



# Security Council

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## United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2704 \(2023\)](#), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, and resolution [2366 \(2017\)](#), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the mandate of the Mission every 90 days. The report covers the period from 27 September to 26 December 2023.

#### II. Major developments

2. The reporting period was marked by events that provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress made in peacebuilding efforts in Colombia as the Government's total peace policy gradually takes hold, though not without challenges. In November, in the context of the seventh anniversary of the signing of Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government of Colombia and the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), senior government officials reiterated that its implementation was one of the main pillars of the total peace policy. Concurrently, developments such as the ongoing ceasefires and the fifth round of negotiations between the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) provided evidence of the Government's resolve to prioritize dialogue. Events throughout the reporting period underscored the ties between these processes, and their mutually reinforcing nature to consolidate peace.

3. The Government, former FARC-EP and civil society actors organized numerous forums, cultural events and meetings throughout the country to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the signing of the Final Agreement. A high-level meeting was held with all of the entities created through the Final Agreement, notably the Commission for the Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement and the National Reintegration Council. The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Carlos Ruiz Massieu, accompanied those events, whose common message was the recognition of the historic nature of the Final Agreement and the renewed commitment to achieving its goals.



4. On 20 November, Government and State entities renewed their commitment to the implementation of the ethnic chapter of the Final Agreement, signing a pact to complete at least 60 per cent of its implementation by 2026. Heads of Ministries and Government entities committed to take steps to reduce gaps between rural and urban areas through effectively incorporating the ethnic approach to the comprehensive rural reform; to safeguard the rights of communities and victims; and to guarantee political participation and collective and individual security for ethnic peoples. The pact also includes commitments to advancing the chapter's gender-related provisions. Representatives of the United States of America and Mexico, the countries accompanying the implementation of the ethnic chapter, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, were present as observers in the launch of the pact. Vice-President Francia Márquez, who is leading efforts to accelerate the implementation of the ethnic chapter, recognized that progress remained limited. The office of the Vice-President has identified nine priority areas, including access to land, development programmes with a territorial focus on ethnic territories and the strengthening of self-protection mechanisms.

5. Another important event in November was the first meeting of the executive board of the newly created National Agrarian Reform System, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, designed to propel much-needed coordination between entities with rural reform implementation responsibilities. Similarly, the Government's High-level Forum on Gender, a key entity for advancing the gender provisions in the Final Agreement, was reactivated in December, convened by the Ministry of Equality and the Unit for the Implementation of the Final Agreement.

6. In a significant step to give a long-term, structured perspective to reintegration, the parties approved the Comprehensive Reintegration Programme within the National Reintegration Council. This marks the conclusion of a year-long joint design process, with participation of nearly 500 former combatants, who provided insights in national and regional consultations, with support from the Mission. Key aspects of the programme include community-based and political reintegration. According to the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the Programme also provides for 153 affirmative actions to promote gender, ethnic and youth approaches. Its implementation in 2024, coordinated through the National Reintegration System, will be crucial to respond to former combatants' long-standing expectations.

7. In September, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace opened Case 11 to investigate gender-based, sexual and reproductive violence and other crimes based on prejudice against persons with diverse sexual orientation, expression and/or identity. The case will address violence committed by FARC-EP and by State actors and within the ranks of both parties. Victims' and women's organizations, who had strongly advocated the opening of the case, lauded this decision. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has stated that this will be its last case.

8. In addition, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace admitted under its authority for the first time an ex-commander of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), Salvatore Mancuso. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has no jurisdiction over crimes committed by the paramilitary, which fall under the justice and peace system created after the demobilization of the AUC in the mid-2000s. However, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace exceptionally accepted the former commander after he demonstrated that, between 1989 and 2004, he had functionally and materially been part of the public security forces, acting as a "hinge" or "point of connection" with the military.

9. The President of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, addressed a letter to the Secretary-General on 19 October that has been shared with the Council at the President's request. In the letter, the President reiterated his commitment to continue to

implement the Final Agreement and made observations regarding the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The President of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, Justice Roberto Vidal, later responded to these observations, emphasizing the independence of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and calling for respect for its autonomy.

10. In December, President Petro appointed Otty Patiño, until then the head of the Government's delegation to the peace talks with ELN, as High Commissioner for Peace, replacing Danilo Rueda. Several actors reacted to this leadership change by acknowledging Mr. Rueda's efforts during the first year of President Petro's administration, while calling on Mr. Patiño to continue to make strides towards peace consolidation. Various voices, including the Comunes party, also took the opportunity to insist on the necessary reestablishment of an office, within the Presidency, dedicated solely to the implementation of the Final Agreement. Following this appointment, President Petro designated Vera Grabe, a former member of the M-19 guerrilla, as the new head of the delegation in negotiations with ELN.

11. The Constitutional Court made an important decision giving further clarity for the implementation of the total peace policy, after reviewing a claim against the constitutionality of aspects of the law defining the legal framework for the policy. On 29 November, the Court ruled that engaging with high-impact criminal organizations falls within the President's constitutional mandate of preserving public order. Furthermore, it provided that Congress and the Judiciary have a role to play, for example, regarding the definition of terms for the submission of these organizations to justice and in authorizing the lifting of arrest warrants.

12. Regarding Congressional activities, discussions continue around regulations on procedural and administrative aspects of the agrarian jurisdiction. Government officials have been called to brief Congress on developments regarding the total peace policy, including negotiations with ELN.

