One-year anniversary of the peace process: the humanitarian perspective

FARC-EP remains principal participant in forced-displacement events

It is now just over a year since the peace process began between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP guerrilla, on 18 October 2012. During that year, there has been a slight reduction in the number of displacements, attacks on civilians and antipersonnel mine (APM) accidents, as compared with the same period between October 2011 and October 2012. This reduction is explained by the so-called unilateral ceasefire declared by FARC-EP between December 2012 and January 2013.

During the past year of negotiations, nearly 38 per cent of mass-displacement events were caused by armed confrontations between FARC-EP and the military, while 18 per cent were caused by FARC-EP attacks. FARC-EP was thus involved in more than half of all mass-displacement events during this period. The Pacific coast region was by far the most affected region.

FARC-EP increases participation in armed confrontations

In the year before the peace talks, the hostilities between FARC-EP and the national armed forces represented 23.5 per cent of the armed actions monitored by OCHA. During the negotiations, this percentage rose to 35 per cent: an increase of nearly 50 per cent. The most significant increase during the negotiations was in the percentage of direct armed actions attributed to FARC-EP.
FARC-EP was involved in more than half of all mass-displacement events and in 35% of all armed actions since the beginning of peace dialogues.

Geographically, the distribution of these events was more dispersed than in the case of mass displacements, with Cauca and Antioquia being the most affected, but with events recorded in south-central Colombia and along the Venezuelan border. The number of death threats issued against civilians also spiked by more than 50 per cent during the past year of negotiations. The north-west and the Caribbean coast, where the land-restitution process is under way, were the most affected by these threats.

Government and FARC-EP must be aware of the risks of a worsening humanitarian situation caused by the continuing armed conflict. Both parties should make a joint announcement regarding minimum humanitarian criteria to be followed in the conflict.

Peace-talks continue during “Black October” campaign

The peace-talks had an important advance in early November with the agreement of the second of six points on the peace talks agenda. This was preceded during October by a significant escalation of FARC-EP armed actions. These focused on mining and energy infrastructure, making use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) along the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders and the Pacific coast. In some areas as Arauca in the Venezuelan border, these FARC-EP actions were supported by ELN guerrilla. The “Black October” campaign by the FARC-EP coincides with the new “Sword of Honor” government military campaign, which plans a military expansion in south-central Colombia, a traditional stronghold of the guerrilla group.

Dialogues need to respect minimum humanitarian criteria

The Instituto de Estudios sobre Conflictos y Acción Humanitaria (IECAH) published a report in April 2013 that analyses potential humanitarian scenarios of the peace talks. The report states that the humanitarian situation in Colombia remained stable, particularly in areas such as the Pacific coast region and the south-east. However, in a recent review of events since the report’s publication, the report’s researchers found that several departments in Colombia continue to show deteriorating humanitarian indicators, such as the placement of APMs, recruitment of minors, sexual and gender-based violence, and confinement of entire communities. The grave impact on indigenous people and afro-colombians one year since the start of peace negotiations appears to be worsening.

IECAH stresses the need for the peace dialogues to directly broach humanitarian issues, and that there exists a need for the Government and FARC-EP to be aware of the risks of a worsening humanitarian situation caused by the continuing armed conflict. Both parties should make a joint announcement regarding minimum humanitarian criteria to be followed in the conflict. The role of international humanitarian organizations continues to be crucial to ensure access to certain areas and to protect victims in fulfillment of humanitarian principles.

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1 This section was contributed by Luisa Fernanda Pineda and Francisco Rey. Instituto de Estudios sobre Conflictos y Acción Humanitaria IECAH. www.iecah.org

Increase in conflict’s impact on civilians

There has been a steady increase in the number of armed confrontations since July, according to OCHA’s Monitor information system. FARC-EP attacks were the most common in October, representing more than one third of all events, followed by armed confrontations between the guerrilla group and the military, which represent a fourth of all events.

Humanitarian impact of energy-and-oil infrastructure attacks

The Pacific port city of Tumaco, Nariño, near the Ecuadorian border, lost power for more than three weeks following FARC-EP’s repeated attacks on surrounding energy infrastructure. Other populations were also affected, as 24 such attacks were registered over October. However, the actual number of attacks is probably higher, since these types of events are hard to detect. The attacks occurred primarily along the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders.

