



Neither in times of war nor in times of peace: May the defense of human rights not cost us one more life

Analysis of the situation of female defenders of human rights in Colombia since 2012*

May 2017

The insecure situation of human rights defenders in Colombia is alarming, particularly since December 1, 2016, the initiation date of the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending Conflict and Building a Stable and Long-Lasting Peace, signed between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP.

The Ombudsman¹, in her Risk Report N. 010-17 A.I of March 30 of the present year, as well as the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, in his 2016 annual report on the human rights situation in Colombia of the past March 14, and the nongovernmental program Somos Defensores, in its 2016 Annual Report of the System of Information on Aggressions Against Human Rights Defenders, agree in recognizing, despite some differences in the data, that the situation is worrisome.

The reports highlight that the work on peace and defense of the territories, in the current conjuncture of reorganization of armed actors in the places where the FARC-EP has begun the process of reintegration into civilian life, as well as the weak presence and effectiveness of the State and the persistence of levels of impunity in these cases, have complicated the situation of human rights defenders, increasing the risk in which they find themselves.

There were 34 human rights defenders killed in Colombia between December 1, 2016 and April 30, 2017, of which 10 were women². This figure is overwhelming and evidence that in only 5 months, assassinations numbered between 41% and 61% of the total defenders assassinated per year between 2012 – the year in which the peace process began – and 2016, allowing for the projection, in addition, that if immediate measures of prevention and protection are not taken, 2017 could be the most difficult year for those who carry out this work in contemporary times. For the particular case of women, the

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¹ Defensoría del Pueblo

² Figure consolidated from an intersecting of the databases of Programa Somos Defensores, the portal ¡Pacifista!, and press releases from social and human rights organizations. In this consolidation, trans women have been included in the count as women, which differs from their treatment in other databases and reports.

situation of these 5 months becomes more complex, as in these months more female defenders were murdered than in 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015.

In this situation, social, community, and human rights organizations have called for the attention of the State, demanding guarantees for the legitimate exercise of their work, as well as the prompt implementation of the agreements in the Final Agreement in relation to the safety of social leaders and human rights defenders, and the guarantee of the right to participation. Faced with the painful irony that at historic levels of reduced confrontation in the armed conflict³ and the abandonment of arms of the country's largest and most widespread guerrilla group, the risk of defending human rights has increased, the call of defenders has been: *May peace not cost us life*.

In this context Corporación Humanas, through its Observatory of Women, Peace, and Security, within the perspective of monitoring the Colombian State's fulfillment of Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on women, peace, and security, particularly in its participatory and protective components, analyzes the specific situation of female human rights defenders in the country. The level and nature of violence against women who exercise their political rights is fundamental to understanding the obstacles that impede or make difficult the significant participation of women in scenarios of advocacy, decision-making, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping.

The defense of human rights in Colombia has never been a simple job, not in times of war, not now, in times when termination and the hope of achieving peace seem possible. Although multiple structural and daily obstacles face women in the full exercise of their right to participation in the country, for years they have been able to cope with these to resist the armed conflict and to bet on the creative resolution of conflicts and the construction of peace. The peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP was the perfect stage for women to potentiate their lessons from so many years of resistance to the war and to influence the inclusion of their needs and interests, so that peace would not be built without them.

Thus, since 2012 they have deployed multiple national and local advocacy strategies surrounding this process, including communicative actions, mobilizations, creation of documents with proposals, thematic alliances, forums, and territorial peace agendas in municipal and departmental spaces. These actions allow their voices to reach Havana, as well as cement in public opinion not just enthusiasm for peace, but also the necessity that it include the interests of women, considering their differentiated affectations as victims and including specific measures for them. Additionally, once the Gender Subcommittee was established, it also supported their work within the Negotiating Table.

In this way, in the last five years, work for peace and peacebuilding on the national and territorial levels that has been developed over several decades by women strengthened and grew more visible and influential.

