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Harbingers of Hope
Peace Initiatives in Colombia

Summary

- With the reelection of incumbent President Alvaro Uribe on May 28, 2006, a "ripe moment" may be emerging for resolving Colombia's long-standing armed conflict. After exerting pressure on the guerrillas and demobilizing the largest paramilitary organization during his first term, President Uribe is well positioned to pursue a political solution to the conflict. If he does not, the window of opportunity may close and the conflict could quickly intensify.

- The Colombian state has a rich and varied history of negotiating peace at the national level with illegal armed groups. Increasingly, state authorities at local and regional levels, as well as individuals, groups, and communities within civil society, have gained experience in negotiating peace with armed actors and establishing mechanisms for the nonviolent resolution of conflict.

- Since local peacebuilding involves informal, unofficial ("track two") diplomacy, a central question is how these local experiences might contribute to "track two" diplomacy at the national level.

- Vibrant, organized, and diverse, civil society actors are seeking ways to participate in a future negotiation while debating what form that participation might take. These actors generally agree on the need for citizen mobilization and peace education, political support for dialogue with armed actors, increased and broader citizen participation in any peace process, and solidarity with all the victims of violence.

- Peace initiatives that cut across geographic lines offer opportunities for more comprehensive approaches. Women's, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian groups have successfully organized at the local, regional, national, and, increasingly, international levels, and women's groups have designed consensus peace agendas. These sectors have borne the brunt of the conflict and have high stakes in its resolution.

- International actors can be most effective if they play a subsidiary or complementary role that supports and builds on local, regional, and national peace initiatives. They can provide financial or technical assistance, support basic human rights protection and monitoring, and accompany peace and development initiatives. They also can facilitate consensus that will lead to public policies more conducive to the transformation of the conflict.

- Contrary to the usual notion that peacemaking should take place before peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, and reconciliation, and that humanitarian assistance should be emphasized over development, the case of Colombia suggests that concurrent pursuit of these goals can help reduce violence, mitigate conflict, and create conditions for a peace accord.

Introduction

Colombia is in the midst of a prolonged and chronic, internal armed conflict that involves multiple armed actors (including guerrillas, paramilitary forces, state armed forces, common criminals, and drug traffickers) and has lasted for more than four decades. It also involves a broad range of individuals, organizations, and institutions dedicated to finding a nonviolent resolution to the conflict. This report, the USIP-Cornell conference on which it is based, and the upcoming book focus on the often-unacknowledged actors in what we broadly consider "peace initiatives."

Civilians are increasingly involved in the Colombian conflict, not only as victims but also as protagonists seeking ways to end the violence, marginalize actors advocating violence as a vehicle for change, and negotiate conflicts as they emerge on the ground. Armed actors are thus not the only or even the primary stakeholders in the resolution of Colombia's conflict. Peace initiatives are promoting attitudes and structures that may help create a more inclusive political system that can manage conflict nonviolently. Thus these and other expressions of social mobilization and collective action must be seen as integral parts of any comprehensive and strategic peace policy and as important mechanisms for building the relationships of trust necessary for a reconciled society in Colombia.

State of the Conflict and Prospects for Peace

In Colombia conflict-related violence claims the lives of more than a dozen people and internally displaces 850 people every day, observed conference speaker Jorge Rojas, president of the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement. With 3 to 4 million people now estimated as displaced by the conflict, Colombia ranks second only to Sudan in numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs).

The human costs of war are not felt equally by all Colombians, conference participants observed. Afro-Colombians comprise one-third of Colombia's internally displaced population. Half of the internally displaced are under age fifteen, and most IDPs are female. The war is most pervasive in the countryside: At least 13 percent of Colombia's rural population is now displaced, and rural poverty reached 69 percent in 2004, up from 64 percent the previous year.[1]

According to Rojas, the war is costing the Colombian government US$14 million per day; the U.S. government is spending $1.6 million per day (compared with a high of $1 million per day during the worst part of El Salvador's civil war); and Colombia's guerrillas and paramilitaries pay some $2.7 million per day to keep the war going.

Since the 1990s, the narcotics industry has become increasingly important in prolonging the conflict by underwriting the war economy, enabling the conflict to spread and escalate, preventing its resolution, and fostering corruption and impunity. This aspect makes Colombia's conflict atypical but similar to those in countries with shadow economies that create their own incentive structures for the conflict's perpetuation, Rojas said. The chronic nature of the war has meant that in areas with few economic alternatives, job security and employment options are enmeshed in the war economy.

Because the conflict is rooted in long-standing social and economic inequities that predate the drug problem, whatever approach brings the armed actors to the table also must create or apply mechanisms for addressing the issues of poverty, inequity, marginal-

ity, and exclusion, Rojas observed. These conditions gave rise to the conflict, continue to nourish it, and at least partly sustain the illegal economy that finances many of the armed actors.

Few believe any longer that the armed conflict in Colombia can be won militarily, conference participants agreed. Colombia's largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has waged war steadily for more than four decades, while governments have changed every four years.[2] In recent decades, with each change of government, war policies have alternated with efforts to negotiate peace.

A key resource available to the guerrillas is their ability to manage time. In a best-case scenario, one participant suggested, the guerrillas would be reduced to a "law enforcement problem." But the speaker considered this scenario overly optimistic, given the extent of the FARC's territorial control, Colombian geography, the guerrillas' historical resilience, and limitations on the capacity of the Colombian army. As one conference participant noted, "In order to declare victory, the government has to win, but the guerrilla has merely not to lose."

Although electoral commentators today credit Uribe with reducing violence and the reach of the FARC, conference participants agreed that the government's military approach has nearly run its course without achieving a decisive victory over the FARC. Some argued that this approach has fostered greater intransigence among the FARC. Much as fumigation of illicit crops yielded short-term declines in particular geographic locales, only to be replaced by new crops in new zones, prosecution of the conflict has caused similar "balloon" effects. Rojas noted that the FARC guerrillas have responded to the government's military offensives in the guerrilla-controlled south under Plan Colombia (a U.S.-supported program initiated in 2000 to strengthen the Colombian state, reduce drugs, and defeat the insurgency) and Plan Patriota (a military counterinsurgency offensive launched in 2003) by expanding their activities into new regions.

In the western departments bordering the Pacific Ocean, Rojas noted, the conflict has intensified most sharply, with more fighting and increased presence of paramilitaries, guerrillas, and state armed forces; increased displacement; increased fumigation; and increases in coca exports. In the middle of the country the conflict has continued more or less the same. In the southeastern departments (Amazonas, Vaupes, Guaviare, Guainía, and Vichada), the guerrillas are expanding their activities and consolidating new bases likely to sustain the insurgents and prolong the conflict.

The general environment for local peacebuilding has changed considerably since 2003, noted Christopher Mitchell of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. Until recently, the war manifested itself as a competition for control of territory that consisted in some regions of attacks by local armed actors on local communities, rather than direct fighting between combatants. With programs and policies like Plan Patriota, "democratic security," and the drive south involving local communities more directly in the conflicts and making it more difficult for them to remain outside the conflict, Mitchell said, many local communities are caught up in fighting between local armed actors. As a result, they are increasingly seeking ways to maintain their neutrality as civilian noncombatants.

