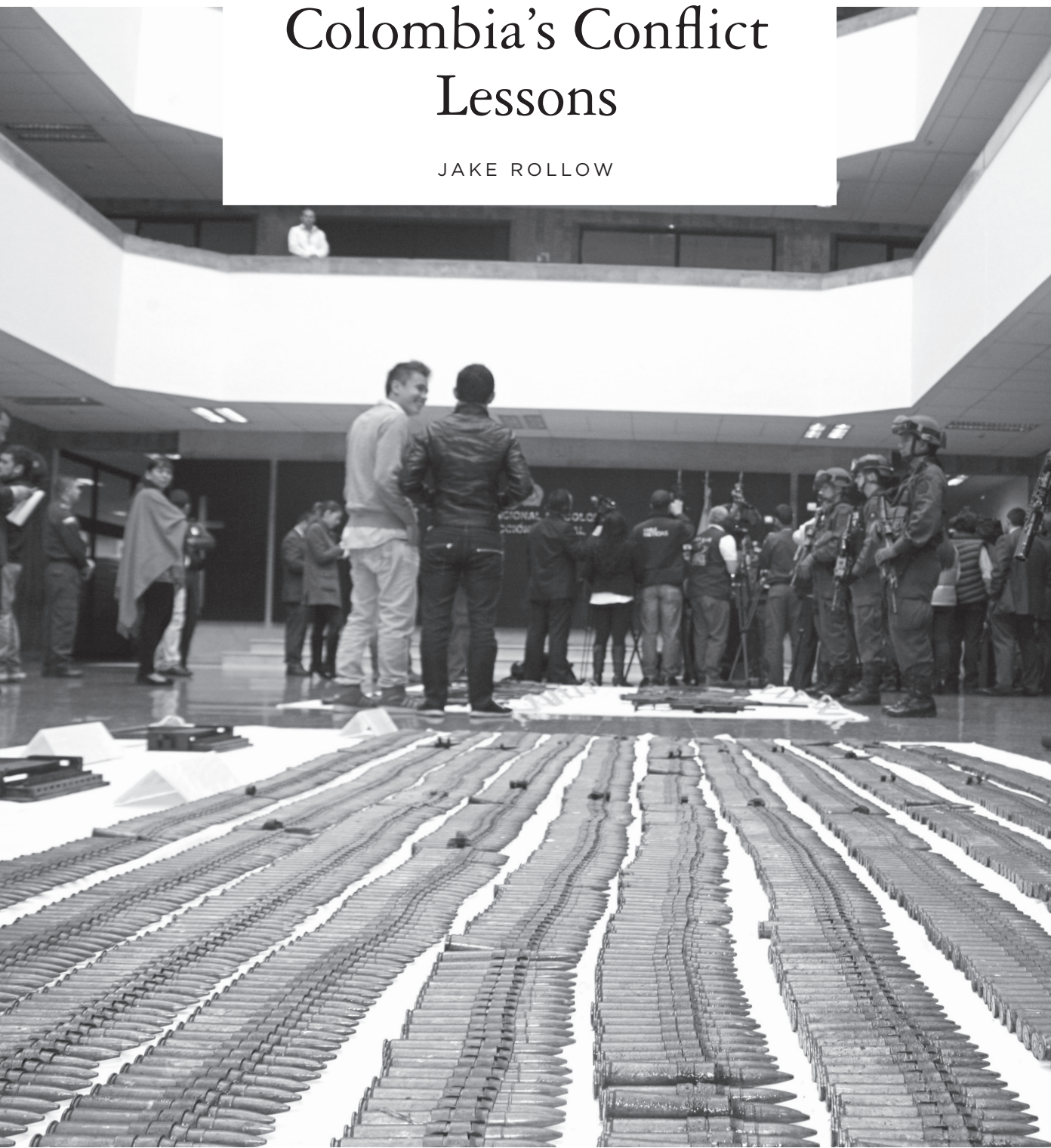


# Colombia's Conflict Lessons

JAKE ROLLOW





**E**ASTERN ANTIOQUIA, Colombia—In late 2001, Sandra Mira was kidnapped while riding a bus with her six-year-old daughter through rural Colombia. Paramilitaries in camouflage uniforms stopped the bus and forced both to disembark. They tied up Sandra, then returned her daughter to the bus. When the girl arrived in San Carlos, the town where the family lived, she asked someone to call her grandmother, Pastora Mira.

