Mr. Martin Santiago Herrero, as Humanitarian Coordinator for Colombia. The continuity of a clear and strong humanitarian leadership is essential to ensure a successful transition phase, where peace dividend is still to be seen in the territories.
4. OCHA should maintain its presence in Colombia. The humanitarian coordination and response in areas affected by conflict is key, specially at a time where a large OCHA geographical presence is under reduction.

¹ 70.4% of the displaced population did not receive any immediate assistance before the registration at the victim's registration system (RUV). Comisión de Seguimiento y Monitoreo al Cumplimiento de la Ley 1448, 2015.