In its first term the Uribe administration demobilized the largest number of combatants in Colombian history. High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo announced in April 2006 that more than 30,000 paramilitary combatants had demobilized since late 2003, and the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) had officially ceased to exist.

With state benefits for ex-combatants limited to a maximum of two years, conference participants noted that a small window of opportunity exists now to dismantle paramilitary structures and bring the remaining illegal armed actors to the peace table. The sooner this happens, the less likely the paramilitaries will take up arms again. Unfortunately, recidivism has already begun. In his fifth quarterly report in March 2006 to the Permanent Council on the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza of the Organization of American States (OAS) expressed concern about the

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paramilitaries' continued "failure to observe the cessation of hostilities" and the transformation of demobilized groups into new criminal gangs.

After decades of warfare, intensified in recent years under Plan Colombia, and with heightened opposition to their violent tactics in the communities they purport to serve, guerrilla groups may be more open to a negotiated settlement in the post-election period, some participants believed. One participant said there "is more space to negotiate with the FARC than might be imagined." In the past year, UN consultant and anthropologist James Jones noted, several peace initiatives have succeeded in placing a humanitarian accord between the government and the FARC on the national political agenda. Although armed actors have been called on to respond to these proposals, the accord initiative has yet to move forward in any significant way.[3]

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Some movement has taken place toward a negotiated settlement with Colombia's second-largest guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN). Most recently, a civil society commission created the House of Peace to facilitate a consultation process between Colombian civil society and the ELN. This led in late 2005 and early 2006 to three rounds of formal, exploratory meetings in Cuba between the ELN and the Colombian government, mediated by international facilitators from Cuba, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland. Although the talks ended in May 2006, just before the presidential election, this process is expected to pick up again soon and could result in an ELN cease-fire.

The international community may be ready to put renewed weight behind a new peace effort, conference participants suggested. Under the leadership of its secretary-general, the OAS is beefing up its mission in Colombia and has secured new international donors to support its oversight of the demobilization and reintegration of paramilitary ex-combatants.

Uribe and his predecessor, Andres Pastrana, have secured strong backing (some $4 billion—mostly in military and police aid—since 2000) from the United States for Plan Colombia; but U.S. pressure on Colombia to move toward peace may increase as such levels of funding become more difficult to sustain.

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Participants did not believe that U.S. funding for Colombia would be cut off in the near future; they did note that the battle for funding was becoming more difficult for a number of reasons. First, U.S. resources are coming under increasing strain because of commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hurricane Katrina, and U.S. indebtedness (particularly to China and Japan). Second, skepticism is growing about the effectiveness of current U.S. antidrug policies, as the intellectual case for a supply-side strategy to control drugs has collapsed, and policymakers are questioning whether the results warrant further investment.[4]

Third, President Uribe's much-touted successes could redound to his detriment. Kidnappings, homicides, and massacres have declined dramatically in recent years, bringing greater security to large portions of the population, particularly in the urban areas. Given these apparent successes, some U.S. policymakers may be ready in coming years

U.S. policymakers may be ready in coming years to "declare victory and go home."

to "declare victory and go home," particularly in light of what they might perceive as more pressing problems in the surrounding Andean neighborhood. Finally, many who have advocated applying military pressure to get the guerrillas to talk peace may determine that it is now time to bring them to the negotiating table.

In the absence of significant successes—such as the capture or killing of senior FARC leaders—conference participants indicated that momentum for peace is likely to build again. Given the current military impasse with the FARC, "there may be more support for a negotiated settlement now than there has been previously," one speaker said.

Defining the Role of Civil Society in Conflict Zones

Colombia is a democracy with long-standing electoral traditions and active engagement by a vibrant civil society. Civil society is ordinarily thought to include primarily nongov-

ernmental actors—religious organizations, secular and educational institutions, human rights and other social organizations, journalists, labor unions, peasants, professionals, and a broad range of others who act collectively in accordance with shared interests, values, and goals. Although many of the participants viewed civil society as distinct from the state, family, and market (and the term as used in this report reflects this view), participants recognized that these boundaries are frequently porous, blurred, and negotiated—especially in the rural regions of Colombia where the state is weak and illegal armed actors dominate.

In the Magdalena Medio region, eastern Antioquia, Montes de María, and Putumayo, noted participants, civil society often constitutes itself in opposition to the armed actors. As Javier Moncayo, head of the National Network of Regional Programs for Peace and Development, wrote in his conference paper on the Magdalena Medio, "in the midst of fear and desperation, there is a civil society that is stronger, more proactive." In such conflict zones, then, the term "civil society" may include the private sector, landowners, and municipal workers or other agents of the state.

Conference participants discussed the role of different civil society actors in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. Considering the tremendous diversity and sometimes conflicting interests of the actors comprising civil society, its contribution is necessarily complex.

The Colombian experience thus far underscores the positive role that a healthy and well-organized civil society has in conflict prevention, noted United Nations Development Program (UNDP) adviser Borja Paladini Adell. Development organizations working in Colombia, such as UNDP's REDES program, are finding that the more organized a community, the less vulnerable it is to violent conflict and the more capacity it has to present nonviolent alternatives to reconfigure social relations and enhance democratic practices and institutions. Civil society's heightened engagement in pushing for peace in the past two decades has resulted in the creation of institutional positions and mechanisms to keep negotiations on the national agenda, channel and respond to public opinion and activism at the grassroots level, and include civil society in creating a climate for political resolution of the conflict.

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Adam Isacson reviewed civil society's role in peacemaking in Colombia, especially in laying the groundwork for the 1998–2002 talks between the FARC and the Pastrana government. He discussed the emergence of social movements for peace, including the REDEPAZ (Network of Initiatives for Peace and Against War) in 1993 and subsequent campaigns of youth and other social groups. These culminated in a massive mobilization of public opinion for peace and contributed to the creation of the government-mandated National Peace Council and the National Conciliation Commission, and later the Coordinating Committee and the Alliance. These institutional mechanisms, suggested Isacson, have been mostly underutilized, as has civil society's capacity to sustain the momentum toward a negotiated resolution of the conflict.

Conference participants noted that civil society today—as well as local government officials—needs to become more proactive again in creating a propitious environment for a new peace process, elaborating proposals for citizen involvement, and analyzing and publicizing the costs of war for society at large, as well as their impact on particular regions and sectors.

Civil society organizations can serve as a third party in the peacemaking process, helping bridge the divide between the government and armed groups—much as they have been doing in facilitating the ELN-government discussions. Conference participants believed that civil society might have a similar role in exploring negotiating options with the FARC on the national level.

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To the extent that civil society participates in the formulation of peace agreements or processes, those agreements will have greater legitimacy at the local level and greater likelihood of implementation in the post-conflict era.

Civil society has the power to legitimize a process or withhold its stamp of approval, as the recent demobilization of the paramilitary umbrella group, the AUC, has shown. Although the Catholic Church initiated talks that led the AUC to declare a cease-fire and enter into dialogue with the Uribe government in December 2002, other parts of civil society (as well as some within the Uribe administration and many international actors) have challenged aspects of the process. Most of the public supports removal of the paramilitaries from the battlefield. Some worry, however, that the process will legitimize the ill-gotten gains of the paramilitary forces, limit accountability and punishment for crimes committed, and protect drug traffickers from extradition or prosecution. The business community has supported the process rhetorically, but it has offered relatively little in the way of financial support or jobs, noted one participant.