However, this aspect, considered positive, has had negative implications for the wellbeing, physical integrity, and life of women defenders. Their participation and advocacy has been "punished". In the

³ According to data from CERAC's last monitoring report of May 2, 2017, the fulfillment of the ceasefire has been almost completed by the parties. Since the initiation of the cessation eight months ago, fatalities or injuries in civil society due to armed actions between the parties have not been registered. It has been calculated that in the course of the peace process, 2,670 lives have been saved.

face of greater work and visibility around peace and social justice, the political persecution of which women have been victims has also increased. As we have been analyzing in previous years, in moments when there were key discussions and advances at the Negotiating Table, in which civil society and women were protagonists – such as the discussion on victims and justice, for example – approaching, with these actions, the possibility of the signing of the Final Accord, the attacks against them increased.

In this way, the evolution of individual aggressions against human rights defenders increased in the country throughout the four years of the peace process negotiations. Regarding the evolution of the situation of female defenders from 2012 – the year in which the peace process in Havana began – to 2016, one identifies an increase of aggressions against them of 6%, in relation to the total aggressions each year.

It is particularly noteworthy that 2015 was the year in which most female defenders were attacked, accounting for 40% of the total. That is, this year the increase compared to 2012 was 14 percentage points, coinciding with the key year of discussion on the fifth point about victims of the conflict.

Table N. 1. Aggressions against female human rights defenders: 2012-2016

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. female defenders attacked	92	85	221	271	155
Total aggressions against defenders	357	366	626	682	481
% female defenders	26%	23%	35%	40%	32%

Source: original production from: Programas Somos Defensores (2013) (2014) (2015) (2016) (2017).

Regarding the murders of female defenders, it has been possible to establish that since October 1, 2012 – the month in which the Negotiating Table was installed – and April 30, 2017, 48 female defenders were killed in the country (see table of murdered female defenders). Regarding the annual evolution one observes that, as with the number of individual aggressions against women, between 2012 and 2016 there is an increase, this time between 3% and 6%, in relation to the total murders of human rights defenders in the country. That is, the percentage representation of women has increased in relation to the total, which means that there has been an increase in the materialization of threats to life in most of the years of peace process negotiations, in relation to the starting point in 2012. Now, in comparison with the total female defenders murdered in 2016, in just 4 months 2017 already registers an increase of 72%.

Table N. 2. Murdered female human rights defenders: 2012-2016

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
No. female defenders murdered	7	11	6	10	11	8
Total murders of defenders	69	78	55	63	82	25
% female defenders	10%	14%	11%	16%	13%	32%

*January 1 to April 30

Source: original production from: Programas Somos Defensores (2013) (2014) (2015) (2016) (2017); Portal ¡Pacifista! (2017); Asociación Chaparral LGBTI (2017).

For the year 2015, one observes that although the total number of murdered defenders is less than the majority of the other years of the period, the proportion of women is greater, which confirms that this year was the most complicated in terms of security for female human rights defenders.

Now, the lack of information about the killed female defenders and the circumstances that surrounded these events implies that beyond the quantitative data about the murders, little information is available for analysis in each of the different databases and sources consulted. Thus in order to advance the necessary characterization of female defenders and the facts, in terms of leaderships, ages of the women, spaces and places where the events occurred, types of violence exercised against women to cause their death, and suspected perpetrators, a case-by-case tracking of information has been carried out in the national and local press, in press releases of social organizations, and in CINEP's Noche y Niebla database. The starting point of this tracking system was the identification of the name of the defender and the organization with which she was connected, aspects contained in the reports of Programa Somos Defensores and the portal ¡Pacifista!

Regarding the type of leadership or sector/subject in which women exercised leadership in defense of human rights, it was possible to identify information for all cases. It was found that the defenders killed between 2012 and April 30, 2017 were principally community leaders, LGBTI leaders, leaders of local community processes, countrywomen leaders, and victims' leaders. Particularly the community leaders, leaders of local community processes, and LGBTI leaders were most affected in their right to life, representing 28%, 13.5%, and 13%, respectively, of the total murdered female defenders. This situation is not accidental. On the one hand, both communal and local community leaderships are exercised at the territorial level, and as mentioned at the beginning of this document, the defense of territory and emerging disputes over territorial control of various armed groups are central factors in the configuration of risk involved in the work of defending human rights.