13. The reporting period was also marked by progress in the implementation of previous agreements between the Government and ELN, particularly in the ongoing bilateral ceasefire and in the participation of society in the peace process (see paras. 86 to 93 below); and those reached in the fifth round of negotiations held in Mexico from 4–17 December. Demonstrating commitment and political will, the parties in Mexico addressed sensitive issues and announced key agreements on the extension of the ceasefire from 30 January 2024; the decision by ELN to suspend ransom kidnappings within the framework of that extension; the establishment of eight critical locations for humanitarian action and social transformation; the strengthening of the participation of society in the process; and measures to address actions by paramilitary forces and other illegal armed groups. The parties also established a bilateral commission to identify financial sources to advance the implementation of the peace process and the transition to peace by ELN. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Norway and a representative of the group of countries for accompaniment, support and cooperation (Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) were called to accompany the commission's work. The next round of talks will be held in Cuba in January.

14. Upon request by the parties, the Mission and the Catholic Church accompanied discussions and supported operations for the release, on 9 November, of Luis Manuel Díaz, father of professional football player Luis Díaz. Mr. Díaz was kidnapped by ELN in La Guajira department on 28 October with Cilenis Marulanda, his wife, who was released hours later. The abduction led to tensions between the parties and was widely condemned. The case sparked controversy around whether abductions fall under the remit of the agreed ceasefire protocols, and, more broadly, regarding how

they should be addressed in the peace negotiations. It also prompted a general call from the Colombian public to end kidnappings.

15. On 16 October, a bilateral national ceasefire came into force between the Government and the dissident group of the former FARC-EP that identifies itself as the Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (EMC FARC-EP), effective until 15 January 2024. The parties agreed that the ceasefire includes specific commitments to the protection of civilians, with references to international humanitarian law. On 12 December, the oversight, monitoring and verification mechanism was installed at the national level in Bogotá.

16. Although negotiations have faced difficulties, including episodes of violence between the parties and with other armed actors, and differences hindering further progress, the parties held a second round of talks in December. In addition to developing five of the needed protocols covering the rules for the ceasefire and the functioning of the Mechanism, the parties reached another four agreements regarding the role of the international community in negotiations, parameters to define the talks' agenda and locations defined as priority areas for enhanced State presence and services. Furthermore, in December EMC FARC-EP announced its decision to suspend ransom kidnappings. A third round of talks is expected in January.

17. The second municipal and departmental elections since the signing of the Final Agreement, were another major development during the reporting period. Some 20 million of nearly 39 million eligible voters cast ballots in the 29 October polls. Consistent with the trend observed since 2016, voting on election day took place largely without security incidents amid a large preventive deployment of the public security forces. According to the Government, ongoing talks and ceasefires with different illegal actors contributed to this positive result.

18. Some 120,000 polling stations were installed across the country, including polling stations in isolated conflict-affected areas, and 1,139 of them in Indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories. According to a report by the Investigation and Accusation Unit of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace on the impact of the ceasefires and the total peace policy, most municipalities with development programmes with a territorial focus where indicators of confinement and forced displacement have fallen, also saw an increase in voter turnout, most notably in Chocó Department.

19. Nevertheless, and as also observed in recent electoral campaigns, candidates and voters continued facing violence during the run-up to the election. Eight candidates (two women) from different parties were killed. In addition, 91 disturbances over electoral matters took place prior and after the elections, according to the non-governmental organization Electoral Observation Mission. Several affected the premises of the National Civil Registry and one resulted in the death of an official of the Registry and wounding of others.

20. Newly elected authorities, who have a significant role to play in peace efforts, will take office on 1 January 2024. Six women were elected as governors in Colombia's 32 departments, four more than in 2019, and 145 as mayors, 25 more than in the past elections, for the country's over 1,100 municipalities. Several Indigenous and Afro-Colombian candidates were also elected. As part of the Mission's advocacy efforts, its regional offices are engaging with incoming authorities to discuss priorities and opportunities related to the implementation of the Final Agreement and other peace initiatives.

21. Political reintegration is an essential aspect of former combatants' transition to civilian life. Former combatants voted largely without obstacles, including due to efforts by electoral authorities, the Government and Comunes, with support from the Mission, to address voter registration issues. Of the 299 candidates endorsed by

Comunes, 69 of them former combatants, and another 76 former combatant candidates endorsed by other parties, 18 were elected (10 women), nearly doubling the 12 successful candidacies in the 2019 elections. This includes one Afro-Colombian former combatant elected mayor of Cumaribo, Vichada Department, 10 candidates elected to municipal councils (three former combatants) and seven others to local administrative board (one former combatant). Women former combatants represented 38 per cent of candidates endorsed by Comunes and nearly half of those elected under Comunes' and other parties' banners, despite persisting challenges to access funds and protection measures.

22. Regrettably, there were also incidents illustrating the persistent stigma and violence facing former combatants willing to take part in democratic debate. A former combatant running for the municipal council of Chalán, Sucre Department, was killed hours before election day, and another one in Fonseca, La Guajira Department, suffered discrimination throughout the campaign.