Participants discussed the appropriate roles of civil society and the state and speculated about how these might reinforce a culture of democracy, human rights, accountability, and peace. Some participants spoke of the emergence of a more engaged citizenry bolstered by international human rights and humanitarian laws, as well as national institutions such as the Office of the Public Defender, the Constitutional Court, and the legal recourse granted through the writ of *tutela*, which allows individuals to request immediate court action if they believe their constitutional rights are being violated. Participants noted that civil society can assist the state in defining the needs of communities and developing and implementing appropriate programs to meet those needs. It can also pressure the state to include and represent marginalized groups, they said.

National Peace Initiatives

Every Colombian government has faced multiple challenges from illegal armed actors.

Since the early 1980s, every Colombian government has faced multiple challenges from illegal armed actors—both guerrillas and paramilitary forces—that control large stretches of national territory. In these decades governments have demobilized five different groups of guerrillas, including the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), Quintín Lame Armed Movement (MAQL), April 19th Movement (M-19), and later, the Socialist Renewal Current (CRS), a splinter faction of the ELN. These successes and the failed efforts to demobilize the primary guerrilla groups—the FARC and the ELN—can teach us much about what has worked and what has not.

In his presentation Carlo Nasi, a political scientist at the Universidad de los Andes, observed that Colombia's experience of bringing armed actors to the negotiating table challenges the conventional wisdom of current conflict-resolution literature, particularly insofar as it suggests that combatants come to the negotiating table when they have been defeated or when the costs of war become unacceptable for both sides. At one point or another all of Colombia's principal guerrilla groups have negotiated despite the lack of a "mutually hurting stalemate" (at least from the perspective of the combatants). They did so when insurgents had demonstrated relative military strength, as well as in periods of relative weakness. Nasi said, "While a rebel group whose offensive capacity is increasing will probably not sign a peace accord … even a strong rebel organization could end up demobilizing if a government negotiates skillfully, makes some major concessions, and redresses the rebels' key concerns."

All of Colombia's principal guerrilla groups have negotiated despite the lack of a "mutually hurting stalemate."

Georgetown Professor Marc Chernick agreed, "Negotiations will not be based on military strength or military defeat, but on the pursuit by both sides and more ample members of political and civil society of broader national interest."[5]

Some national peace processes in the past two decades were at least partly successful. During the governments of Presidents Barco (1986–90) and Gaviria (1990–94), several smaller groups such as the M-19, EPL, and MAQL demobilized and attempted to transform themselves into political parties. The M-19 had substantial electoral success initially but then faded from the political arena. Nasi concluded that institutional mechanisms, including employment of full-time personnel dedicated to the peace process, had been

instrumental in the success of these peace processes. He noted that empowering the M-19 guerrillas and reaching agreement on a clear political path for change had proven more successful than addressing issues of structural change at the negotiating table. Broader bargaining agendas to address root causes had had little success in previous negotiations.

Nasi considered the demobilizations under Barco and Gaviria successful because the Colombian government and the rebels reached negotiated settlements that led to new, nonviolent mechanisms for participation, representation, and human rights guarantees that allowed the insurgents to pursue a political agenda. Largely as a result of these earlier peace processes, in 1991 a new constitution was enacted that guarantees the right to peace; provides protections under the law for some traditionally excluded groups, including indigenous communities; enhances citizens' basic rights by guaranteeing the writ of protection, or *tutela*; and establishes an independent court to decide constitutional cases and ensure the adherence of national laws to Colombia's commitments and obligations under international norms and standards.

More pronounced than the demobilization successes of Barco and Gaviria, however, were the failures of successive governments to reach agreements with the country's largest guerrilla groups, the FARC and ELN. Chernick observed that the first attempts at negotiations were in the late 1950s, before the formal founding of the FARC, when liberal and communist guerrillas were organized in self-defense groups. Other major negotiations took place in 1982–86, 1990–91, and 1998–2002. During each period, Chernick said, the FARC has held firm to relatively moderate positions that call for agrarian reform and rural development; broader access to state resources; greater accountability of local governments; public participation in state decision making on economic and social issues; restructuring of the armed forces and police; and human rights protections for leftist political movements, labor leaders, and civil-society opposition groups, including amnestied or demobilized combatants.

Chernick said many analysts believe the FARC is unlikely to enter into serious negotiations without addressing some of the broad structural issues they claim are at the root of the Colombian violence. For the FARC, the most important are agrarian reform and rural development. "Even as Uribe intimates that he may change course in his second term," Chernick wrote, "I argue that for the FARC the Justice and Peace Law is not an acceptable framework: They [FARC] will not accept negotiations based on demobilizations and alternative sentencing, even if most former combatants will not be punished. They believe their rebellion is just. They will only accept a model based on reforms and a sharing of political power in some way. They will insist on an amnesty. They will also ask for *despejes* [demilitarized zones] and a broad agenda … as they did in previous periods. The challenge will be how to close these gaps."

Nasi concluded that the factors blocking these unsuccessful peace processes with the FARC and others have included

- The role of spoilers (such as paramilitary organizations, rebel groups that did not participate in negotiations, and even some state agencies);
- The increased militarization of the conflict (especially with Plan Colombia);
- The financial sustainability of the armed groups (through drug trafficking, extortion, and illegal trade);
- Lack of effective security guarantees;
- Inexperienced negotiators and ineffective negotiating strategies;
- Underutilized peacemaking mechanisms and institutions; and
- Unrealistic bargaining agendas.

Conference participants also discussed national initiatives under Uribe to demobilize paramilitary groups. Law Professor Arturo Carrillo analyzed the evolution of the controversial Justice and Peace Law passed in July 2005 to regulate the terms of the AUC demobilization. Carrillo said the Uribe administration's proponents of the Alternatives to

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Criminal Sanctions Law, the precursor of the Justice and Peace Law, drew lessons from earlier successful peace negotiations with guerrilla insurgent groups but failed to consider the dramatic changes since the 1990s in the national and international contexts with regard to transitional justice norms.

Carrillo noted that Inter-American Court jurisprudence, international criminal law and human rights norms, and international experience with truth and reconciliation in countries such as Chile and South Africa—as well as changes in Colombian law and society since the ratification of the 1991 constitution, including jurisprudence of Colombia's Constitutional Court—have increasingly supported victims' rights to truth, justice, and reparations. Greater international oversight, the rise of professional human rights NGOs, and increased U.S. pressures for "justice" for paramilitaries and guerrillas charged with drug trafficking have also contributed to a new calculus for peace.

Carrillo observed, "The search for peace in Colombia and DDR [demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration] processes can no longer be resolved through models that promote forgiveness without accountability, that sacrifice truth for political expediency, or that gloss over the rights of victims to participate in the process and to obtain reparations for the abuses they have suffered at the hands of the parties to the conflict." He said legal challenges to the Justice and Peace Law were pending in the Constitutional Court.[6]

Civil society leaders have come to differ over their role in the implementation of the Justice and Peace Law.

