

# Targeted Killings of Social Leaders, Human Rights Defenders, and Ex-FARC Combatants in the Aftermath of the FARC Peace Accord



The young ladies who cooked our meals at the dining room of the Peace Community

by Professor John Dugas  
Kalamazoo College

On November 21, 2019, hundreds of thousands of Colombians flooded into the streets of cities and towns across the country to protest against the administration of President Iván Duque. Among the many reasons for the national strike was a justifiable anger over the targeted killing of social leaders, human rights defenders, and Ex-FARC combatants over the past three years. This disturbing social phenomenon has been occurring in Colombia since the signing of the final, revised peace accord with the FARC guerrillas in late November 2016.

The phenomenon of the targeted killing of activists is certainly nothing new in Colombia. Nevertheless, it has taken on some unique characteristics in this most recent period. And more disturbingly, it is taking place in a period that was supposed to usher in a time of peace and reconciliation among Colombians.

According to a recent joint study of

Cumbre Agraria, Marcha Patriótica, and INDEPAZ, there have been 817 targeted political assassinations between the signing of the final peace accord on November 24, 2016 and September 8, 2019: 666 social leaders and human rights defenders and 151 former guerrillas of the FARC in the process of reincorporation into civilian life (Cumbre Agraria, et al. 2019, pp. 13-14).

## The Killing of Social Leaders and Human Rights Defenders

Of the 666 social leaders and human rights defenders who have been murdered in Colombia since the signing of the peace accord in November 2016, 21 killings occurred in 2016, 208 in 2017, 282 in 2018 and 155 through September 2019 (Ibid, p. 13). The targeted killings of social leaders and human rights activists were carried out in 29 out of 32 departments. Nonetheless, despite the nationwide occurrence of these assassinations, over half of them were carried out in just four departments: Cauca

(133), Antioquia (92), Nariño (67), and Valle (55) (Ibid, p. 19).

The Jesuit thinktank CINEP has noted that the victims of this wave of killings often belong to small grassroots organizations working at the periphery of the country: they are members of Communal Action boards and indigenous reservations, promoters of peasant organizations, environmentalists, land claimants, and opponents of the extractive megaprojects. The apparent strategy is to assassinate and threaten the grassroots leaders of these various rural organizations and social movements in order to weaken them through fear (CINEP 2018). The data compiled by the recent Cumbre Agraria et al study backs up this claim. Specifically, between November 2016 and September 2019, in 468 cases of targeted political homicides, the victims were members of peasant, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, environmental or communal organizations. In other words, rural conflicts over land, territory and natural resources represented 70.27% of these killings (Cumbre Agraria, et. al 2019, p. 25).

With regard to the perpetrators of these crimes, there is a notable absence of concrete information. In a report on this phenomenon published in December 2018, the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ) pointed out that of 257 killings of social leaders and human rights defenders between November 24, 2016 and July 31, 2018, in 118 cases (45.91%) the authorship was unknown, while in another 35 (13.61%) it was possible to determine that the perpetrator was an armed group, although the identity of the armed group was unknown. In only 106 cases of targeted killings (41.24%) was there a presumed author (CCJ 2019, p. 34).

Of those cases with a presumed author, 44 killings were attributed to paramilitary



# FARC aftermath cont.

groups (17.12% of the total). Another 19 cases (7.39%) were attributed to groups made up of dissident FARC fighters who refused to demobilize or who later abandoned the peace process. State security forces were the alleged perpetrators of 14 killings (5.44%), of which the National Police was the alleged culprit in three killings and the National Army was the alleged victimizer in 11 killings. The ELN guerrillas were presumed to be the authors of eight killings (3.11%). Finally, four killings (1.55%) were attributed to private security groups, two (0.77%) to EPL guerrillas and 15 (5.83%), to civilians who were captured but whose membership in a group had yet to be established (CCJ 2019, p. 35).

