

# INTRODUCTION: AFRO-COLOMBIAN VOICES IN THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS

## HOW A GROUP OF AFRO-COLOMBIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND NEW YORK LAW PROFESSORS CAME TOGETHER TO RAISE AWARENESS

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Colombia has emerged as a global reference for establishing political solutions to seemingly intractable conflicts. After five decades and numerous negotiations attempts, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (“FARC”) reached a peace agreement containing several major innovations in the field of women, peace and security and conflict resolution.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the Colombian peace accords, and the peace process more generally, is the inclusion and recognition of gender-based issues. The strides in gender rights protections were hard fought by civil society, first in their call for negotiations to include the voices of women, Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community, and then for their steadfast effort to ensure inclusion of progressive language in the final text. Among the advocates were Afro-Colombian women’s human rights defenders, who played a critical role advocating for inclusion of the groundbreaking racial and gender justice provisions in the finalized peace accord. While the struggle for meaningful implementation of the Peace Accord continues, Afro-descendant women and their allies are in a much better position to advocate for a just and inclusive peace.

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Sustainable peace is achieved when women participate at all levels of decision-making, political processes, conflict prevention, resolution, and peace processes.<sup>1</sup> Successful and sustainable transitional justice, reconstruction and institution-building in Colombia will depend on consolidating and ensuring the participation of Afro-Colombian women in the implementation of Colombia's Peace Accords. Because of this, Afro-Colombian women's rights activists have sought ways to make their voices heard and to create channels of communication and consultation between their communities and international policymakers in order to achieve sustainable peace.

The Human Rights and Gender Justice ("HRGJ") Clinic at the City University of New York ("CUNY") School of Law in New York has been working in Colombia since 2010. By 2017, the HRGJ Clinic began working with Proceso de Comunidades Negras<sup>2</sup> ("PCN") in their struggle to implement Colombia's Peace Accords from an ethnic, racial and gender perspective. PCN is an Afro-descendant collective of more than 100 grassroots organizations, Community Councils, and individuals formed in Colombia in 1993.

Knowing more allies among the United Nations Security Council could be reached by publishing in English, PCN sought partnership from the HRGJ Clinic on a writing project designed to raise visibility internationally including with the Security Council. The HRGJ Clinic worked with law professors at CUNY Law School in New York and at the University of Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia to write a series of articles on the priority issues identified by PCN that have impacted Afro-Colombian communities deeply affected by Colombia's protracted war. PCN also worked with MADRE to publish a book highlighting individual stories of Afro-Colombian women's human rights defenders.<sup>3</sup>

In February 2019, the HRGJ Clinic led an academic delegation to Cali, Colombia to discuss the collaborative academic writing project and content for each article. Workshop participants decided to search for a US-based law journal with a strong social justice readership for partnership. After publication was complete, MADRE would

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1. NGO WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY, MAPPING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL 1 (2016), <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/NGOWG-Mapping-WPS-in-UNSC-2016.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/W6EM-U4V8>].

2. "Black Communities Process," a Colombian human rights organization.

3. PROCESO DE COMUNIDADES NEGRAS & MADRE, NO CHOICE BUT TO RESIST: WOMEN LEADERS OF BLACK COMMUNITIES PROCESS (2019).

disseminate these articles to key UN Missions in New York and other key international stakeholders.

Known for rigorous discussion and analysis of current issues in human rights law, the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* was the perfect match for this project. Reflecting PCN's priority issues, the six thematic areas that will be covered in the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review's* online forum are: (1) the Colombian government's compliance with its Peace Accord in the area of inclusion of Afro-Colombian women;<sup>4</sup> (2) threats against and attacks on Afro-Colombian human rights defenders;<sup>5</sup> (3) sexual and gender-based violence committed against Afro-Colombians;<sup>6</sup> (4) access to justice for victims of sexual and gender-based violence;<sup>7</sup> (5) access to healthcare for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence;<sup>8</sup> and (6) protection of Afro-Colombian women's territorial rights.<sup>9</sup>

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4. Lisa Davis, *Third Party at the Table: Afro-Colombian Women's Struggle for Peace and the Inclusion of a Racial-Gender Justice Analysis in Colombia's Peace Process*, 4 HRLR ONLINE 324 (May 2020).

5. J.M. Kirby & René Urueña, *Understanding Threats Against Afro-descendant Women Human Rights Defenders: Re-envisioning Security*, 4 HRLR ONLINE 336 (May 2020).

6. Babe Howell & Naree Sinthusek, *In the Crosshairs: Centering Local Responses to SGBV in Afro-Colombian Communities*, 4 HRLR ONLINE 268 (May 2020).

7. Julie Goldscheid, *Gender Violence Against Afro-Colombian Women: Making the Promise of International Human Rights Law Real*, 4 HRLR ONLINE 249 (May 2020).

8. Deborah Zalesne, *Making Rights a Reality: Access to Health Care for Afro-Colombian Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, 51 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 670 (Feb. 2020).

9. Rebecca Bratspies, *'Territory is Everything': Afro-Colombian Communities, Human Rights and Illegal Land Grabs*, 4 HRLR ONLINE 290 (May 2020).