As paramilitary demobilization has moved forward, civil society leaders have come to differ over their role in the implementation of the Justice and Peace Law, particularly the official National Reparations and Reconciliation Commission it established, conference participants said. Two of the thirteen commissioners—including REDEPAZ president Ana Teresa Bernal—have been charged with representing civil society and victims. However, some victims' groups, including the Movement of Victims of State and Paramilitary Crimes, have challenged the commission's capacity to maintain its independence, since it is chaired by Colombia's vice president. They worry that the interests of victims will not be adequately represented—particularly in the regions outside Bogotá, where land titling is sporadic, and displacement and illegal land appropriation by the paramilitaries are widespread.

Local and Regional Initiatives

Although peace writ large has been elusive, and national dialogues between the FARC and the government have been stalled since 2002, local and regional dialogues appear to be filling the gap at the grassroots level. "Colombia is a land of hope," observed Ricardo Esquivia, general coordinator of the Red Asvidas of Montes de María and Sincelejo, "where more than 30,000 peace initiatives have been counted." Extreme situations of violence, the long-term nature of the conflict, and regional variations in its manifestations help account for the peace movement's tremendous diversity in Colombia.

Local peace initiatives emerge primarily in areas of violence and conflict where state institutions have little or no presence, Mitchell observed. In general they promote a message and culture of peace in response to violence and conflict, and they seek ways for the multiple actors—armed and unarmed—to coexist. Peace initiatives promote the association of citizens and the inclusive participation of communities in common projects of development, democracy, local governance, protection and promotion of human rights, and nonviolent resistance, as well as nonviolent transformation and negotiation of social conflicts. They usually start from the premise that social organization and leadership can protect communities from violent actors or from corruption and poor governance, Mitchell said. Based on this broad definition, some initiatives have emphasized development and satisfying basic needs, while others have had a more political focus, trying to empower citizens and promote inclusive democracy at the local level.

Overall, peace initiatives in Colombia have undergone several changes in the past years, noted political scientist Angelika Rettberg, who directs a research program on peacebuild-

ing at the Universidad de los Andes. First, peace initiatives have moved from national to regional and local levels. These initiatives emerged partly because armed actors increasingly launched attacks on towns or small groups of towns to gain control of lootable resources. This in turn generated locally specific peace initiatives. The spread of regional and local initiatives reflects the inability of national initiatives to grasp and represent the highly diverse interests of civil society and testifies to the state's inability to provide basic security, as well as the communities' creativity in the face of crisis. Second, Rettberg noted, the objectives of local and regional initiatives have shifted in recent years. In the aftermath of the failed Pastrana-FARC talks, local and regional initiatives went from demanding national peace negotiations among armed actors to seeking more context-specific solutions to problems caused by conflict (such as kidnappings, displacements, and land mines). Thereby they contributed to a broader and more complex peacebuilding agenda.

Regional and local initiatives are less ambitious than national initiatives but perhaps more effective in delivering on their promises, Rettberg observed. Conference participants discussed the efforts of local government authorities and civil society leaders to negotiate development plans that were transparent, ensured accountability, and met community needs. They spoke of the REDEPAZ initiative to create "100 Municipalities of Peace" and the establishment of constituent assemblies in places like Tarso, Sonsón, Mogotes, and Samaniego. In these places civil society has achieved concrete results in establishing and using new conflict-resolution mechanisms through alternative governance arrangements that encourage greater participation, accountability, and peaceful coexistence. Conference participants analyzed citizen initiatives to promote electoral debates, address corruption, and create mechanisms to ensure that local populations can contribute to the formation of municipal and national economic development plans.

In many cases—most of which receive little publicity—local negotiations with armed actors have been effective. Participants discussed women's experiences in successfully negotiating with armed actors to secure safe passage through contested territory. They noted the periodic successes of indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups in securing the release of hostages from a variety of armed groups and maintaining their autonomy, lands, and neutrality. They mentioned other success stories in places such as Micoahumado, where peasant communities have secured agreements from the ELN to remove land mines on nearby roads. (Colombia now holds the world record for the highest number of land-mine victims.) In Putumayo unarmed peasants have succeeded in persuading the FARC to lift armed blockades (*paros armados*) and have overcome FARC opposition to alternative development projects. In Cauca, Nasa indigenous guards wielding only their ceremonial batons have faced down paramilitary death squads and forced drug traffickers to shut down their cocaine laboratories. The churches—Catholic and Protestant alike—often participate in and support these community-level negotiations.

Although no clear and systematic typology of initiatives yet exists, Paladini Adell suggested that the initiatives can be grouped roughly according to the aims they promote and the strategies they employ to meet their goals.[7] These include

- Resisting, protecting from, and defending against violence (as in peace communities and some indigenous initiatives);
- Educating for peace and nonviolent, alternative conflict resolution (through both formal and informal education);
- Expanding democracy and increasing public participation in local governance (especially through local and regional constituent assemblies);
- Engaging in dialogue and negotiation toward agreements on humanitarian issues or for conflict mitigation (House of Peace and civil society efforts to reach a humanitarian accord);
- Promoting regional development and peace (largely through regionally based Peace and Development Programs, some sixteen of which have been established throughout the country);

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- Creating or strengthening regional and national organizations and networks (including networks such as Redepaz, Indepaz, Planeta Paz);
- Researching and systematizing best practices for conflict resolution (Indepaz, UNDP Good Practices to Overcome the Conflict); and
- Supporting and providing international accompaniment to communities, organizations, and individuals in highly conflictive zones (Peace Brigades International, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Pax Christi, Society of Friends).

Local populations in conflict zones have rather limited options, noted Mitchell, who has been leading a USIP-supported project to study these local zones of peace. They may flee and join the ranks of those internally displaced by the conflict. In rare cases they return to their community of origin as a peace community. They may stay and hope that one side or the other will predominate so that things at least calm down a bit. Or they may seek to separate themselves from the local violence, in a territorial but mainly in a behavioral sense, by making explicit the community's rejection of the use of arms. Throughout the country, unarmed communities are choosing the latter option and establishing peace communities; peace laboratories; zones of peace; no-conflict zones; territories of nonviolence, peace, or peaceful coexistence; or humanitarian zones of peace.

Peace communities multiplied dramatically in the 1990s, fostered by REDEPAZ's "100 Municipalities of Peace" project. These communities are sometimes but not always defined geographically and include both displaced communities and those that have refused to be displaced. By and large, peace communities are villages whose residents have sought to exclude all armed groups, including the military.

Mitchell said peace communities frequently are sparked by the participation or collusion of public security forces in massacres, or they emerge where government authorities engage in corrupt practices. They seem to start locally in a patterned way. "A community may be under stress for a long time, and then a trigger event enrages people to the point that they decide something must be done to exclude violence from the community," Mitchell said. This might be a violent incident, but it might also be related to governance. In Tarso, for example, the municipality was to be downgraded to a lesser administrative unit, a *corregimiento*, and a constituent assembly formed to defend its status as a municipality. The mayor participated actively and was elected by the assembly—in effect forming a co-government and creating a new and highly participatory vehicle for local engagement. In Samaniego, the community secured a promise that the local municipal government would inform the Working Group for Peace (which represented more than twenty local nongovernmental organizations) about development proposals, keep the group informed about the local budget, and consider community proposals regarding expenditures.