On the other hand, the persecution and murder of LGBTI female human rights defenders – in this case, all transgender women – finds an echo in the context of the growing rejection of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and of the recognition of the rights of those so positioned and their visibility.

Driven by conservative sectors of society and some evangelical and Christian churches, the peace process was signaled to promote “gender ideology” by seeking to guarantee the rights of women and the LGBTI population in the framework of negotiation points. The influence of these sectors managed not only to add votes for No in the Peace Agreement approval referendum carried out on October 2, 2016, but also has fortified, in the last years, a discourse of hate towards diversity, which one glimpses in the contents of the electoral campaigns which are approaching for the Presidency of the Republic, as well.

It is important to mention, in terms of the type of leadership, that in some accounts of the facts, consulted in the press, in addition to the principal leadership indicated, it is reported that the woman also worked for the rights of women. However, in the databases consulted, this category of type or character of human rights defense is not present.

Regarding personal characteristics of the women, it was possible to identify age in the majority of the cases, while it was impossible to consolidate additional data in a general way. Thus, the murdered female defenders were principally between 30 and 42 years old, followed by those between 43 and 55 and those between 17 and 29. It is, then, the leaderships of adult women which have been predominantly affected, which has a direct additional impact of discouraging the leadership of young women and new leaders.

As for the characteristics of the murder, the information found accounts for the department of the country in which it occurred, the place where the victim was found, the form in which the murder was committed (types of violence exercised and objects used), as well as the alleged perpetrators.

The murders of defenders in the period from 2012 to April 2017 occurred in 20 departments of the country, with notable intensity in Antioquia, Cauca, and Valle del Cauca. In these three departments, 40% of cases were registered. The geographic distribution of these murders coincides with the general dynamic of aggressions against human rights defenders in the country, since, in the consulted reports, these three departments are among the top five in attacks on this population.

Regarding the space in which the murder occurred or where the body was found, the identified information reveals that the majority of the women were killed in their home or in front of it, as well as on public roads while they were approaching home. Additionally, the reports mention “solitary and abandoned spaces”, in which the bodies of eight of the women were found, the majority of whom had been reported earlier as disappeared.

To cause the death of the women, principally firearms were used (68%), followed by short-strike weapons (11%). Most of the women were victims of multiple attacks, that is, more than one shot and multiple wounds with a short-strike weapon. Additionally, in 19% of the cases, they were victims of more than one violence: firearm impacts, wounds from short-strike weapons, strong blows (bodies found with severe trauma), attempts of hanging, some were beheaded, and one was impaled.

The reports also analyzed the state in which the body was found, identifying that 8% of the women were found semi-naked or naked. Although, in the definition of crime, only one case within the consulted sources mentions sexual offense, finding the naked or semi-naked body of a woman can imply that she was a victim of sexual violence in the context surrounding the murder: causing death does not require undressing the victim. The body found semi-naked, naked, and/or with explicit signs of violence in the genital zone has been associated with expressions of misogynistic motivation and humiliation⁴, as well as with the fact that women have historically been seen as sexual objects before being seen as political subjects.

The identification of multiple attacks and violence perpetrated against women in the context of their murder suggests the phenomenon of overkill⁵ and may constitute torture, being that in addition to the intention to cause death is the intention to cause the greatest suffering possible. This situation, in addition to indicating contempt for and dehumanization of the victim, implies that the murders were “exemplary”, given the brutality used and the notoriety of the caused suffering.

Regarding the type of weapon principally used, the need to advance with a greater control on the circulation of small and light weapons is evident, as established in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 in its indicators for the protection component: the greater control on the circulation of these weapons contributes to the protection and safety of women.