FARC-EP’s IED attacks on oil infrastructure were the most common of these attacks during October. In the Venezuelan border, departments of Arauca and Norte de Santander, at least 60 attacks on oil infrastructure have been reported in 2013. As in Tibú, in Norte de Santander, this type of attack causes water contamination, which leads to water services being cut; crop damage, which increases food insecurity; and damage to homes, which leads to the displacement of many families.

Attacks lead to significant gap in response mechanisms

The humanitarian community is concerned about the lack of an adequate response mechanism following the above-mentioned attacks. No institution is legally obligated to respond, and oil companies pay no compensation to affected people, since a third party is responsible for damaging the oil pipelines. Oil-and-electric companies repair the infrastructure damage, but there is no direct response for affected people. The UARIV does not consider the indirect victims of the attacks within the framework of the 2011 Victim’s Law.

Land-restitution leaders targeted

The number of attacks on civilians has increased steadily since July. In October, Monitor\(^3\) catalogued 114 such events, which is well above the average for the year and is now the high point for all of 2013. Death threats comprise nearly two out of five of these incidents. Land-restitution leaders were the most targeted, in threats that extended to 10 departments during the month, with a concentration along the Caribbean coast where the land-restitution process is more advanced. Three men and two women working on land restitution were assassinated in different locations in the country.

The NGO Human Rights Watch\(^4\) (HRW) warned that the risk situation for land-restitution claimants and leaders was putting the Victim’s and Land Restitution Law of 2011 at risk of failure. The report documented the situation of nearly 500 land claimants and restitution

\(^{3}\) Monitor categorization system: http://bit.ly/18FSvQ0
leaders in 25 departments who had denounced these threats since early 2012. HRW notes that while the Government has implemented some protection measures, these measures are inadequate due to the scale of the problem. The report notes several points of concern: accountability for threats and attacks against land claimants has been weak, which means little effective deterrence for such crimes; few people have been prosecuted for acts of forced displacement and land seizure, meaning the perpetrators can oppose restitution through violence and intimidation; and the successors of the paramilitaries in different regions continue to demonstrate a strong operational structure, which allows them to abuse claimants.

**Protection concerns in Caquetá and Putumayo**

The situation in Caquetá, south-central Colombia, is alarming. At least 34 teachers renounced their teaching jobs last month, and 50 families received death threats and are considered at high risk of displacement. The Ombudsman’s Office reported threats against at least four local ombudsmen. This area was a focal point of the August protests, and some protesters could be the target of future threats. During the October indigenous protests, organizers reported threats by PDAG members.

On the Ecuadorian border in Putumayo, FARC-EP’s “Black October” campaign was accompanied by political activity and social control in the area. A *Manual for Co-existence* was found in circulation by FARC-EP for enforcement in rural areas in seven municipalities. It includes instructions for permitted hours for movements, prohibitions on participating in State-sponsored social programmes, and limitations on economic activities and religious practice. It also instructs the families of police and military personnel to sell their properties and leave the area. Several Catholic priests were recently threatened; six reportedly left the department.

**Armed confrontations and APM-UXO cause forced displacement**

Four mass-displacement events were reported in October along the Pacific Coast and northern Colombia (see map). Along the border with Ecuador in Nariño, oil infrastructure attacks displaced 10 families. They are ineligible for State assistance from the UARIV as they are not considered to be victims of the conflict in accordance with the Victim’s Law of 2011.

In the Nariño municipality of Ricaurte, a group of about 750 Awá indigenous people were displaced following repeated armed clashes between FARC-EP and the military (see *Flash Update*). The community was previously displaced in February 2013 (see *Sitrep*) and stayed for six months in shelters unsuitable

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**# Attacks against civilians Oct 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>#Attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Caquetá</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Arauca</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Córdoba</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sucre</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Antioquia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIDIH/Monitor – OCHA

Credit: FAO/Milton Pantoja.
Temporary shelters in Awá Nulpe Medio Alto Río San Juan indigenous reservation, Ricaurte (Nariño), Septiembre 2013.

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for such a large group. Some of the group returned to their place of origin, but non-State armed group presence and Antipersonnel Mines (APM) - Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) contamination contributed to their decision to become displaced. Repeated displacement is unfortunately common in some areas of the country where inadequate assistance is provided. The IDPs finally took shelter in temporary shelters. A MIRA needs evaluation carried out in September (see Flash MIRA) confirmed priority needs in protection, food security and nutrition, and water and basic sanitation.