Sara Ramírez, a member of Mitchell's team at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, spoke about eight peace initiatives established between 1987 and 2002 that she had researched.[8] She found a number of commonalities among them in terms of their actual and potential contributions to long-term reconciliation and reconstruction of the Colombian social fabric. Ramírez observed that these initiatives all contribute to fostering social cohesion, developing a coherent political position favoring nonviolent peacebuilding, strengthening democratic participation and increased knowledge of the rights and duties of citizens, practicing consensus building, providing alternative local and regional development programs and training, and generating confidence-building measures. They favor reconciliation by creating a bridge of communication between the armed groups, delegitimizing violence as a path to justice, and highlighting problems of displacement and intrafamilial violence.

Several speakers talked about San José de Apartadó. Established in 1997 in the Pacific coastal region of Urabá by some 350 villagers, and now with five times that number of inhabitants, it is one of Colombia's oldest and largest peace communities. Its members, like those of other peace communities, engage in "active neutrality," as they press armed actors on all sides to adhere to the Geneva Conventions' human rights provisions requiring

Peace communities are villages whose residents have sought to exclude all armed groups, including the military.

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them to ensure the protection of the civilian population. Nevertheless, in the past eight years, some 157 members of the community have been killed.

Photojournalist Jesús Abad Colorado told of his efforts to investigate the killings of seven community members in February 2005, and the difficulty he had in persuading other journalists to cover the story. He was told to wait and see if the massacre could be verified before going to visit the community. A colleague told him, "Fifteen or twenty deaths are newsworthy, not five to seven." Abad underscored the need to "sensitize the memory of the nation with these stories."

Conference participants noted that the peace communities have been particular targets of hostility from President Uribe and the security forces, who believe that no part of the national territory should have the right to prohibit entry of the state and its agents—or, for that matter, to carry out its own negotiations with armed actors. The national government under both Uribe and Pastrana has perceived these efforts to maintain "neutrality" at the local level—both by civil society and municipal or regional authorities—as a threat to its ability to exercise sovereign control.

The peace communities have been particular targets of hostility from President Uribe and the security forces.

Several speakers observed that central government policies tended to stymie local and regional efforts to mitigate conflict. They pointed out that the difficulties local armed actors have in recognizing the status of neutrals or noncombatants and the ease with which people are defined as "military targets" have particularly endangered the survival of peace communities.

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In some cases local populations and authorities have contravened federal prohibitions and successfully negotiated with armed actors. In a paper prepared for the conference, María Clemencia Ramírez, director of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History, described how in 2000 and 2005 peasants in Putumayo succeeded in pressuring the FARC to lift armed blockades that had obstructed access roads and banned traffic in and out of town centers—even though the government had not met any of FARC's stated demands. She noted that the FARC saw itself obligated by its own discourse and self-presentation as "representative of the people" to take peasant demands into consideration.

Historian Mary Roldán analyzed the efforts of the twenty-three mayors who launched the Oriente Antioqueño's No-Violence Movement and their clashes with the central government as they sought to negotiate a humanitarian solution to the repeated killings and blockades of their towns by the FARC, ELN, and AUC. She also discussed their initiatives to secure greater participation in policymaking on hydroelectric development, land tenure, and resource use in the region.

The relationship between local and regional authorities, on the one hand, and those based in Bogotá, on the other, is historically marked by mutual distrust. One speaker pointed out, "It is important to realize that many local communities view the Colombian state, which has long been absent from many areas of the country, as merely another armed actor and not as an actor whose presence is more legitimate than that of other actors." In rural areas that have been marginalized, abandoned, and subject to criminalization, it is often difficult for civil society and the state to renegotiate a relationship of trust or for the state to achieve legitimacy. The state's efforts to assert itself primarily through an armed presence have sometimes exacerbated this mistrust.

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Sectorial Initiatives

Conference speakers discussed the peace efforts of different sectors of Colombian society—women, business, education, the church, and Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups. These initiatives provide opportunities for crosscutting integration of efforts as well as the advancement of particular peace agendas. The real challenge is combining them in a framework of mutual reinforcement.

Catalina Rojas, a political scientist and graduate of George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, described the way women's groups are working for

peace at the local, regional, and national levels in Colombia. These groups have begun forming networks and meta-networks (or "coalitions of coalitions") that include women from both urban and rural zones, cut across class and ethnic lines, and bring together peasants and academics. Beyond negotiating safe passage for humanitarian needs, women and women's groups have sometimes managed to prevent displacement of a community. Women's groups also have succeeded in bringing together large numbers of people from across the country, including a meeting in November 2002 following the breakdown of the Pastrana-FARC talks. On that occasion, Rojas said, they convened more than 300 women—representing 270 organizations of diverse ideological, social, cultural, regional, and ethnic backgrounds—to produce a twelve-point consensus agenda for peace.

On the national level, their success ultimately will be measured by their ability to foster consensus on their peace agenda, secure inclusion of their particular points in the broader national agenda, and increase women's visibility and impact on major issues. These include women's participation in national peace commissions or peace talks, violence against women, and integration of gender analysis into the design and implementation of DDR programs.

Private-sector-led peacebuilding is occurring in Colombia. On a small scale, businesses are seeking innovative, pragmatic solutions to the specific problems of companies faced with local conflict.

Private-sector-led peacebuilding is occurring in Colombia. On a small scale, businesses are seeking innovative, pragmatic solutions to the specific problems of companies faced with local conflict. Rettberg addressed business's current and potential contributions, which can take a variety of forms, including provision of income, resources, tax revenue, and jobs. The domestic business sector, she said, has a particular stake in establishing a stable network of domestic markets. Given constraints on exit options, domestic business is more vulnerable to the costs of domestic conflict than foreign corporations or investors that have the option of simply relocating their businesses elsewhere.

Rettberg discussed four initiatives in Cali and the surrounding municipalities of the Valle del Cauca region, the Magdalena River Valley region, Bogotá, and Medellín. She emphasized these initiatives' varying approaches and motivations, as well as the tremendous diversity within the business sector as a whole. Company traits (such as rural or urban, sector, company size, and region), previous philanthropic experience, and the availability of external funds for implementation often affected a company's willingness to participate in conflict mitigation or peacebuilding efforts.

The more severe the conflict and the more unhealthy the economy becomes (especially at the local level), the more likely that businesses will get involved in peace initiatives, she said. This was particularly true in the 1990s, when the costs of the Colombian conflict—increased taxes for the execution of the war; increased expenditures (an average of 4–6 percent of corporate budgets) to protect staff, equipment, and operations; and the deferral of investment for security concerns—rose dramatically for businesses. Business initiatives for peace have yet to be extensively evaluated, although conflict levels seem to have dropped in some areas where they were undertaken.

Psychologist and education specialist Ana Maria Velasquez said that education offers an important, if often overlooked or underestimated, vehicle for conflict prevention, management, resolution, and transformation. The conflict's chronic and prolonged nature has shaped the environment in which Colombian youth have been raised, validating and rewarding violent beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. However, schools can foster an alternative culture of democratic participation, nonviolent resolution of conflicts, critical thinking, and cooperative interactions for problem solving.

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Velasquez discussed government and NGO peace-education initiatives aimed at creating national standards of citizenship that would ensure

• Students are educated and gain skills and experience in peaceful relations and coexistence;

• Schools provide opportunities for democratic participation and responsibility;

• Students learn to appreciate pluralism, identity, and the value of differences; and

• Human rights initiatives are integrated into primary and middle-school education.