23. With regards to security in regions historically affected by conflict, and as observed in recent months, the situation during the reporting period offers a mixed picture: owing to the Government's engagement with various illegal armed groups, some indicators have improved in specific locations. Nevertheless, violence by armed and criminal groups continues to have a severe impact on communities and undermine implementation efforts (see paras. 59–64). For example, Phanor Guazaquillo, a leader of the Nasa Indigenous Peoples from Putumayo Department and a member of the High-Level Forum of Ethnic Peoples, was killed in December. Mr. Guazaquillo played an important role in peace implementation, including regarding the development programmes with a territorial focus and the pact for advancing the ethnic chapter.

24. The Constitutional Court recently declared an unconstitutional state of affairs regarding the fundamental rights of social leaders and human rights defenders. In response to writs of protection presented by 20 of them between 2020 and 2022, the Court highlighted the persisting, grave and generalized violence facing leaders and defenders, and the limited institutional response. It issued orders to Government and State entities to assess their protection needs and to accelerate investigations. The Court also ordered the development of a plan for the comprehensive respect for and protection of leaders and defenders and to ensure their effective access to justice. The Court stated that the plan should be aligned with security guarantees provisions of the Final Agreement.

25. In a separate decision, in December, the Court also ruled in favour of protecting the rights of peasants and ethnic communities participating in the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops in Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo Departments, issuing orders to Government entities to comply with the programme's commitments, including prioritizing voluntary substitution over forced eradication.

26. Regarding violence against former FARC-EP combatants, the Mission registered the killing of 11 former FARC-EP members (all men), a decrease of 26.7 per cent compared with the previous reporting period. The total number of homicides of former combatants since the signing of the Final Agreement stands at 406 (including 11 women, 57 Afro-Colombians, 49 Indigenous persons).

### **III. Main activities and priorities**

27. The Mission, through the successive mandates agreed by the Security Council, has supported the implementation of the Final Agreement through its different phases.

28. Most recently, in August 2023, the Council also authorized the Mission's role in the monitoring and verification of the temporary bilateral ceasefire between the Government and ELN. Furthermore, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General continues to provide his good offices as the Government engages with other illegal armed groups under its total peace policy.

## **A. Verification of the implementation of the Final Agreement**

29. The Government has continued to show a strong commitment to further the implementation of the Final Agreement as one of the pillars of its total peace policy. As progress across its different sections has been uneven since 2016, the reporting period offers encouraging examples of this commitment, while also placing in evidence the persisting challenges.

30. The implementation of the ethnic chapter continues to lag despite being a pioneering development of the Final Agreement. The Mission continued to monitor its implementation and developments described throughout this section help illustrate the status of its provisions.

### *Comprehensive rural reform*

31. Advancing a long-overdue rural reform remains a top priority for the Government, as demonstrated by recent progress in key areas owing to new regulations to accelerate access to land for peasants, a sizeable budget increase to over \$216 million, and the holding of weekly Cabinet meetings on rural reform chaired by the President.

32. Nevertheless, progress regarding the national plans for rural reform remains uneven, despite their importance to help consolidate advancement in land distribution and rural development efforts by enlarging the presence of the State and increasing the delivery of its goods and services to conflict-affected regions. Challenges related to insufficient coordination by some Government entities, as well as regarding the inclusion of gender and ethnic approaches in the plans' design and implementation, persist.

33. Constructive dialogue and wide participation of stakeholders from across Colombian society remain a feature of rural reform efforts. Peasants, rural women and private landowners have been able to voice their concerns regarding challenges, including insecurity. They have also participated in discussions, supported by the Mission, regarding policy design and implementation, including in the framework of the development programmes with a territorial focus and the National Mixed Commission on Peasant Affairs.

34. Such dialogue remains essential to address persisting tensions and clashes around access to land between peasants, ethnic peoples and private landowners. In Cauca, Cesar and Norte de Santander Departments, as well as others, these tensions persist and have grown in areas with the presence of illegal armed groups, as well as in environmentally protected areas where peasants reside. While agreements over specific plots are being sought in Cauca Department under the leadership of the Office of the Vice-President, a more structured governmental approach to managing land conflict could contribute to durable solutions.

35. Recent progress has also included additional land purchased, land with formalized tenure, as well as land handed over to beneficiaries. According to the National Land Agency 172,192 hectares intended for the Land Fund were acquired during the reporting period, for a total of 288,105 hectares to date under this administration. Nevertheless, only 5,429 hectares were handed over during the

reporting period, mainly to ethnic peoples for a total of 28,684 hectares during this administration. The recently approved special land programme for peasants and the special land programme for rural women, provided for in the National Development Plan, could help accelerate access to land.

36. As part of the pact for advancing the ethnic chapter, the National Land Agency committed to expediting land access for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombians, and to ensuring clarity regarding figures to track progress. In addition, two collective titles were granted to Afro-Colombian authorities during the reporting period. In 2023, 13 processes of land purchase and collective adjudication benefited Indigenous Peoples and three benefited Afro-Colombian communities. However, the Roma continue to have limited access to land through the Land Fund.

37. Furthermore, the National Land Agency formalized land tenure for some 385,984 hectares during the reporting period. 726,673 hectares have been formalized during the current Administration (67 per cent benefited Indigenous Peoples, 26 per cent peasants and 6 per cent Afro-Colombians). Over a third of beneficiaries were women. The fact that land-related efforts are mostly benefiting impoverished ethnic communities, peasants and rural women in long-neglected areas such as the Caribbean region and peasant reserve zones, illustrates the enormous potential of fully delivering on the ethnic and gender-related provisions of the Final Agreement. Nevertheless, this requires additional efforts to reach beneficiaries and to deliver land with the necessary support to make it productive.