In San Carlos, everyone calls her Doña Pastora—a sign of respect for the elderly. Pastora is 58, and her short hair is graying, but more importantly, since 2004 she has been repeatedly elected to the municipal council, without ever having campaigned. She is warm and often greets women with a hug and a diminutive of their name—Teresa becomes Teresita—or a term of endearment such as beautiful or princess. She does not speak loudly, but decisively, and her voice is strong, low, and a bit gravelly. At the sidewalk cafés throughout San Carlos, where everyone drinks small, 25-cent cups of coffee throughout the day, Pastora also smokes cigarettes. Like the majority of residents in the region, she is not wealthy, and she buys her smokes one at a time.

In the days after Sandra was kidnapped, Pastora received no request for ransom. It seemed the paramilitaries had actually made Sandra entirely disappear, and Pastora worried she would never see her daughter again. Pastora, who had worked in the local government's justice department before it became dangerous to do so, began calling governments of the neighboring municipalities and asking them to look out for

---

*Jake Rollow researched community peace building initiatives during nine months living in Colombia.*

Sandra, or her body. Finally, 12 days later, Pastora's phone rang. Sandra cried on the other end. Then a man's voice shouted, and the call ended.

San Carlos and the surrounding region, Eastern Antioquia, were at the epicenter of Colombia's civil conflict between 1998 and 2004. Two guerrilla groups, three paramilitary units, and the army killed tens of thousands, many of them civilians. Yet today, even as the war rages elsewhere in Colombia, Eastern Antioquia is peaceful. It is

---

**ORGANIZED  
DISCONTENT  
PROVED  
ADVANTAGEOUS  
WHEN NATIONAL  
GUERRILLA  
GROUPS BEGAN TO  
RECRUIT IN THE  
REGION.**

in fact one of the few regions in the country to have endured such violence and emerged peaceful. But even more remarkable is the post-conflict work—in San Carlos by Pastora and her colleagues—to try to ensure that the conflict does not return. Indeed, their stories offer valuable lessons for commu-

nity leaders and policymakers seeking to build peace, both elsewhere in Colombia and around the world.

**PEACE POINTS**

Today, Colombia has never been closer to ending the world's longest ongoing civil conflict. In the peaceaccord negotiations between the federal government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group, representatives have reached agreement on three of six points—more than any previous negotiation. The country's second strongest guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), is now talking with the government about joining the negotiations or

starting its own peace process. And most importantly, in the country's presidential election in June, which became a referendum on the peace process, Colombians re-elected Juan Manuel Santos, giving him more time and a mandate to pursue peace.

Colombia is at an auspicious moment in its history. After 50 years of the government fluctuating between seeking to defeat the FARC militarily or to negotiate a settlement but achieving neither, Santos is now taking the middle road. He is negotiating with guerrilla groups that have been weakened by years of fighting, but he has refused to call a ceasefire while the negotiations play out. The strategy seems to be working. Prior to the election, Santos said he hoped to sign accords with the FARC by the end of 2014.

That may prove elusive, or at least premature—more of a campaign promise than a goal. But Colombians and the international community should begin preparing for the possibility of a post-conflict Colombia, or the fallout if negotiations fail. If accords are signed, there will be renewed interest in and potential for curbing the coca industry—Colombia grows about one-third of the world's cocaine. If negotiations fail, the international community may be called upon to help resolve the country's remaining humanitarian crises. Finally, if peace accords are achieved, it will create a new and welcome challenge for Colombia—ensuring that the accords are implemented in communities across the country, and that peace truly takes root.

When it comes to instilling peace at the local level, there are communities in Colombia that can serve as models for the Colombian government and its international supporters, as well as other countries seeking to foster peace within their own borders. The municipality of San Carlos and its

neighboring agricultural communities in Eastern Antioquia have long and painful histories, but their leaders and victims have also done outstanding work to rebuild their communities and promote reconciliation.

The region of Eastern Antioquia—comprised of 23 municipalities east of Medellín, the country's second largest city—has a history of community organization, resistance, and conflict. In the 1970s, large swaths of Eastern Antioquia's farmland were flooded to create hydroelectric dams for power primarily destined for Medellín. But the state and federal government had not sought local approval for the dams, and farmers formed resistance movements. Ultimately, the movements could not overturn the regional and federal power dynamics, and many resistance leaders were murdered. But the organized discontent proved advantageous when national guerrilla groups began to recruit in the region.