Teachers, NGOs, program developers, local and regional state institutions, and district and regional secretaries of education are promoting these initiatives. Evaluation thus far seems to indicate some short-term successes, but evaluation tools and measures are still somewhat problematic.

Many of the conference participants mentioned the important facilitating role churches have played at different points, across regions, and on the local and national levels. The Catholic Church has been a key intermediary in the recent paramilitary demobilization, creation of mechanisms to involve civil society in moving the country toward reconciliation, local dialogue and negotiations between armed actors, and reconciliation efforts that provide a place for victims to speak and be heard. In addition, Ricardo Esquivia, coordinator of the Colombian Council of Evangelical Churches' peace commission, described the growing organization and emerging consensus on peace among Protestant evangelicals, who have become targets of violence.

In some regions groups have appealed to a constitutive identity based on ethnicity and culture to develop peace agendas. Using traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, their own histories of resisting Spanish colonial rule, and the growing political presence of indigenous groups throughout the continent, highly organized indigenous communities in Colombia engage in their own efforts to move the country toward peace. International studies scholar Leslie Wirpsa, who spent two decades as a journalist in Colombia, said the 1991 constitution offers indigenous groups special protections and rights and has enabled indigenous communities in Cauca and elsewhere to create their own development "plans for life," based on constitutional requirements for prior consultation with these communities.

Both indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups frequently have been caught in the cross fire of the conflict. Because much of their land is resource-rich, they have been affected disproportionately by violence and displacement. Although indigenous peoples comprise only 2 percent of Colombia's population, they own 20 percent of the national territory, Wirpsa pointed out. Afro-Colombians constitute approximately 30 percent of the population but hold less than 5 percent of the national territory. Unlike indigenous communities, Afro-Colombians are not subjects of any special constitutional provisions that would protect their collectively held lands, although they worked hard to secure legal recognition and territorial rights to their ancestral lands through passage of Law 70 in 1993. Implementation of the law has been difficult, however.

International Initiatives

Since 2002, with the breakdown of FARC-government negotiations and the inauguration of President Alvaro Uribe, the international community has been divided over the best approach to the Colombian conflict. German political scientist Sabine Kurtenbach described the marked differences between the overall approaches of the United States and the European Union. The U.S. government has supported the Uribe administration (and before that, the Pastrana administration) through Plan Colombia, investing heavily in strengthening the Colombian state.

Nonetheless, U.S. actors and objectives are multiple and complex. Various agencies are charged, respectively, with the fight against drugs, insurgencies, and terrorism, and they often compete for the upper hand. Jones noted, "The U.S. has played a largely negative role by supplying arms to the government and by not sorting out the three wars—on drugs, on insurgents, and on terrorists—in a way conducive to peace in Colombia."

U.S. policymakers have been divided over paramilitary demobilization. The U.S. congressional contribution of $20 million for demobilization was less than the Uribe government had requested, came with many strings attached, was opposed by most U.S. NGOs, and was controversial within the U.S. executive branch, noted one participant. The Justice Department had long argued that the Patriot Act prohibited financing of foreign

The Catholic Church has been a key intermediary in the recent paramilitary demobilization.

Afro-Colombians worked hard to secure legal recognition and territorial rights to their ancestral lands.

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terrorist organizations. (The AUC, the paramilitary umbrella group whose demobilized members would benefit from such funds, appears on the foreign terrorist organization list.) The State Department argued for conditions on aid for demobilization, proposing that U.S. cash be channeled through the OAS or other bodies, rather than directly to the paramilitary ex-combatants. U.S. Southern Command (Southcom) leaders favored financing the demobilization as a way to remove paramilitary forces from the battlefield. The U.S. Agency for International Development supported aid for reintegration of ex-combatants based on its experience in Mozambique, where war had resumed in the absence of reintegration support. And both sides of the political aisle in Congress worried that the Justice and Peace Law would allow both drug traffickers and human rights violators to enjoy virtual impunity.

In the United States, NGOs and think tanks have differed over the best approach to the conflict in general, observed Neil Jeffery, a founder of Peace Brigades International's Colombia Project. Some believe a military-security approach will bring the armed actors to the negotiating table and hold that security must be in place before development can take place or be effective. Other NGOs, particularly those supported by religious and human rights organizations and coalitions, advocate a policy less heavily weighted toward the military side. They insist that security in the absence of development cannot be sustained. And they suggest that development aid and economic assistance will decrease the attraction of the economic incentives that armed groups offer to new recruits.

NGOs and think tanks have differed over the best approach to the conflict in general.

Colombia is not a top priority for Europeans, noted Kurtenbach, but the European Union has channeled support to victims of violence and promoted peace as a prerequisite for sustainable development and social development as necessary to overcome the causes of the conflict. It has supported "islands of civility" in Colombia, including NGOs and peace laboratories. These peace laboratories, supported by the Colombian government and funded by international donors such as the World Bank and the European Union, are designed to support the implementation of specific accords between conflict actors, strengthen local institutions, support civil society actors working for peace, and encourage social and economic development as they foster regional peace proposals in highly conflicted areas.[9]

NGOs working for a peaceful resolution of the conflict increasingly have found common ground with EU efforts to open space for civil society, especially human rights defenders and victims of violence, noted one speaker. Donor meetings in London in July 2003 and Cartagena in February 2005 have facilitated a tripartite dialogue involving the Colombian authorities, civil society, and international actors. Following the London meetings, U.S. NGOs supported the development of the Alliance, a coalition that brought together business, church, philanthropic sectors, regional entities, NGOs, ethnic groups, and state-led initiatives to plan and prepare for the Cartagena conference. Civil society used these meetings to generate consensus on peace and reconciliation proposals, noted Isacson.

NGOs working for a peaceful resolution of the conflict increasingly have found common ground with EU efforts.

Many Colombian NGOs are calling for greater engagement by the EU, harking back to Europe's role in promoting the Contadora talks that preceded peace negotiations in Central America. They look to the EU to provide an alternative view to the U.S. military approach to the conflict. Kurtenbach said such a role, at least from an institutional perspective, seems highly unlikely; but enhanced European engagement might be possible if other Latin American actors take the lead.

Jennifer Schirmer, a political anthropologist at the University of Oslo and director of a project funded by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry for mediated dialogues between armed actors and civil society, is optimistic about the possibilities for Nordic governments to participate in and give political and financial support to a peace process in Colombia, as well as provide lessons learned from processes they are mediating or have mediated in the past.

Paladini Adell summarized the myriad ways international actors—including multilateral institutions, bilateral aid agencies, and international NGOs—can continue to support peace initiatives:

1. **Financial support**. The level of international economic assistance to Colombian peace initiatives has been growing in recent years. Among other things, it has helped strengthen grassroots communities, buttressed the technical capacity of the initiatives, and developed specific social development projects. Nonetheless, it also has triggered disputes over resources and occasionally overwhelmed the administrative capacities of the initiatives. The trick seems to be to help local people in zones of peace develop their own resource base without becoming dependent on outside help.