CINEP has suggested that the difficulty in identifying presumed culprits results from a new mode of operation in which perpetrators “camouflage” their crimes by making them appear to be motivated by more mundane concerns. Hence, intentional killings are consciously designed to misleadingly appear as the result of common crimes such as robberies, hold-ups, extortionist loans, love affairs gone wrong, or simply neighborhood problems. According to CINEP, “This is how the truth about the victims is camouflaged in a high profile, but misleading way” (CINEP 2018, p. 5).

The ultimate tragedy of these social leaders and human rights defenders was expressed by Father Francisco de Roux, who currently leads the Truth Commission established by the 2016 Peace Accord. Speaking to family members of the victims, Fr. De Roux stated: “They were men and women of peace. They were convinced that the solution did not lie in arms and precisely for that reason they were extraordinarily vulnerable, and immensely valuable from an ethical perspective. In other countries, in other parts of the world, these men and these women would be national heroes. Here we kill them” (Semana 2018).

## The Killing of Former FARC Combatants

The disturbing killing of social leaders and human rights activists has been joined by an equally troubling campaign of exterminating former members of

the FARC guerrilla movement who demobilized after the signing of the final peace agreement on November 24, 2016. Between that date and September 8, 2019, 151 former FARC fighters in the process of reincorporation have been assassinated in Colombia: 2 in 2016, 38 in 2017, 76 in 2018 and 55 in 2019 through September 9<sup>th</sup> (Cumbre Agraria et al. 2019, p. 14). These homicides have occurred in 19 of 32 Colombian departments (Ibid., p. 21). Equally concerning, some 35 relatives of demobilized FARC guerrillas have been murdered: 15 in 2017, 11 in 2018 and 9 in 2019 (Ibid, p. 14).

There is genuine concern that the plight of the demobilized FARC guerrillas may end up replicating the tragic history of the Unión Patriótica (UP) in the 1980s and 1990s. The UP emerged with the first concerted effort to negotiate peace between the FARC and the Colombian state in the mid-1980s. As part of this process, the FARC created the UP as an unarmed legal political movement that was intended to become its political vehicle once it demobilized and returned to civilian life. When the peace process broke down definitively in 1987, the UP distanced itself from the armed activities of the FARC and continued as a legally-recognized leftist political movement. Despite its independence from the FARC, targeted killings over the next decade killed over 3,000 UP activists, while hundreds of other UP members were disappeared, thousands were displaced, and numerous others renounced their UP affiliation in an effort to survive the annihilation of the Unión Patriótica (Gómez Suarez 2010, 152-153).

In the present unsettled circumstances in Colombia, the continued targeted killing of former FARC combatants is likely to have two extremely negative consequences: First, if the trend continues it will incentivize an ever larger number of former guerrillas to abandon the peace process and return to armed combat. Colombian military intelligence estimates that some 2,300 fighters now belong to FARC “dissident” groups, which encompass fighters who never demobilized in the first place or who demobilized and subsequently returned to combat (Grattan 2019). Second, this phenomenon is likely to jeopardize the

prospect of achieving peace with the remaining guerrilla groups, particularly the ELN, which can anticipate having to survive a similar campaign of extermination should a peace accord ever be reached.

CINEP. 2019. *Violencia Camuflada: La Base Social en Riesgo*. (<https://www.cinep.org.co/publicaciones/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce/uploads/2019/05/2019509InformeViolenciaCamuflada2019DDHHCompleto.pdf>)

Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ). 2018. *¿Cuáles Son los Patrones? Asesinato de Líderes Sociales en el Post Acuerdo*. Diciembre. Bogotá: Comisión Colombiana de Juristas. ([https://coljuristas.org/centro\\_de\\_documentacion/documento.php?id\\_doc=636](https://coljuristas.org/centro_de_documentacion/documento.php?id_doc=636))

Cumbre Agraria, Marcha Patriótica, and INDEPAZ. 2019. *Informe Especial: Violación de los Derechos Humanos en Tiempos de Paz*. Septiembre. (<http://www.indepaz.org.co/wpcontent/uploads/2019/09/Informe-Violaciones-a-los-Derechos-Humanos-en-tiempos-de-Paz.-Septiembre-de-2019-18-09-19.pdf>)

Gómez-Suárez, Andrei. 2010. “U.S.-Colombian Relations in the 1980s: Political Violence and the Onset of the Unión Patriótica Genocide,” in Marcia Esparza, Henry R. Huttenbach, and Daniel Feierstein, eds., *State Violence and Genocide in Latin America: The Cold War Years*. Routledge.