Armed confrontations between FARC-EP and the military injured two civilians and displaced at least 300 Afro-colombians from seven communities in Buenos Aires, Cauca, in the north of the department. Local Humanitarian Team (LHT) members have complemented State response to this emergency. However, the community needs livelihood recuperation due to extensive APM-UXO contamination in the area, which has led to the suspension of agriculture activities and classes in local schools.

**Humanitarian access limitations reported**

According to estimates by OCHA and LHT members, in October at least 24,800 people remained confined in 10 departments. There were no reports of new confinements in October, but in several locations there were reports of movement and humanitarian access limitations that may lead to confinement.

In Buenos Aires, Cauca, where several communities are displaced, others decided against displacement but face movement limitations due to repeated armed confrontations near their homes. These limitations are affecting the communities’ food security. Along the Pacific coast in Bagadó, Chocó, Embera indigenous communities reported extensive APM-UXO contamination in their territories. At least 41 per cent of confinement events so far in 2013 are reportedly connected to APM-UXO.

In October, FARC-EP placed an armed lockdown in Chocó, along the Pacific coast (the second lockdown this year). All land and river transportation was halted in the department for three days. This was interpreted as the group demonstrating its power and control in the area, but it could cause serious humanitarian problems if extended, given the poor access to most communities in this department.

Although the lockdown was short and had only a limited impact on the humanitarian situation, the department’s vulnerability means that such lockdowns could isolate as much as half of the local population, lead to mass displacement, cut off food supplies and interrupt classes (see Sitrep).

In northern Colombia on the border between Antioquia and Bolívar, there were rumours through late October of an additional lockdown by FARC-EP following the circulation of an order prohibiting all transportation and commercial activity in the area. Many residents were afraid and moved to nearby rural areas or municipal seats.

During the month, incidents affected the operations of humanitarian actors and medical missions in Chocó on the Pacific coast and on the Ecuadorian border in Putumayo. There were reports of direct attacks on humanitarian workers in both locations. Many humanitarian actors suspended operations during the indigenous minga march as a preventive measure.
On the anniversary of peace negotiations, reflections on humanitarian trends

The Colombian NGO Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM) documented 144 civilian victims of APM, UXO and IED during the year of peace negotiations with FARC-EP. Sixty of these people were minors.

FARC-EP continues to use APM and explosive devices as a principal weapon. Civilians pay the consequences of this strategy. APMs impose movement limitations on civilians, particularly children, inhibiting them from enjoying their rights, with a particular impact in areas such as the Ecuadorian border, including Putumayo and Nariño, in north-western Colombia, in Antioquia and along the Venezuelan border in Arauca and Norte de Santander.

CCCM, which has worked on mine action since 2000 in Colombia, proposed a “Special Agreement on Antipersonnel Mines” to the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP to protect non-combatants in conflict areas. On 18 October, CCCM issued two letters to the public requesting that the agreement is included in negotiations in Havana.

Civilian humanitarian demining begins

In 2005, Colombia suffered one of its worst years in terms of mine victims, with 1,181 dead or injured. Fifteen-year-old Gloria Nancy Vásquez was one of those victims. She was riding a mule in Antioquia, north-western Colombia, which is one of the country’s most mined areas. The mule stepped on a mine and died instantly; Gloria suffered serious injuries to her leg, waist and arms.

Eight years later, 23-year-old Gloria joined the British NGO HALO Trust, the first civilian humanitarian demining organization accredited in Colombia. She is now one of 22 women out of 63 trained to demine in Colombia. She says: “I don’t want what happened to me to happen to anyone else.”

On 18 September 2013, humanitarian demining operations began in northern Colombia, and just one day later the HALO Trust team found its first minefield in El Morro, just 500 metres from the village of Puerto Venus. This discovery will help improve the lives of at least 1,000 local residents, as it improves the security conditions in the area with the local community.

There have been many achievements in the three years since the process began, and today there is a legal and theoretical framework with a Quality Management System that includes an accreditation process. There is political will from the Government to engage in the process, as the only former demining operator in existence was the Army’s...
Civil humanitarian demining began in Antioquia, Bolivar and Santander, some of the country’s most mined areas.