Finally, in relation to the perpetrators, the information found varies in the different sources, particularly in the way in which they are named. It is also the aspect about which the least information exists, as in

⁴ Fajardo, J., Pérez, J., & Agudelo, I. (2015).

⁵ Referring to the fact that more violence and attacks are perpetrated than are needed to cause death.

most cases it is presented as “unknown” or “without information”. However, in cases in which this information was identified, principally paramilitary groups were identified as responsible for the murder. This situation is consistent with the growing denunciation of social organizations about the existence and expansion in various regions of the country of paramilitary groups, which, according to the recent report presented by CINEP, ranked first as alleged perpetrators of human rights violations and political violence⁶.

It can be seen that the outlook for human rights defenders in the country is not encouraging. Women, in particular, have faced considerable increases in the violation of their rights, including the right to life, which has not only sought to cut specific leaderships but also, within the framework of the patriarchal society in which we live, sanctions the presence of women in the public and political world and tries to discourage new leaderships. In this context, there is urgent need not only to continue demanding effective preventative and protective measures for the defense of human rights, but also to remember that these must contain a gender-differentiated character and other characteristics.

Table N. 3. Female human rights defenders murdered: 2012 – 2017 (30 of April)

Defender	Year of murder	Sources
Aurelina Adarme Chasoy	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2012; El Tiempo (06/04/2012)
Luz Neida Gómez	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); Proyecto Vidas Silenciadas (s.f); Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (06/08/ 2012)
Sirena Paola	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 46; ElHeraldo.co (09/09/2012); Colombia Diversa (30/08/2012)
Fabiola Perea Perea	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); ElMundo.com (19/09/2012); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 46; Caracol Radio (18/09/2012);
Marina Vásquez	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); Caracol Radio (06/04/ 2012); Polo Democrático (03/11/2012)
Rosa Helena Bernal Pinto	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 46; Movimiento Mundial por los Derechos Humanos. (21/12/2012); Prensa Libre Casanare (18/12/2012)
Nancy María Miramá	2012	Somos Defensores Anual (2013); Informativo del Guaico (12/04/2012); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2012; Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (19/04/ 2012)
Elizabeth Gutiérrez	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2013
Alba Mery Chilito Peñafiel	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Somos Defensores, Informe Enero-Junio 2013; CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 47; Sol de Paz Pachakuti. (s.f).
Luz Johana López	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2013; CINEP- No. 47; La Patria (s.f)

⁶ CINEP. (2017).

María Angélica Grajales Ramírez	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2013; CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 47; Rubén Damián Goyes Ramírez (13/03/2013)
Isnelda Gutiérrez	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); El Tiempo (13 /10/2012); Somos Defensores, informe semestral Enero-Junio 2013; CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 47; Soacha Ilustrada. (s.f)
María Oliva Álzate Pérez	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Instituto Popular de Capacitación (26/07/2013); El Colombiano (26/07/2013)
Adelinda Gómez Gaviria	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 48; Red de hermandad y solidaridad con Colombia. (01/10/2013); Corporación Nuevo Arcoíris (02/10/2013)
Aurith Bravo Brun	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); El Universal (09/09/2013)
Diana Marcela Morales Arenas	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); Minuto30.com (22/10/2013); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 48; ElColombiano.com (22/10/2013)
Nancy Vargas	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 48; Colectivo de Abogados “José Alvear Restrepo” (15/10/2013)
Lida Olivero Mejía	2013	Somos Defensores Anual (2014); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 48; Radio Macondo (08/12/2013); Feminismo Afrodiaspórico (5/12/2013)
Edith del Consuelo Santos Jiménez	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 50; El Tiempo (10/06/2015)
Flor Nibe Rodríguez Rocha	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); El Tiempo (09/09/2014)
Nair Edilia Tay Torres	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); Radio Macondo (04/10/2014)
Johanna Quintero Pabón	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); Caracol Radio (10/10/2014)
Amalia Fernanda Meza	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); La Voz del Cinaruco (28/11/2014); Llanera.com (27/11/2014); El Espectador (27/01/2015)
Leydi Milena Méndez	2014	Somos Defensores Anual (2015); Llanera.com (27/11/2014); El Espectador (27/01/2015)
Camila Flores	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015; CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 51; Caribe Afirmativo. (s.f)
Juliana Andrea Pérez Lujan	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Minuto30.com (17/02/2015); La Voz de San Pedro (16/02/2015)
Elizabeth Méndez Sánchez	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); La Cariñosa (24/03/2015); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015; CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 51; Comité de solidaridad con América Latina (19/08/2015)
Wallis del Carmen Barriosnuevo Posso	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); El Heraldo (08/04/2015); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015
Viviana Agudelo Zapata	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015; CINEP. Banco de Datos de Derechos Humanos y Violencia Política; Minuto 30. (07/05/2015)
María Luz Lucero Figueroa	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015; Comité de solidaridad con América Latina. (s.f); Agencia Prensa Rural (02/06/2015); MiPutumayo (27/01/2015)
Charol	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); CINEP. Banco de Datos de Derechos