2. **Technical assistance**. Although Colombia has a wealth of experience, some outside initiatives can provide guidance, lessons, and good practices that could be adapted to the particular conditions of the country and the respective regions. Examples include social participation in the peace negotiations in Central America, methodologies drawn from peace territories in the Philippines as an inspiration for Colombia's constituent assemblies, and numerous truth commissions that might increase the options available to Colombia's National Reparations and Reconciliation Commission.

3. **Accompaniment**. Conflict zones are usually areas with weak institutional capacity, where violent behavior often is neither approved nor prevented through institutional channels. In these places, ad hoc mechanisms of dissuasion, such as international accompaniment or regular field visits, can play an informal but significant protective role. While not totally eliminating the risk, such mechanisms can ensure external publicity of any violent act against the initiatives, imposing an additional political cost on the authors of the violence.

4. **Support for human rights monitoring, early-warning systems, and human rights advocacy**. Peace communities and human rights defenders frequently suffer attacks from armed actors. In these cases, the international community can respond promptly to ensure their protection and, by insisting on accountability, help ensure that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice. International actors also must hold the Colombian state to its commitments to international human rights norms, international humanitarian laws, and conventions to which it is a party. Support for human rights monitors and human rights organizations—whether through NGOs, state mechanisms, churches, or civil society organizations—can contribute to the prevention of future violence.

5. **Facilitation of processes of dialogue and construction of national, regional, or local consensus**. Armed conflict generates dispersion, separation, and disarticulation of social sectors, and these processes tend to affect even those who have worked on peace strategies. International actors can help neutralize the culture of separation and generate convergence by creating spaces to air and discuss multiple views about the conflict and its resolution. They can play a significant role in facilitating strategic alliances among diverse actors of the social peace movement and the local, regional, and national authorities. In turn, these can facilitate participatory assessments and analytical consensus on the problems that need to be addressed to transform the conflict. International actors have exercised this facilitating role by assuming moderating functions, proposing formulas for consensus, or observing or accompanying peace initiatives. Such interventions should lead to public policies that establish better institutional responses to the challenges of conflict and peacebuilding opportunities.

Support for human rights monitors and human rights organizations can contribute to the prevention of future violence.

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Lessons from Colombia for Other Conflicts

In addition to discussing ways the international community might contribute to supporting Colombian peace initiatives, Paladini Adell proposed a series of recommendations, based on UNDP's experiences in Colombia, which might have broader implications for other conflict zones.

Emergency aid in conflict zones should be reinforced by far-reaching development interventions.

First, emergency aid in conflict zones should be reinforced by far-reaching development interventions. Promoting participatory human development in the middle of a conflict as a complement to humanitarian action can help reduce violence and create conditions for a sustainable peace. Through such programs, civil society and political institutions can recover from a logic of war based on illicit economies, corruption, and terrorist strategies, creating a logic of peace based on licit economies, democratic governance, a fully legitimate and territorially consolidated state, and a strong, pluralist, and active civil society.

Second, international cooperation should play a subsidiary or complementary role in these initiatives for peace and development. International actors must learn to build on what is already in place and the knowledge accumulated in local and regional reflection exercises developed in Colombia. The international community, broadly defined, can establish mechanisms to make peace initiatives more visible, complement their needs, and find ways to protect and nurture them. In particular, international actors are in a good position to accompany and strengthen these initiatives, increase their institutional capacities for development and peacebuilding, and help link them strategically.

There is no need to wait for the signing of peace agreements before launching sustainable projects to support communities in conflict zones.

Third, it is possible and indeed desirable to launch sustainable development and peacebuilding initiatives based on community organizing in zones still suffering from the impact of the violence. There is no need to wait for the signing of peace agreements before launching sustainable projects to support communities in conflict zones. Conceptually, this is a break with the paradigm that posits a rigid sequence of stages in peacebuilding, whereby humanitarian assistance precedes development projects, peacemaking precedes peacebuilding, and peacebuilding follows the signing of peace accords.

Fourth, community organization establishes a kind of armor or protection for the communities. It builds "soft" power, based on persuasion, legitimacy, and moral authority, which helps balance and counteract the "hard" power of the armed groups. The reverse also seems to be true: Where social organization is lacking in the conflict zones, the influence of armed actors increases, making the communities more vulnerable to the violence.

The objective of all these efforts must be to contribute to and support the building of legitimacy that reduces support for violent options, suggested Paladini Adell. This legitimacy must exist on various levels: in the state and institutions, through democratically elected governments' political action, by diverse civil-society actors as a democratic counterweight to the state, through diverse community and cultural expressions across the nation, and, most of all, by replacing the logic of violence with a logic of peace and human development.

Challenges to Peace

In Colombia it is difficult even to find a language to speak of peace.

In Colombia it is difficult even to find a language to speak of peace—let alone arrive at a consensus about what that means or how to get there. Conference participants discussed this dilemma and noted that since the 9/11 attacks the Colombian government has sought to present the violence in Colombia as part of a terrorist campaign against a legitimately elected government. Most observers, including those at the conference, classify the violence as an internal armed conflict; some participants called it a civil war. The language used to define the problem is important because it dictates regulating norms regarding the obligations and behavior of governments and insurgents under international law.

Analytical agreement is also lacking. For some, terms like "dialogue," "dissent," "rapprochement" (*acercamiento*), and "humanitarian accords"—and even "peace communities" or "zones of peace"—have subversive connotations suggesting illegal alliances with armed actors that could lead to punitive consequences. In this charged context, it becomes difficult for international and local actors alike to discuss conflict resolution or support peace initiatives—to say nothing of trying to develop evaluation mechanisms or working toward goals related explicitly to peace objectives.

The lack of a common vision of the problem, as well as the inability to agree on the appropriate language to describe it or develop a discourse that supports its resolution, contributes to the disheveled state of debates, conference participants found. Within the social movement for peace, as in Colombian society more broadly, little agreement has materialized on what the peace "end game" is or the methods, path, or strategies for reaching it.

For both philosophical and strategic reasons, some take a narrow view of peace as the absence of war, observed Esquivia, a member of the National Peace Council advising the Colombian president. Inside and outside Colombia, he noted, some individuals and groups are working toward eliminating the physical manifestations of violence. They see this as possible to achieve with arms, with violence, or via pacts between those who are armed or those who are financing armed actors. Here the main objective is the defeat or elimination of "the other."

Esquivia observed, "Ending the war is necessary but not sufficient. You must also create a social base that will sustain peace, and you must do away with the social injustices that nurture and encourage war." In this vision, he said, peace is the "fruit of justice, manifest in a dignified and abundant life for all," and the path to such a life is "through education and active nonviolence, where one achieves peace through actions in favor of justice."

"Ending the war is necessary but not sufficient."

One U.S. participant favored a narrower definition of peace for tactical reasons. He noted, "Trying to insert too many things into the definition of 'peace' may make it far more elusive." The participant cautioned, "If attempts are made to fix all of Colombians' structural, class, and historical ills at the negotiating table, then nothing will go very far, and there will be no consensus so essential for success."

Conference participants did not disagree about the existence and nature of the social inequities in Colombian society and the need to address these issues. The debates are, rather, over the strategies and timing by which inequities and inequalities should be addressed.