Grattan, Steven. 2019. “Killings, Threats, and Delays Disenchant Colombia’s Ex-FARC,” Reuters, 2 September. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-farc/killings-threats-and-delays-disenchant-colombias-ex-farc-idUSKCN1VN16D>)

Semana. 2018. “En otros países serían héroes nacionales. Aquí los matamos”: Francisco de Roux sobre líderes asesinados.” 6 de julio. (<https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/en-otros-paises-serian-heroes-nacionales-aqui-los-matamos-padre-de-roux-sobre-lideres-asesinados/574240>).



# Implementation Shortfalls of Rural land Reform as Planned in the 2016 Peace Agreement



CSN delegation members with Peace Community residents at the front gate.

*Conrad Weiffenbach, CSN Board Member*

According to Indepaz, 566 social leaders and defenders of human rights have been assassinated from January 1, 2016 to January 10, 2019. Recent victims of these attacks are the following:

(1) In Santa Marta Maritza Quiroz Leiva, a leader of women displaced, was murdered on January 5, 2019; (2) Alan Eder Mostacilla, an instructor

for the union Family Compensation Fund, was murdered on January 7. (3) Wilson Perez Ascano, a leader for social and crop substitution processes, was killed on January 4; (4) Jose Rafael Solano Gonzalez, President of the local Community Action Board, was murdered on January 4 in Cauca; (5) Gilberto Valencia, a social leader and builder of peace and a cultural leader, was killed in Suarez on January 1; and

(6) Wilmer Antonio Miranda Cabrera, a campesino leader and human rights defender who was enrolled in the crop substitution program, was murdered in Cajibío on January 1, 2019.