Humanitarian Demining Batallion (BIDES for its Spanish acronym). BIDES will engage in the accreditation process to ensure safe and efficient demining operations.

Among many future challenges is to define the exact nature of the threat and the extent of mine contamination in Colombia. Non-Technical Studies will be implemented, including a diagnosis and initial stage of humanitarian demining. This will allow for improved information management and to free land that today is suspected of mine contamination according to the mine database IMSMA. These activities are fundamental for the implementation of land-restitution processes, as 20 municipalities in four departments were prioritized for demining supporting the National Land Restitution Unit program, in 12 of them civilian humanitarian demining will be carried out.

Locating and destroying a mine is not an unusual process, but in the case of Colombia it needs to be analysed how and where this will be possible. Where it is impossible, the main priority will continue to be Mine Risk Education (see “Stories from the Field”) and assistance to victims. The final objective is to achieve integral mine action, which leads to an improved response to communities’ needs when security and protection considerations allow.

The United Nations in Mine Action team in Colombia offers technical assistance, training and recommendations to help the sector assist people most affected by landmines.

Flooding and wind storms affect thousands

Information gaps delay assistance to affected people

The second rainy season began in September and was the strongest along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. Preliminary official figures from Unidad Nacional para la Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres (UNGRD) indicate that about 18,000 people were affected in October, three fifths by flooding and the remainder by wind storms. These figures are consolidated at the national level and based on assistance requests by local authorities. However, the components of the National Disaster Response System reported larger numbers at the local level, which have yet to be consolidated into the proper formats for reporting.

Difficulties evaluating the impact in rural areas constrain local response capacity, and information gaps affect the data-consolidation process.

On the border between Sucre and Córdoba on the Caribbean coast, the San Jorge River flooded several swamps and lowland areas, affecting about 3,250 families in two municipalities. According to local authorities, further flooding is inevitable during the current rainy season, which runs into mid-December, since flood-mitigation projects have been suspended until the rains stop.

In the Pacific port of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca, flooding at the end of September damaged at least 1,400 homes in rural areas, as well as local health posts and community centres. A community of 66 families was...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>#People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Cauca</td>
<td>4,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalena</td>
<td>4,175</td>
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<tr>
<td>Córdoba</td>
<td>3,155</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risaralda</td>
<td>1,648</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boyacá</td>
<td>1,253</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17,767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No data available disaggregated by gender

Source: UNGRD

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8 Information system recommended by the United Nations for basic data management on integral mine action. It establishes data collection, information analysis and project management. It is used by antipersonnel mine centres at the national and regional levels in Colombia, and by mine-action project implementers.
severely affected. UNHCR was already carrying out community-strengthening activities in that area. It reported urgent needs in food security, shelter, health and early recovery.

In Huila, south-central Colombia, about 2,500 people were reportedly affected by wind storms, and at least 311 homes were damaged.

**National Disaster Response System advances prevention and awareness-raising initiatives**

A World Bank study estimated that 44 per cent of Colombia is exposed to a high or medium seismic threat, and that 86 per cent of the population lives in these areas.\(^5\) Seismic activity is stable in Colombia, but the risk of earthquakes is steadily rising due to increasing population and poor infrastructure. When these factors are combined with issues such as forced displacement, which typically displaces people to slum areas, many people find themselves in situations of double vulnerability.

To increase awareness of the dangers of earthquakes, the fifth Annual District Evacuation Exercise was held in Bogotá in October, followed by the third Annual National Evacuation Exercise for much of the rest of the country. Approximately 3.2 million people participated in 300 municipalities and 23 departments, which represents a 60 per cent increase from last year.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) participated with 13 officials who were observers in 10 departments and 11 crisis rooms around the country. Based on lessons learned and best practices, a risk-management culture continues to grow in the country. Testament to this, the HCT identified gaps and potential joint actions.

As in 2012, OCHA and UNGRD activated the platform http://yoestuveaqui.co. It provides real-time mapping of the evacuation process among participants in the evacuation exercise. More than 350 reports and 1,100 social media messages were included on the platform, which also geo-referenced photos and videos. The tool is based on Ushahidi, which was implemented in the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. If there is an earthquake in Colombia, it is hoped that such collaborations will ensure that these tools reduce suffering and save lives.