Numerous other challenges remain. Participants mentioned other obstacles to a negotiated settlement, including continued violations of human rights; physical threats to individual, institutional, and community security; lack of political space for dissent and debate; guerrilla intransigence; U.S. opposition to negotiations; and what one participant called "the distraction of the paramilitary demobilization." Precarious resources and unsustainable funding, Catalina Rojas noted, also contribute to a lack of institutional capacity for peacebuilding, particularly among women's groups.

Precarious resources and unsustainable funding contribute to a lack of institutional capacity for peacebuilding.

Divisions within civil society also have prevented development of a consensus agenda for peace. In his presentation Isacson noted that social organizations working for peace are divided over how to participate in the political process; how to balance demands for accountability and human rights with the desire to move a peace process forward; the appropriate role of international actors; and attitudes toward the guerrillas and armed struggle as a mechanism for change. Conflicts also abound among local, regional, and national agendas; inter- and intra-sectoral interests; and class interests.

Conclusions and Possible Ways Forward

Colombia now has the chance to achieve lasting peace or, alternatively, to spiral into another cycle of violence that could engulf the next generation. Having applied tremendous military pressure on the guerrillas and demobilized 30,000 paramilitaries during his

Uribe is well positioned to make bold moves toward a political solution to the conflict.

first administration, Uribe has an opportunity to provide leadership for a fresh push for peace in Colombia. With his recent victory at the polls and control of both legislative chambers since congressional elections last March, Uribe is well positioned to make bold moves toward a political solution to the conflict. Whichever avenue he chooses, Uribe will do well to draw on the experiences of those engaged in peacemaking and peacebuilding at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

The international community could encourage the Uribe government to initiate a guerrilla-government dialogue.

Conference participants discussed a number of options for moving forward. First, the international community could encourage the Uribe government to initiate a guerrilla-government dialogue or could facilitate such a dialogue. One participant suggested that dramatic gestures on the part of the FARC—such as the release of Ingrid Betancourt, three captured U.S. personnel, or other kidnapped Colombians—could "go a long way towards getting European and U.S. buy-in" and could "press Uribe to come to the table." He noted, "If the FARC appears willing to negotiate in good faith … the U.S. government is likely to place enormous pressure on Uribe to reciprocate and get to the table." Conference participants expressed hope that given the proper conditions, agreements with the FARC could be reached in the future.

Participants underscored the important role of civil society in the ongoing efforts to bring the ELN to the peace table and the potential role of civil society in moving the FARC toward a political solution as well. **Jones proposed a series of goals that might be achievable** with the participation of civil society—a prisoner swap with the FARC as an opener and token of good faith, followed by an agreement to start a dialogue about an agenda and preconditions for talks with insurgents, government, and civil society amply represented. This, in turn, could lead to talks themselves, suspension of the armed conflict, and agreement on a strategy for demobilization of the FARC guerrillas, he suggested.

Second, some participants felt that meetings among and with armed actors in pursuit of a peaceful settlement might be worth exploring. FARC leaders had once proposed meeting with the Colombian generals, noted one participant. He asked whether the United States might be in a position to encourage or facilitate Colombian military-guerrilla conversations or engage in confidence-building measures that might get both sides thinking about how to break through the current impasse. He recalled that the pre-peace-accord talks between the Guatemalan military and guerrillas paved the way for negotiations that ended Guatemala's civil war a decade ago, and he cited the role of the Israeli military in pushing Israeli political leaders to seek peace. Any U.S.-Colombia military talks, cautioned another participant, would need to take place with the approval and knowledge of the highest levels of Colombia's executive branch, or they could be seen as undermining civilian control of the military.

Any U.S.-Colombia military talks would need to take place with the approval and knowledge of Colombia's executive branch.

Third, dialogues with armed actors could be more effective if civil society actors, such as the Catholic Church or one of the peace commissions representing civil society, were actively involved in crafting and executing them, another participant said. This was the case in Guatemala and is being tried now with the ELN.

Fourth, involving the military in planning for peace could minimize the chances that it would take on the role of "spoiler" in future peace talks. In a paper prepared for the conference, Schirmer underscored this point. She noted that the armed actors of both the insurgency and the state—"those actors who have the most capacity to wage war"—need to be engaged and brought into pre-dialogues early on.

Fifth, given their backgrounds, demobilized and reintegrated ex-guerrillas may be in a position to make an important contribution to current and future peace efforts. Schirmer noted, "Those *ex-guerrilleros* with both military experience and political skills, as well as experience with negotiating a cease-fire, are often, unsurprisingly, the most able to reach across the table and speak frankly and respectfully about delicate issues without raising rancor."

Finally, and perhaps most important, those engaged in peacemaking and peacebuilding at the local, regional, national, and international levels are primary stakeholders in the conflict, and they constitute a tremendous untapped resource whose accumulated

experiences—negotiating agreements on humanitarian issues or for conflict mitigation, promoting inclusive and participatory governance, promoting regional development, educating for peace and nonviolent conflict resolution, and marginalizing actors advocating violence—may hold the keys for transforming Colombia's conflict.

LIST OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

(*indicates paper coauthors or contributors not present at the conference)

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- Juan Cháves, program officer, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Bogotá*
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- Catalina Garzón, Ph.D. candidate in environmental science, policy, and management, University of California-Berkeley
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- Neil Jeffery, former executive director, U.S. Office on Colombia
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- Ana Maria Velásquez, psychologist, program director, Asesorías Pedagógicas, Bogotá

Notes

1. *NotiSur*, Latin American Data Base 16, no. 9, March 3, 2006. http://ladb.unm.edu.
2. Uribe is the first president in a century to run for reelection in Colombia—allowed by a special ruling of the Constitutional Court.
3. In June 2006 the FARC announced its willingness to open a dialogue with the Uribe government.
4. The most recent figures from the White House Office on National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) report a 26 percent increase from 2004 to 2005 in coca cultivation in Colombia and an accompanying rise in coca production in Peru and Bolivia. *Associated Press*, May 2, 2006. www.ap.org.
5. Marc Chernick to Virginia M. Bouvier, e-mail communication, June 15, 2006.
6. A May 18, 2006, Constitutional Court ruling that still awaits implementation modifies the Justice and Peace Law by mandating greater accountability and stiffer sentencing of demobilized ex-combatants and requiring full reparations and disclosure of the whereabouts of the "disappeared" to victims' families.
7. This work draws heavily from that of Mauricio Garcia Duran, Carlos Fernandez, and Fernando Sarmiento, and the database of peace initiatives compiled by the Jesuit Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP). See www.c-r.org/accord/col/a14spnsh/tablePeaceInit.htmland www.cinep.org.co/datapaz_resumenes.htm.
8. The initiatives were the Association of Peasant Workers of Carare (ATCC), founded in 1987; Peace Communities of Atrato, 1997; Samaniego Peace Territory, 1998; Municipal Constituent Assembly of Mogotes, 1998; Association of Municipalities of Alto Ariari, 1999; Municipal Constituent Assembly of Tarso, 2001; Municipal Constituent Assembly of Sonsón, 2001; and the Provincial Assembly of Eastern Antioquia, 2002.
9. The first peace laboratory was established in 2002 in the Magdalena River Valley, where civil society had developed the Program for Development and Peace in response to the high levels of violence in the region. A second peace laboratory has been established in Norte de Santander, Oriente Antioqueño, and Macizo Colombiano/Alto Patía, and a third in Montes de María and Meta.

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