## I. Rural land reform in the Peace Agreement

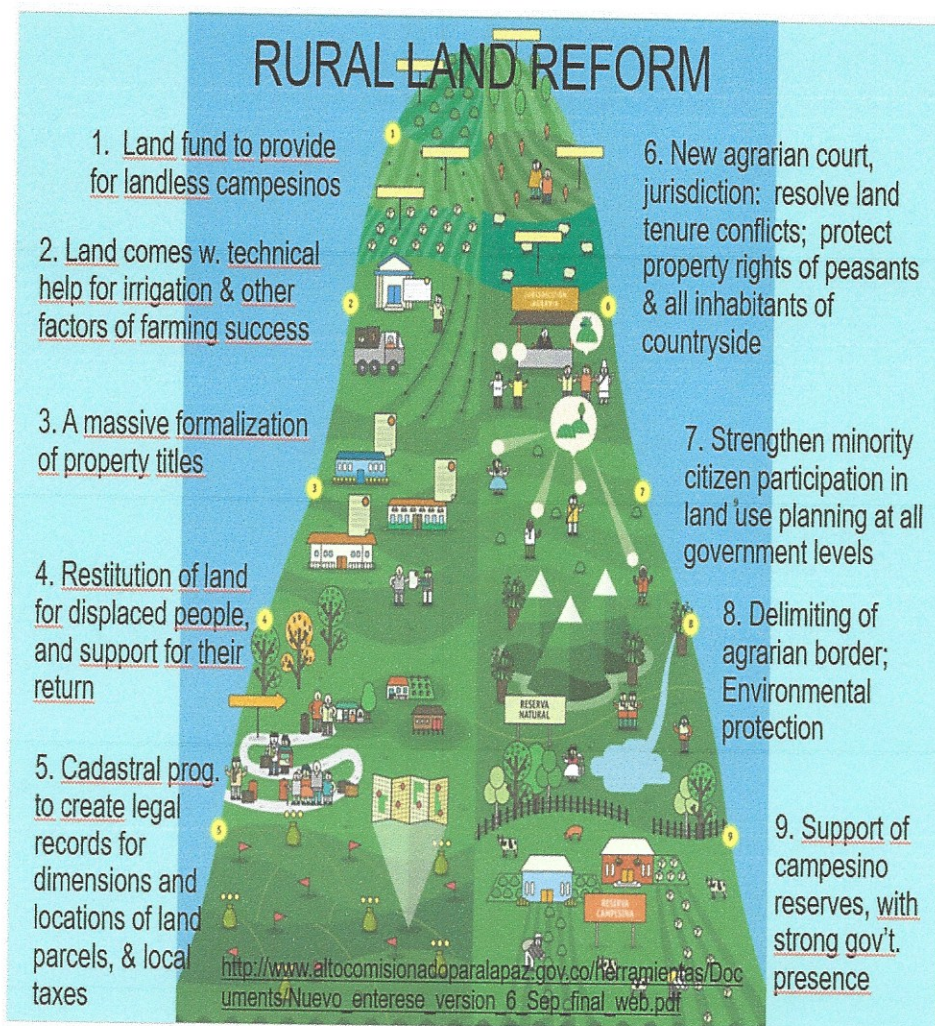
1. Comprehensive rural reform: Free distribution of land to rural people without land or with insufficient land; eradicating extreme poverty; reducing rural poverty by 50%; reducing overall inequality within 10 years; programs for dealing with hunger and malnutrition; measures to strengthen local and regional production and markets. (Government)<sup>1</sup>

A program for Rural land reform is the first part of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC:

1. The letter in parentheses state the institution responsible for carrying out the numbered item.
2. Guarantees for political parties or movements that declare themselves in opposition. (UN, FARC, etc)



# Implementation Shortfalls cont.



3. Ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms (UN, FARC)

4. National substitution of crops used for illicit purposes (Gov't)

5. For victims of the conflict: systems of truth, justice, reparation, non-repetition (Gov't.)

The illustration showing components of land reform in the agreement is adapted from an impressively illustrated version of the Peace Agreement, with many diagrams and charts, by Colombia's Office of the High Commissioner for Peace.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.altocomisionadopalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/Nuevo\\_enterese\\_version\\_6\\_Sep\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.altocomisionadopalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/Nuevo_enterese_version_6_Sep_final_web.pdf)

As indicated in reference (1) by Colombia's Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the Land Fund would be created to provide 'comprehensive access' to land for landless or land-poor peasants. The lands would be acquired through a) judicial expiration of ownership, b) recovery of illegally acquired land, c) expropriation for the social interest or public utility or d) unexploited lands.

The land would be accompanied by a comprehensive subsidy: credits, technical assistance, housing, marketing and access to means of production provided by the government. Redistributed land would be inalienable and non-transferable for a period of seven years

The "massive formalization of

property titles" would be for small and medium rural properties: It is estimated that a fifth of all rural properties, and nearly half of small ones, have title problems, a problem which prevents the existence of a real market for land and investments and which has facilitated land dispossession during the conflict.

## II. Shortfalls of implementation to date

President Trump secretly received former Colombian presidents Andres Pastrana and Alvaro Uribe at Mar a Lago, and adopted their anti-Peace Agreement political attitude rather than that of the US State Dept and former US president Obama, who had promised \$450 million in support for the Peace Agreement.