38. The comprehensive assistance for rural development provided by the Rural Development Agency is also noteworthy. Additional resources are allowing the Government to offer technical assistance and low-cost credit to small farmers, rural women and youth. This has been implemented in Córdoba, La Guajira and Sucre Departments, as well as other areas where peacebuilding efforts overlap, including peasant reserve zones and development programmes with a territorial focus regions.

39. The land restitution process made moderate progress during the reporting period. Owing to efforts by the Land Restitution Unit, the area of land for which requests were resolved increased from 29,000 hectares to 59,349 hectares, benefiting 1,905 victims, as well as 556 Indigenous and Afro-Colombian families during the current administration. Challenging security conditions for beneficiaries and public servants continue to hinder restitution efforts in regions such as Urabá, and in Magdalena, Norte de Santander, Caquetá and Nariño Departments.

40. In a welcome development illustrating the ties between rural reform and the ethnic chapter of the Final Agreement, the Government, Standing Committee for Consultation with Indigenous Peoples and Organizations and the National Commission of Indigenous Territories reached an agreement regarding the implementation of the multipurpose cadaster in their territories. Through this agreement, Indigenous Peoples and organizations are now allowed to become implementing partners, strengthening their autonomy and involvement in decision-making about their territories.

41. The development programmes with a territorial focus were conceived in the Final Agreement to help close historic divides between mostly poor and conflict-affected rural regions and wealthier urban areas. Enhanced institutional coordination, including the efforts of the Agency for Territorial Renewal, and the approval of new funding for the implementation of development programmes with a territorial focus initiatives are encouraging, as is the continued mass participation of communities in their design and oversight. Sustained efforts are needed to meet the expectations of communities in regions prioritized for implementation.

42. In October, the Government allocated around \$140 million to finance high-impact projects in regions with development programmes with a territorial focus, aiming at closing socioeconomic gaps, creating synergies with illicit crops substitution strategies and reparation to victims. The Mission supported efforts by entities with implementation responsibilities to align actions in Cauca, Chocó and Norte de Santander Departments.

43. Also in October, a national gathering of representatives of the special consultation mechanism, created to guarantee the effective participation of ethnic peoples in the development programmes with a territorial focus, was convened to discuss methodologies for expediting their implementation in ethnic territories. The mechanism highlighted the need for adjusting priorities and allocating resources and agreed on the importance of ensuring their coherence with municipal and departmental development plans of recently elected authorities. The special consultation mechanism has also recently underscored the critical humanitarian situation of ethnic peoples in regions with development programmes with a territorial focus.

44. Implementation of umbrella projects aimed at reinforcing the comprehensive approach of development programmes with a territorial focus is advancing. In the Catatumbo region, a university campus expected to leverage additional public investments is now under construction with a budget of approximately \$8 million. Similar initiatives are being designed in the Bajo Calima and Bajo San Juan regions in Chocó Department and in the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia Department, both of especial interest in the negotiations between the Government and ELN. This is an example of linkages between implementation of the Final Agreement and other efforts under the total peace policy.

*Reintegration of former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo combatants*

45. Reintegration is another area in which the reporting period saw concrete efforts to approach implementation more comprehensively. As the process continues to evolve from necessary measures to kick-start the transition into civilian life towards long-term actions, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization and former combatants' representatives have shown a renewed focus on strategic discussions and joint decision-making.

46. Within the National Reintegration Council, the parties are showing strong interest in strengthening the collective dimension of reintegration. They are working on the identification of "special collective reintegration areas", which would encompass the nearly 2,000 former combatants residing in former territorial areas for training and reintegration and approximately 3,000 conducting their reintegration collectively outside these areas. So far, the National Reintegration Council has conducted 93 visits in 19 departments, most of them accompanied by the Mission. These visits informed a draft decree, which will be necessary to ensure and expand the provision of State-sponsored support and services for former combatants, regardless of their location.

47. Collective efforts are a fundamental aspect of economic reintegration. During the reporting period, the number of former combatants' cooperatives reached 232. With a view to leveraging local efforts, former combatants established six new regional federations grouping cooperatives from various departments.

48. Almost 80 per cent of former combatants (2,763 women) participate in 5,691 productive projects (68 per cent are individual projects). During the reporting period, the National Reintegration Council approved three collective projects benefitting 19 former combatants (three women) and the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization approved 82 new individual ones. To enhance market access and



productive capacities, the Agency is assessing 23 collective projects for potential funding under its sustainability strategy. Three are led by women, in line with the Agency's effort to strengthen their economic empowerment. The unpaid care work continues to be an added burden for women former combatants. A project on comprehensive caregiving, implemented by the Agency with support from the United Nations country team and the Mission in 10 prioritized former territorial areas for training and reintegration, is providing valuable lessons to inform long-term solutions.

49. Thousands of former combatants are conducting their reintegration in predominantly rural areas, where access to land is fundamental to their livelihoods and long-term stability. During the reporting period, the Government purchased 4,725 hectares and devised an additional avenue to accelerate access to land for reintegration. Coordination between the National Land Agency and the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization is key to streamline the processes for land access based on agreed priorities and goals for 2024.