		Humanos y Violencia Política; El Heraldo (15/07/2015)
Liliana Ramos Largo	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); La W Radio. (27/07/2015); Periódico Virtual (27/07/2015)
Flor Alba Núñez	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 52; El Tiempo (10/09/2015); Noticias RCN. (10/09/2016)
Ofelia Mosquera	2015	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); CINEP- Noche y Niebla, No. 52
Nelly Amaya Pérez	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); El Espectador (18/01/2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2016; Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo - Ascamcat (17/01/2016); Rebelión.org (22/01/2016)
Marisela Tombe	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2015; Resumen Latinoamericano (29/02/2016); El Tiempo (01/03/2016)
Senelia Rengifo Gómez	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Somos defensores, Informe semestral Enero-Junio 2016; Nariño.Info (04/02/2016)
Nohora Hernández	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); La Opinión (17/08/2016)
Oriana Nicoll Martínez	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Aldía.co (19/08/2016)
María Fabiola Jiménez	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); Noticias Caracol (12/09/2016)
Cecilia Coicué	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); CM& (09/09/2016); Caracol Radio (08/09/2016); La W Radio (09/09/2016); El Espectador (08/09/2016)
Espólita Casina Teheran Acosta	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2016); La silla Vacía. (22/11/2016);
Marcelina Canacue	2016	Somos Defensores Anual (2017); ElHeraldo.co (25/11/2016)
Nataly Salas	2016	Pacifista (13/02/2017); El Espectador (06/12/2016); El Heraldo (03/12/2016); Pulzo (04/12/2016)
Yaneth Calvache	2016	Pacifista (13/02/2017); La W Radio. (11/01/2017)
Emilsen Manyoma	2017	Somos Defensores trimestral (2017); Pacifista (13/02/2017); El Espectador (20/01/2017); El Espectador (17/01/2017); El Colombiano (17/01/2017); frontlinedefenders.org (s.f)
Yoryanis Isabel Bernal Varela	2017	Somos Defensores trimestral (2017); Pacifista (13/02/2017); Contagio Radio. (30/01/2017)
Luz Herminia Olarte	2017	Pacifista (13/02/2017); Contagio Radio (10/01/2017); Telesur (09/02/2017)
Danna Méndez	2017	Opitastereo.com. (18/02/2017); El Cronista.co (19/02/2017); Asociación Chaparral LGBTI Diversa
Ruth Alicia López	2017	Somos Defensores trimestral (2017); El Tiempo (02/03/2017); Pacifista
Luz Ángela Anzola Tejedor	2017	Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela (07/03/2017); Partido Comunista Colombiano- Regional Meta (06/03/2017); Pacifista
Edenis Barrera Benavides	2017	Somos Defensores trimestral (2017); Revista Semana (21/03/2017); Las Chivas del Llano (20/03/2017)
Rubiela Sánchez	2017	Pacifista; RCN Radio (20/04/2017)

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