**ERF projects respond to displacement**

In October, a new Emergency Response Fund (ERF) project was approved to respond to emergencies caused by armed conflict.

Along the Venezuelan border in the Catatumbo region, Norte de Santander, the Norwegian Refugee Council will work on protection and education in emergency needs among children affected by forced displacement, or who are at risk of displacement. The project will benefit local teachers, school directors and other education entities in the region.

**New ERF projects launched in October**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Funding US$</th>
<th>Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Emergency Type</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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\(^5\) Analysis of Disaster risk management in: un aporte para la construcción de políticas públicas. Banco Mundial Colombia, GFDRR. Marzo 2012.
Humanitarian Country Team prepares Humanitarian Needs Overview, Strategic Response Plan for 2014 during October

The month of October included intense preparation for 2014, with the preparation of a series of important documents designed to identify the main humanitarian needs, responses and gaps in the country during 2013 and plan for 2014. On 8 October, a Humanitarian Needs Overview Workshop reviewed the findings from the prioritization process carried out in September. This prioritization process involved the collection of Key Humanitarian Indicators and project data from members of the humanitarian community by department. Part of the process involved the rigorous analysis of this data in order to identify key gaps to be attended in 2014, thus prioritizing geographic areas for intervention. The Workshop identified priority areas for expanded assistance in the coming year, noting the need for improved assistance in south-central Colombia, where current presence by the humanitarian community remains limited.

On 22 October, the Humanitarian Country Team carried out a retreat to review the Humanitarian Needs Overview exercise and a draft of a Strategic Response Plan to attend identified needs and gaps, taking into account not only geographic areas, but also sectoral and population-group priorities. For 2014, the HCT will prioritize Protection, Food Security and Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Health interventions. The resulting Strategic Response Plan for 2014 will provide the guiding framework for new joint interventions throughout Colombia, helping to guide donor priorities and provide a strategic vision for the Humanitarian Country Team throughout the coming year.

Stories from the field

Indigenous youth educate to save lives

Text and photos: Angela Hurtado, OCHA Colombia.

Liliana Guejía, Elvia Coscué and Paola Colcué live in northern Cauca, a department of south-western Colombia. They have three things in common: they are young, indigenous and the only women in their community who are dedicated to antipersonnel mine risk education. The three, together with another three men, make up a group of youth leaders who work with the slogan “learn, teach and help”. Their aim is to prevent more people, especially children, becoming victims of these deadly devices.

“Whenever I leave my home, I know that I have to come back healthy for my children,” says Liliana. She teaches self-protection, particularly to her children, in northern Cauca, the second most conflict-affected area in the country. In 2012, landmines injured 21 children in northern Cauca. Liliana is 25 years old and a mother of four children between 4 and 10 years old. They are among the main participants in her classes on what not to touch, how to find safe paths, and what you should do in an area contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance.

“I’ve never seen a landmine, but now the youths in our community take care regarding what they’ve learned about mines and what we should do,” says Elvia, the youngest of the three at 23. Elvia was born in Toribío, a municipality in the area with frequent armed confrontations between the Army and FARC-EP guerrillas. Since she was 17, her father has supported her in her role as leader. She would like to continue leading in her community, as she has already worked as an indigenous Council Secretary in San Francisco. Elvia dreams of one day becoming a human rights...
defender.

Paola, who is 25, puts all her energy into training. She makes sure that her students, who are indigenous youths with many points of view on the conflict in the area, can find new opportunities living in the indigenous territory. Paola’s leadership has meant that other indigenous territories in Cauca adopt these classes to ensure that children remain calm in conflict. She is sure that the key to education in emergencies is through the youngest children. “They are so intelligent, they learn everything so quickly. From their experience the entire community can learn to be protective,” she says.

The training, led by Liliana, Elvia, Paola and other youths from the indigenous leadership training school, is carried out through a UNICEF project designed to reach 2,000 indigenous children and youths living in northern Cauca. The project is partly financed by the Central Emergency Response Fund and supported by the Local Humanitarian Team. Their stories are a reflection on how to guarantee resistance against the effects of the conflict, and how to maintain their indigenous identity and thus preserve their peoples and territories.

Thanks to these training sessions, indigenous youths and children in northern Cauca are more aware of the dangers of landmines in their territories. Through play and education, they are learning to overcome a serious situation so that they can one day be free of mines and other deadly explosives and remnants of war.