50. The number of former territorial areas for training and reintegration with State-acquired land remains at 13 out of 24. In October, the National Land Agency adjudicated 1,047 hectares in San Juan de Arama, Meta Department, to former combatants relocated from Vista Hermosa, Meta, and eight hectares for the former territorial area for training and reintegration of Tumaco, Nariño Department. So far, the Special Assets Administration has granted 133 hectares to three former combatants' associations in of Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca and Huila Departments. To date, over 6,900 hectares have been purchased, 2,000 of which have been adjudicated for reintegration purposes.

51. Despite its importance to provide certainty to former combatants, recent progress in housing construction in four former territorial areas for training and reintegration in Caquetá, Cauca and Antioquia Departments, and in the provision of housing subsidies, still falls short of the needs. Difficulties with contractors, as in the former territorial area for training and reintegration in Arauca, and limited resources are among the obstacles hindering housing solutions.

52. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization began the roll-out of a community-based reintegration strategy in 67 locations in 12 departments and Bogotá. Based on a restorative dialogue methodology to foster reconciliation and coexistence, the strategy, with a budget of \$5 million, was preceded by a pilot phase conducted in Yotoco, Valle del Cauca Department, with support from the Mission. Ensuring an effective participation of former combatants and linkages with existing community-led processes will be key in the early phase of implementation.

53. Local authorities have an important role vis-à-vis reintegration. Within the National Reintegration Council, the parties are reaching out to newly elected officials to position the process in municipal and departmental development plans, as well as to reactivate reintegration bodies at local and regional level. Several developments of the period confirmed the importance of actively involving former combatants in discussions, ensuring that reintegration takes into account their interests, views and beliefs.

54. In November, for example, the Government, with support from the Mission and the United Nations country team, held the first national meeting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex former combatants. Participants provided inputs to several public policy instruments and agreed on common messaging for a campaign against the persisting stigma facing them.

55. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian former combatants held in October their first-ever national gathering, during which they provided proposals for the special harmonization programme and the comprehensive reintegration programme.

Participants highlighted the need to update the census of former FARC-EP members of ethnic origin to ensure accurate information feeds policymaking. They also underscored the persisting risks in their territories, including forced recruitment.

56. After lengthy planning, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization reached an agreement with ethnic organizations regarding the special harmonization programme for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities. The programme is intended to restore harmony in their communities, disrupted by members who participated in the armed conflict. Allocating sufficient resources and ensuring the participation of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian former combatants in the implementation of local-level plans, and safeguarding the collective nature of their reintegration, will be key to the long-term success of the programme.

57. In a welcome development, the National Reintegration Council approved in November the family reunification programme, which includes necessary tools for case management, legal and psychosocial support, and sets the conditions to reunite families of former combatants separated during the conflict, with a particular toll on women. The programme includes a specific route for care and attention of children of former combatants.

#### *Security guarantees*

58. For the comprehensive approach applied by the Government to rural reform and reintegration to produce sustainable results, security is essential. This depends, in turn, on progress in the deployment of an integrated presence of State institutions and services, a core goal of the Final Agreement and a condition to eradicate conflict drivers.

59. The evolving violence, which varies across Colombia's vast and diverse territory, also underscores the need for complementarity between the Final Agreement's security guarantees provisions and the ongoing dialogue efforts under the total peace policy. The Government's engagement with illegal armed groups and criminal organizations has reduced lethal violence. According to the report of the Investigation and Accusation Unit of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, armed conflict de-escalated during the first 10 months of 2023. This meant fewer attacks against public security forces, armed clashes, and civilians killed and wounded.

60. In contrast, crimes that are more closely linked to economic dynamics and social and territorial control, such as kidnapping, extortion, forced recruitment, and conflict-related sexual violence, persist or have increased. Violence was especially felt by Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombians, and by communities in Antioquia, Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Putumayo Departments.

61. The persistence of conflict-related violence in certain locations calls for context-specific measures from authorities to prevent violence, protect civilians and prosecute those responsible. Affected communities also call for efforts towards multilateral ceasefires between all illegal armed actors in their territories. Violence in municipalities which had seen improvements following the signing of the Final Agreement, is a reason for concern, highlighting the need for a swift State-wide response.

62. The Government has made progress in the approval of several long-awaited security guarantees mechanisms provided in the Final Agreement, such as the comprehensive protection programme for former combatants, the strategic security and protection plan, including a protocol for emergency evacuation of former combatants at risk, and the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organizations. Attaining the intended results in 2024 and beyond will be contingent on the allocation of adequate resources and upon interinstitutional

coordination, including with newly elected authorities, for which a more strategic use of the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics remains essential.

63. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported the forced displacement of 62,300 persons and the confinement of 81,100 people, from January to November 2023. Of those, 29 per cent were Afro-Colombians and 39 per cent were Indigenous. While this represents a 20 per cent reduction compared with the same period last year, concerns persist over the impact of armed confrontations on civilians. In addition, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) registered 24 massacres (11 verified and 13 under verification). Verified cases involved 36 verified victims, including 5 women, 1 girl and 2 boys, and represent a 16 per cent decrease compared with the previous reporting period.

64. While 2023 was the year with the second lowest number of landmine victims since the signing of the Final Agreement, their persistent use continues to affect vulnerable communities. Eighty-five victims have been recorded by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace since January, the majority of whom are civilians and about 20 per cent are members of ethnic minorities. Nariño, Chocó and Cauca Departments continue to have the highest landmine contamination, accounting for 72 per cent of the newly recorded landmine victims.

