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## Colombia's Peace Process Sputters on First Anniversary of Historic Accord

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A year after the government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) rebel group signed their historic peace treaty ([NotiSur, Jan. 6, 2017](#)), advocates for continuing a war that cost at least 225,000 lives and incalculable material damage seem to be gaining the upper hand.

Nov. 24, the first anniversary of the long-sought deal, might have been a moment of public celebration for President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño, better known as Timochenko, his nom de guerre. But due to the state's failure to fulfill certain aspects of the accord, along with numerous obstacles put in place by right-wing lawmakers and the Supreme Court, the two were instead forced to meet privately and discuss what the government can do to reactivate the process and offer the former combatants the security conditions and guarantees they need to reenter civilian life and participate in formal politics.

To end the more than half-century-long civil war, the former guerrillas surrendered their weapons to UN personnel and created a political party—the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Common Alternative Revolutionary Force)—that preserves their well-known acronym and, most importantly, their veteran leader ([NotiSur, Sept. 22, 2017](#)). Londoño plans to represent the nascent party in next year's presidential elections.

Four days before the peace-deal anniversary, the FARC leader sent an open letter to Santos asking for a meeting and denouncing the assassinations of, and threats against, demobilized guerrillas, social activists, and human rights defenders. He also lamented the fact that land had not been given to former combatants, as agreed. And he criticized changes to the transitional justice portion of the peace accord that practically free the paramilitaries and politicians implicated in so-called “parapolitics”—a murky intersection of interests between lawmakers, paramilitaries and drug traffickers ([NotiSur, Sept. 12, 2008](#))—from all responsibility.

“We're alarmed, not just by the state's failure to fulfill various aspects of the agreements, but by the audacity with which different institutions are acting in open defiance of the final, Nov. 24, 2016, accord, even modifying it in substantial ways,” Londoño wrote. He specifically called out the Senate and Supreme Court, accusing them of “erasing the essence of the peace accord by imposing their criteria in a kind of immoral and illegal renegotiation.”

### *Land and security*

While there were certainly political factors behind the creation of the FARC in 1964, the rebel group's primary concern was land. This was also the number one issue in the peace negotiations that concluded a year ago in Havana, Cuba, with the signing of an agreement that was supposed to give campesinos (agrarian workers) the right to a parcel of land on which to settle and set up family farms. Since then, complaints have been constant.

“When it comes to economic and social reincorporation in a concrete sense, nothing has begun,” Pastor Alape, another former guerrilla leader and a member for more than two years of the peace-talks delegation in Cuba ([NotiSur, Jan. 15, 2016](#)), said Oct. 16. “No project has yet to be developed with the resources promised in the agreement. Many [projects] have been proposed, but none have gotten off the ground for the sole reason that in this country of latifundios [large estates] and virgin lands, there’s no land! There aren’t any plots for the campesinos.”

A survey done by the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (National University of Colombia) found that 66% of the former rebels have rural origins and that 80% hope to work in farming.

Given the coordinated assassinations suffered in the 1980s by the Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union, UP), a political party founded by ex-guerrillas ([NotiSur, May 31, 1988](#)), the number two priority for the FARC in the peace talks was to have security guarantees allowing them to enter into formal politics. And yet, since the agreement was signed, there has been an increase in killings of, and aggressions against, ex-rebels, social leaders, and human rights defenders.

Work done by the Universidad Nacional, the Centro de Investigaciones y Educación Popular (Center for Research and Popular Education), the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (Colombian Jurists Commission), and the Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation) found that in the first 11 months of this year, 94 activists involved in the peace process had been murdered—a chilling average of one every 84 hours. The same day that Santos and Londoño met, the government, for security reasons, had to relocate Henry Castellanos, a rebel leader from the southwestern department of Tumaco. Several weeks earlier, in attacks on Oct. 30 and Nov. 1, two members of the FARC party were gunned down and five others injured by assassins wielding machine guns. And on Oct. 2, members of the Fundación Legado (a foundation involving family members of war victims) and Juventud Rebelde, a youth group, received death threats.

### *Dangerous disillusionment*

What was perhaps the biggest wake-up call, nevertheless, came from Jean Arnault, head of the UN’s verification mission in Colombia and a special representative of the secretary general. During a forum titled “Reincorporation and Reconciliation, Dimensions of Peace Building,” held in Bogotá and organized by the newspaper *El Espectador*, the French diplomat made the surprise statement that, “at this rate, the [peace] accord is on its way to failing.” Arnault suggested that while the focus right now is on designing a model of justice to punish ex-combatants for their crimes, “it should instead be on reinserting the rebels into civilian life before they become too disillusioned and the cycle of violence swings back into motion.”

Arnault has plenty of reasons to worry about the fate of the peace process, *El Espectador* noted. For one thing, hundreds of former FARC members who were identified by Colombia’s Alto Comisionado para la Paz (High Commission for Peace) as being eligible for pardons are still jailed because the databases used by police and the judiciary have not been updated. Those who have been freed, the Bogotá daily went on to say, still have trouble accessing the banking system. The disillusionment Arnault referred to is such that dozens of ex-combatants and demobilized guerrilla leaders have made up their minds to return to their old jungle camps.

No official representative, member of Congress, or member of the judiciary responded to the UN delegate when he accused the state of squandering the opportunities for reconciliation that existed when the former guerrillas, before handing over their weapons, gathered in designated

concentration zones ([NotiSur, April 28, 2017](#)). During that time, Arnault noted, the state-run Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Learning Service) offered some technical-training courses, the Norwegian Refugee Council introduced its own education program, and the Labor Ministry trained some 5,000 ex-combatants in aspects of economic solidarity.

“But it was all for naught,” the UN representative argued, because the benefits those efforts might have rendered were diminished by “factors ranging from legal uncertainty to limited access to healthcare services for the people most in need: people with handicaps, injuries or chronic illnesses.”

### *‘A chance to act’*

For Arnault, all of this amounted to a missed opportunity, one that has left the ex-guerrillas feeling deeply disappointed as they wait, in vain, for all that had been promised them. And rather than address the problem, in his opinion, the state and the leading economic and political figures are absent, further undermining the process, he said. “It’s urgent that a general reincorporation plan be designed, because at this point it neither exists nor is it being visualized,” Arnault said.

The government’s high commissioner for peace, Rodrigo Rivera, called the UN delegate’s statements unfair and said problems of this kind should be talked about behind closed doors. “We’re surprised,” the special advisor said. “There are diplomatic channels for the kinds of concerns he raises. This just sends the message that there is some kind of diaspora of ex-FARC combatants.”

Londoño, on the other hand, seems to agree, for the most part, with Arnault’s assessment. In a letter “to the Colombian people”—issued before the one he addressed to Santos—the FARC party leader expressed “sorrow” for the serious disagreements that have arisen between the leaders of the former guerrilla force and for the disappointment that so many former fighters feel. He said he feels badly about all that is happening, “with comrades still in prison, a dissent group in the south of the country that is still armed, and with problems regarding the list of members being pardoned.”

The rebel leader said that he’s committed, nevertheless, to making the peace process work. “I sincerely ask those who don’t believe in peace to go about their own business and give those of us who believe in the ability of the Colombian masses to struggle and turn what was accomplished in the negotiations into reality a chance to act,” Londoño said.

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