In response to Trump's subsequent threat to reduce aid to Colombia, crop-substitution program payments to coca-growing campesinos enrolled in that program ended and the government of Colombia resumed fumigation of their coca fields. Since Colombian forces were not sent to pacify coca-growing territories from which the FARC had withdrawn when demobilized, paramilitary and other gangs moved in and began controlling campesinos, taking over the marketing of coca. Planting of coca has tripled since 2016 and export of cocaine now exceeds that of coffee

Paramilitaries and their backers in polite society are the principal exporters of cocaine. They wish to ultimately invest the proceeds by developing formerly campesino-occupied rural land for large plantations of cash crops, new mines, and commercial enterprises.

A current rash in killings of community and human rights leaders is associated with rural land issues, attempted displacements of campesino



and indigenous populations by paramilitaries. The graphic to the left, from The NGO INDEPAZ in Bogota summarizes the killing of 566 social leaders and defenders of human rights in Colombia since January of 2018 as of January 9, 2019. <http://www.indepaz.org.co/566-lideres-sociales-y-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-han-sido-asesinados-desde-el-1-de-enero-de-2016-al-10-de-enero-de-2019/>

Be aware: The internet site indepaz.org.co was not secure when this report was prepared. (Abbreviated translations of the community roles

of six individuals assassinated, from the boxes at the right:)

According to Indepaz the following 6 individuals were murdered in January 2019: 1) Maritza Quiroz Leiva from Santa Marta, a leader of displaced Afro-Colombian women; (2) Alan Eder Mostacelli, of the Caja de Compensacion Familiar in Cucuta; (3) Wilson Perez Ascanio of Ocana, a leader of crop-substitution and social processes there; (4) Jose Rafael Solano Gonzalez, President of a Community Action Board in Cauca; (5) Gilberto Valencia, a social society leader in Suarez, and (6) (6) Wilmer Antonio

Miranda Cabrera, campesino and defender of human rights in Cajibío. (Information for the seventh individual has been truncated to facilitate conciseness in this document.)

INDEPAZ is an NGO of professionals working in training, research, the generation of dialogue spaces and ventures into issues of development and peace, among other activities. Delegations to Colombia from the Colombia Support Network have visited the INDEPAZ office in Bogota and spoken with their representatives.



A photo of Gloria Cuartas, former Mayor of Apartado, visiting a CSN delegation at our hotel in Bogota, with delegation leader Jack Laun.



# THE PRICE OF GOLD

*By Steve Gagan and Mary Kelsey*

Mechanized gold mining in El Choco Department in northwest Colombia is replacing traditional artisanal mining, damaging the environment and undermining communities.

Mining for metals, fuels and other commodities has become a problem the world around, as extractive operations increase in scale and impact. In Central America, Central and West Africa, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Chile and Colombia mining is destroying biological and human habitats.

The damage begins with exploration and continues through the various stages and means of production. In Colombia, current and proposed mechanized mining activities threaten many natural areas.

In this project we have been documenting problems with placer gold mining in Colombia's northwestern El Choco area. We focus on communities along three of the largest rivers—the Atrato, Andugueda, and Quito, with some of their major tributaries.

The Spanish developed gold mines to supply the Crown, where African slaves provided the labor. After independence, gold-mining continued in El Choco, occasionally in commercial

mechanized projects, and always in family-based artisanal mines. Afro-Colombian communities planted, hunted, fished and cut lumber for their own consumption. They also panned for gold to provide cash for things they didn't produce themselves, such as tools, cloth, or salt. Obtaining gold was a part-time activity that supported their subsistence economy.

Such traditional artisanal mining still goes on. It has barely any environmental impact. Large holes aren't opened in the forest floor; what holes are dug are small and shallow. In contrast to mechanized mining, artisanal miners do not use mercury or cyanide to separate gold from substrates.

In the early 1970's the price of gold started to rise. By the 1990's the prices were high enough to justify investing in heavy equipment. The price of gold brought mechanized mining to El Choco, and with a vengeance. Hundreds of large backhoes open huge pits in search of gold. Dozens of big dredges work the rivers. These new lining operations threaten the exuberant but delicate rainforest environment. They also threaten the fabric of traditional village life, as

people abandon economic activities that have supported their families and defined their culture, to become full-time artisanal miners tagging along after big machine operations.