65. Equally concerning is the continuing targeting of men and women, who have dedicated their efforts to stand up for the rights of entire communities and the implementation of the Final Agreement. During the reporting period, OHCHR recorded 46 allegations of homicides of social leaders, 13 verified (11 men and 2 women), 20 undergoing verification and 13 deemed inconclusive. This represents a 28.8 per cent decrease compared with the previous reporting period. Of the cases verified and under verification, most victims were peasant leaders (14) and ethnic authorities (9), and most of these crimes occurred in departments prioritized for implementation, including Cauca (7), Putumayo (6), Nariño (4), Antioquia (4) and Valle del Cauca (3). There is a pattern of increased targeting of leaders involved in land restitution, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian traditional authorities and members of local administrative boards, who are often forced to leave their places of residence, hindering the processes they lead and further eroding the social fabric.

66. The effects of an uneven implementation of the mechanisms established by the Final Agreement to protect the lives of those involved in peacebuilding efforts continue to be felt. It is therefore positive that, during the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior approved and started to implement collective protection plans for all 51 organizations that applied to be covered by the comprehensive protection programme for communities and organizations in the territories.

67. Protection measures also remain of the essence for former FARC-EP members. Since the signing of the Final Agreement, 81 former combatants have been killed while awaiting protection from the National Protection Unit. The allocation of sufficient resources can make a substantial difference, as dozens wait for the Unit to assess their protection requests, including women who are facing specific risks.

68. In addition to killings, the Mission has verified 136 attempted homicides and 35 disappearances since the Final Agreement was signed (two of each during the reporting period). The above includes an attempted homicide against a female Indigenous former combatant in Putumayo Department. As with other expressions of violence, the dynamics associated with attacks against former combatants vary across regions. For example, the Mission has registered a decrease in Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca and Putumayo Departments, while there has been an increase in Arauca, Guaviare, Meta and Valle del Cauca Departments.

69. Since the signing of the Final Agreement, investigations of crimes against former combatants continue facing challenges. Out of the 498 cases under investigation by the Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, no convictions were obtained during the reporting period. The total of sentences stands at 71 (2 for crimes against women, 6 for crimes against Afro-Colombians and 14 for crimes against Indigenous persons), including five sentences against persons who ordered the attacks. The Mission has insisted on the importance of providing judicial authorities with adequate resources and of ensuring enhanced cooperation with public security forces to bring those responsible to justice.

#### *Restorative sentences*

70. The success of the Final Agreement is also contingent upon upholding the rights of victims, an essential principle for laying the groundwork for reconciliation. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has made significant strides to that end as it continues to work to hold accountable those responsible for serious human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

71. In keeping with a victim-centred approach, over 343,000 victims have been accredited, most of them collectively, enabling them to participate actively in the proceedings. Over 13,900 individuals are now under the jurisdiction of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, almost three quarters are former FARC-EP members; roughly one quarter belong to the public security forces; and just over 1 per cent include other State agents and civilian third parties.

72. The trial phase continued during the reporting period in cases 01 (on hostage-taking, other severe deprivations of liberty and concurrent crimes committed by FARC-EP) and 03 (on killings and forced disappearances presented as combat casualties by State agents) for crimes committed in the Catatumbo and Caribbean regions. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace conducted public hearings and dialogue sessions with victims, including Indigenous persons and Afro-Colombians, and with indictees who have acknowledged responsibility and contributed to the truth and are therefore eligible for restorative sentences.

73. Also within Case 03, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace recently indicted 35 members of the army, including five generals, one of whom was later top Commander of the Army, for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Huila Department from 2005 to 2008, resulting in 200 victims of extrajudicial killings and eight victims of attempted homicide.

74. Ethnic-related matters continued to be included in the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. For instance, in Case 09 (on crimes against ethnic peoples and territories), the Special Jurisdiction for Peace engaged with communities and traditional authorities from the Pacific region to discuss the accreditation of victims and the handling of cases of gender-based violence. This engagement was conducted in observance of their traditions and beliefs. In November, within Case 02 (on the situation of Tumaco, Ricaurte and Barbacoas in Nariño Department), the Special Jurisdiction for Peace held a hearing to inform stakeholders about progress in the design of a project for the reparation of the Awa Indigenous peoples.

75. As the issuance of the first restorative sentences approaches, the Government and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are conducting preparatory work to ensure the conditions necessary for their implementation. In December, during the third session of the coordination mechanism to facilitate implementation and monitoring of these sentences, the Government and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace took stock of progress regarding restorative projects, including the identification of Government-led initiatives, which could be used for the implementation of restorative sentences. Efforts by all stakeholders for the timely preparation of these sentences are welcome,

given the vital importance of guaranteeing that conditions are in place before they are issued. Nonetheless, delays persist in the provision of enabling conditions (for example State-sponsored initiatives and security) for sentenced individuals from all parties to the conflict to meet the restorative component of their sentences. Overcoming these gaps is a fundamental requirement to allow individuals most responsible for conflict-related crimes to fulfil their obligation vis-à-vis thousands of victims.

76. The Government has also started preparations to roll-out its attention and support route for members of the public security forces under the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Workshops were carried out by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization across the country to discuss this key assistance, which includes much-needed psychosocial support. The Government is preparing a decree with details on the route.

77. The Mission continues to accompany preparatory work by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, Government and key counterparts and to call for greater efforts to boost this essential work.

#### *Gender issues*

78. Although more than 100 gender-related provisions were included in the Final Agreement, their implementation continues to face challenges, partly owing to insufficient technical and financial resources. The Ministry of Equality and the Unit for the Implementation of the Final Agreement are streamlining the work of entities involved in implementing the provisions, with a view to accelerating the pace of implementation.

79. In its most recent annual report on the implementation of the Final Agreement, the Special Forum on Gender highlighted ongoing issues with its gender provisions regarding the comprehensive rural reform and the ethnic chapter and the violence women are facing in conflict-affected territories.

80. The development of the first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security continues under the leadership of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Equality, with participation of women's organizations and the support of the international community. Issues highlighted during the Action Plan discussion include the need to ensure its coherence with gender provisions of the Final Agreement and the total peace policy and securing resources for its implementation. The Plan is expected to be approved in March 2024.

#### *Youth, peace and security*

81. To raise awareness and promote ownership of the youth, peace and security agenda in the country, United Nations efforts have continued through an interagency working group. In November, the working group on youth organized a meeting on advancing the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean. Sixty-one youth (41 women) from the region, more than 10 Colombians, participated, prompting interest among Colombian institutions in kick-starting the design of a national youth, peace and security action plan.

82. The Mission adopted a new youth, peace and security strategy, focused on incorporating this approach in its verification tasks and promoting youth participation in the implementation of the Final Agreement and other peacebuilding efforts.

*Other developments related to the implementation of the Final Agreement*

83. It is concerning that, seven years since the signing of the Final Agreement, challenges persist regarding the legal situation of former FARC-EP members, affecting their legal security and reintegration. Currently, the number of former FARC-EP members accredited by the Government is 13,705 (3,150 women).

84. The tripartite working group on transit to legality, comprised of the Government, former combatants and the Mission, has recently focused its work on three areas: individuals pending accreditation owing to disagreements regarding their former FARC-EP membership; the identification of individuals yet to be accredited; and the situation of 615 former FARC-EP members who remain imprisoned, according to Comunes. The working group also met with the Ministry of Justice and the National Penitentiary Institute to address the health conditions of some of these individuals.

85. The attorneys for former combatants have also expressed concern about the limited number of amnesties granted by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace since 2018. According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as at 6 December, 676 amnesties have been granted out of 4,417 requests and 3,741 have been denied.

**B. Developments related to the Ejército de Liberación Nacional**

86. As established in Security Council resolution [2694 \(2023\)](#), the Mission continued to monitor and verify the implementation of the 180-day bilateral ceasefire that began on 3 August 2023 between the Government of Colombia and ELN. The Mission acts as the international component of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, which includes representatives of both parties and of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia.

87. The Mission has deployed 106 new personnel (60 observers and 46 civilian staff) to nine regional offices and 22 other locations. Currently, 118 Mission personnel (46 international observers) are involved in the work of the Mechanism in all but one of its regional and local branches; importantly 31 per cent of the Mission's personnel involved are women.

88. The Government has deployed 92 officials, including 44 members of the Military Forces and 42 of the Police, five members of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, and one from the Ministry of Defence. In turn, ELN continued to participate at the national level of the Mechanism, with 11 representatives, and the Catholic Church was actively involved with 29 representatives at the local level, nine at the regional level and eight at the national level.

89. The Mechanism undertook outreach and awareness-raising activities regarding the ceasefire and the Mechanism's work to inform civil society organizations, regional and local authorities in priority areas, including Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Cundinamarca, Nariño, Santander and Valle del Cauca Departments. The Mission developed a guide for internal use on gender mainstreaming and addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

90. The Mechanism continued to contribute to de-escalation between public security forces and ELN, ultimately benefiting communities in conflict-affected areas. In addition to the prevention and resolution of day-to-day problems on the ground, communication channels set up by the Mechanism enabled the parties to avoid armed confrontations on several occasions. On-site verification activities of possible violations were carried out by the Mission, as requested by the parties. Nevertheless, continued violence among illegal armed actors in several regions limits the overall humanitarian impact of the bilateral ceasefire.

91. The Mechanism worked constructively on the classification of the 170 cases received up to 30 November. Several cases were dismissed as “not applicable” for not falling under the protocols. Some cases are at the pre-verification stage, and some were submitted to the plenary. The Mission has verified a number of specific cases. To date, no case has been confirmed as a violation of the ceasefire. The Mechanism is expected to submit a report to the dialogue table ahead of 30 January, when the ceasefire is due to be renewed.

92. In parallel, the work of the National Participation Committee established by the Government and ELN delegations has continued. The Committee conducted 42 of the 68 meetings planned to define the methodology for the participation of society, including 14 sectoral events and one territorial meeting in the Caribbean region. The Mission and the United Nations country team supported these activities, including with resources from the Peacebuilding Fund to strengthen community participation.

93. So far, over 4,000 people from diverse sectors, including Indigenous communities, youth, persons with disabilities and people in penitentiary institutions, have participated and provided inputs. They discussed issues they expect the parties to address at the negotiation table, such as environmental matters, awareness-raising on the process and greater participation at local level.