The new mining has provoked divisions within some Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities that make up most of El Choco's population. Some see big mechanized mining as a great economic opportunity; but others have doubts about its economic benefits and see it as a threat to their forest and way of life.

There are Chocanos who benefit from the mechanized mining: those trained and hired to work the machine; those who make money by selling rights to their land, or by providing supplies to machine owners; and those local leaders who accept bribes. Such benefits do not touch the majority of local people, who feel a new economic disparity with their neighbors who are profiting from mechanized mining operations.

El Choco isn't the first place where technological change has displaced people. In the U.S. industrial farming displaces small farmers to towns where they often find only low-paying jobs. As in El Choco their culture and sense of identity and place are trampled. Not



only farmers but factory workers and coal miners are among the displaced, in what can be seen as the life cycle of industrial capitalism.

In Colombia a new and greater threat looms. The national government is promoting even larger-scale mining by transnational corporations. Rural communities, including those who support current mechanized practices, are nearly unanimous in their opposition to this development.

Meanwhile, community-based struggles to regulate, control, or even eliminate mechanized mining have won support from some organizations concerned with defending human rights, conserving the natural environment, and what is frequently referred to as "environmental justice"--the place where environmental concerns and defense of human, social and cultural rights come together. Our project aims to share some of what we have seen and learned, along

with our concerns about the future of the region and its traditional cultures.

### Who we are:

Steve brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to this project. He has been working closely with the Catholic Diocese of Quibdo, federations of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and various Colombian and international NGO's in El Choco since 2003. His photographs and writing about the issues facing the communities there have been exhibited and published on four continents, included in international conferences and biennials, and won awards.

Mary Kelsey's art addresses the interface of cultural and natural systems. Since the 1970's she has exhibited and published drawings and paintings depicting the natural world. She has worked with imagery of human and natural worlds in tropical and

subtropical regions, and illustrated regional sustainability projects in Northeast Ohio, where she lives. She has made three extended visits to El Choco to work on this project since 2013.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Steve Cagan and Mary Kelsey are preparing a book based on their work in the Choco in northern Colombia. We are hoping they may be able to come to Madison to present their book and photographs and drawings from their time in Colombia. Several years ago CSN invited Steve to come to Madison to show us his photographs from Colombia at that time. Steve came and gave us an excellent presentation about his work and displayed photographs he had taken. We hope he and Mary may join us at our Annual Conference next year and encourage our members to contact them at [steve@sbcglobal.net](mailto:steve@sbcglobal.net) and [marypkelsey@sbcglobal.net](mailto:marypkelsey@sbcglobal.net) to support their book project.



A photo of Ans Teresa Bernal, co-founder of human rights NGO Redepaz, and official in the Bogota government of Mayor Gustavo Petro, on a visit to the delegation's hotel in Bogota.





Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America, Inc.

**Colombia Support Network**

P.O. Box 1505

Madison, WI 53701-1505

## You do make the difference!

Become involved in ending horrible human rights abuses in Colombia.

I would like to become a member of  
the Colombia Support Network

☐ ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP \$25 REGULAR/\$15 LOW INCOME

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE/FAX \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable in \$US to WICOLA/Colombia  
Support Network. Donations are tax deductible.

**I am interested in volunteering by:**

☐ STARTING A CSN CHAPTER IN MY LOCALE

☐ GOING ON A DELEGATION TO COLOMBIA

☐ TRANSLATING/INTERPRETING

☐ HELPING IN THE OFFICE

☐ SETTING UP A TALK AT MY SCHOOL, GROUP, OR CHURCH

☐ PARTICIPATING IN CSN STUDY GROUPS

I am sending a donation of p \$25 p \$50 p \$100 p other

☐ Check ☐ PayPal

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ACCOUNT \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRATION DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE X \_\_\_\_\_