94. The work of the Committee will continue in 2024, convening other key sectors, including victims, women and Afro-Colombians, along with nine additional territorial meetings.

#### **IV. Coordination with the United Nations country team**

95. Through close collaboration between the Mission and the United Nations country team, the Organization continues to contribute to peacebuilding efforts across the country. The country team provided assistance to the implementation of the Final Agreement and other key aspects of the total peace policy.

96. The assistance includes support, funded by the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia, to reintegration initiatives, to the work of the National Participation Committee and to the strengthening of the Catholic Church’s team accompanying the negotiations between the Government and ELN. In November, the Mission and the Resident Coordinator Office jointly supported the visit to Colombia of the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support.

#### **V. Conduct and discipline**

97. The Mission continued to implement a strong misconduct prevention programme with additional mandatory refresher bimonthly training sessions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. A strengthened risk management approach has been instituted.

98. No reports of sexual exploitation and abuse were received during the period from 1 September to 30 November 2023. During the same period, four allegations of serious misconduct were reported and referred for investigations.

#### **VI. Observations**

99. In commemorating the seventh anniversary of the Final Agreement, the Government, the former FARC-EP, political and civil society actors showed renewed

commitment to its implementation. This was yet another encouraging demonstration of Colombia's determination to consolidate peace.

100. Even if challenges at times seem to overshadow progress, the peace process set far-reaching dynamics in motion that can be transformative for Colombia, if rooted in political will combined with the necessary human, financial and technical resources, careful planning and coordination. This is true for the implementation of the pending agenda of the Final Agreement, as well as for the success of the important dialogue initiatives under way to further reduce violence under the total peace policy.

101. I therefore welcome that key planning and design processes have been completed, for example in the framework of the comprehensive rural reform and the reintegration process, and I trust that entities with implementation responsibilities will now translate them into concrete results. To that end, acknowledging the key role that newly elected departmental and municipal authorities can play and working alongside them is of the essence.

102. Honouring the pact recently signed for the implementation of the ethnic chapter is essential to meeting the expectations of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, who have endured long-standing exclusion and inequality and continue to suffer a disproportionate impact of violence, in particular women and children.

103. It is equally important to deepen the implementation of the gender provisions of the Final Agreement and to continue to promote women's participation in ongoing peace dialogues, as demanded by women peacebuilders. Since women and girls continue to face multiple forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, I call upon all relevant authorities to make every effort to prevent these crimes, respond appropriately and bring those responsible to justice.

104. Persistent violence has been an obstacle to implementation of key aspects of the Final Agreement, leading to mixed results across its sections. The lack of security guarantees in several regions has prevented rural reform efforts from improving the living conditions of entire peasant communities, while also hindering the transition of former combatants into civilian life. Insecurity also threatens to prevent the truth from fully coming to light in the context of the transitional justice process.

105. The fact that beneficiaries and stakeholders participating in these fundamental processes, such as peasant and women leaders, face risks because of their role in peacebuilding is unacceptable. The active participation and strong ownership by local actors have been a defining feature of the Colombian peace process and a determining factor in the progress made. Committing to the success of the Final Agreement must, under no circumstances, become an existential threat. I therefore call upon authorities to step up their efforts to protect these local leaders and participants in the peace process, putting to immediate effect the key mechanisms for security guarantees and recently adopted policies.

106. The cutting-edge transitional justice system in Colombia strikes a balance between justice and peace. As the Special Jurisdiction for Peace approaches the issuance of its first sentences, I trust it will receive the full support from all stakeholders in order to deliver on the paramount issue of victims' rights. I also trust the Special Jurisdiction for Peace will further enhance its dialogue with all actors involved in the process and will continue to advance towards upholding truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition.

107. Even if partial, there are positive results from the engagement of the Government with armed actors, despite the obstacles inherent to the ambitious goal of ending violence through dialogue. I welcome the appointment, for the first time, of a woman as the head of the Government delegation to the peace talks with ELN, the first time that a woman has such a role in Colombian history. I am encouraged by



the results of the fifth cycle of negotiations held in Mexico, as well as by progress made in the ceasefire between the parties and the work of the National Participation Committee. I trust that the parties will build on the progress made and will respond to the expectations of the Colombian people with further genuine gestures of their will for peace.

108. As negotiations between the Government and the group self-identifying as EMC FARC-EP continue, I welcome the agreements reached and protocols defined thus far by the parties. I urge them to persevere in observing the ceasefire agreement, including its expressed promise of greater protections for civilians, and in defining the negotiations agenda, which are essential conditions for talks to bear fruit.

109. As these and other efforts by the Government in favour of bilateral dialogue continue, I renew my call to all armed actors to contribute to further de-escalating violence across the country, including by reducing clashes among them, thereby reassuring Colombian society and the world of their commitment to reaching peace through dialogue.

110. Given its fundamental role, I trust that the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, under its new leadership, will seize the opportunity to further strengthen the implementation of the Final Agreement and the foundations for the success of the dialogues, considering the mutually reinforcing nature of both processes.

111. International support for Colombia-led endeavours continues to be fundamental and the Mission stands ready to continue to work alongside the Government and all actors invested in bringing these commendable efforts to fruition.

## VERIFICATION MISSION PRESENCE AND MUNICIPALITIES PRIORITIZED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT - COLOMBIA

Verification Mission  
Geospatial