Guerrillas had been present in Eastern Antioquia for years, but they didn't consider it strategic territory until the hydroelectric dams began producing one-third of the nation's energy. Completion of the highway connecting Medellín to the capital, Bogotá, also meant much of the nation's cargo began crossing Eastern Antioquia. By the 1990s, both the FARC and ELN had made Eastern Antioquia a guerrilla stronghold.

The two guerrilla groups have communist roots and formed in the 1960s, but the FARC has come to be known as the more militant of the two, while the ELN, which had two priests among its founders, incorporates liberation theology into its ideals. However, they share the same underlying mission, described by a former member of the FARC as "fighting for the poor, the farmers, equality in the country." Both groups have committed atrocities throughout Colombia.

Civilian support for the guerrillas remains difficult to calibrate. In Eastern Antioquia, some took up arms, donned camouflage, and moved to the guerrilla camps in the forest, but others served as civilian messengers and task-runners, and in some cases were paid. Often their connections were tenuous and troublesome—spoken of only in hushed tones. Some civilians occasionally provided food, shelter, or information either because it was part of farm-life culture, or because they felt they had no choice but to meet the requests of anyone carrying a gun. Still, such motivations—whether driven by ideology, money, cultural norms, or fear—generally mattered little to those tracking them.

The violence exploded after the paramilitaries arrived in Eastern Antioquia. Colombia's paramilitary organizations were also formed in the 1960s (at the suggestion of U.S.-military advisors), but did not have a strong presence in San Carlos and neighboring municipalities until the late 1990s. To counter Maoist-style guerrilla warfare, they "drained the sea to catch the fish," killing anyone they suspected of supporting the insurgents.

The guerrillas fought back, targeting suspected civilian supporters of the paramilitaries, and attacking public infrastructure—electric towers, police stations, roads, and bridges—hoping to persuade the federal government to reign in the paramilitaries. The crisis deepened when all sides began using cocaine profits to attract young, poor recruits and lure fighters to switch sides. Of course, after combatants switched, it was expected they would point out and kill those who had previously provided them even the most minor support. Soon San Carlos and neighboring municipalities were at the epicenter of the country's violence. There

were tens of thousands of victims in the region. Sandra was among them.

#### TWO CHILDREN TAKEN

After the phone line went dead, Pastora raced to the office of the telephone company. The call had come from El Jordan, a small town within San Carlos, which the paramilitaries used as a base. Pastora knew it wasn't safe for her to travel there, but her neighbor served as the town's director of education, and she asked the woman to dig for information at work the next day. The director, risking her life, found Sandra was being held captive by the paramilitaries and was sick. Two days later Pastora got a phone call from the hospital in El Jordan. Sandra was there having bad asthma attacks, and the doctor needed Pastora to bring her medication.

Pastora got on a bus, and when she arrived at the hospital, she found Sandra laying on a bed, wrecked. She gave the medicine to a doctor and then sat with her daughter. They were not left alone long.

A tall, dark-haired paramilitary commander, with the alias Camilo, walked into their room.

"Are you still rebelling, or has being here changed your mind?" he asked Sandra. "You already know how to ride a motorcycle; you know public relations. The only thing missing is learning to shoot, to earn some respect."

"No sir," Sandra replied. "I'm not going to kill people. That's not how I was raised."

Pastora then asked Camilo if she could talk with him privately. They walked outside the hospital, and she suggested that if the paramilitaries allowed Sandra not to enlist, Pastora would make sure the young woman didn't cause them any problems.

Camilo agreed. "But," he said, "she stays here."

Sandra was moved into a small apartment in El Jordan. Pastora brought her furniture and convinced the education director to give Sandra a job at the school. Soon after, Pastora returned to the San Carlos city center, leaving Sandra under the supervision of the paramilitaries. Life continued without incident for months. But then a dispute occurred among the paramilitaries. Another woman they held captive was killed, angering her captor. He decided to seek revenge on his colleagues through Sandra.

On February 6, 2002, Pastora woke with a terrible feeling. She knew something was wrong. She called a woman in El Jordan, who usually hosted Sandra for hot chocolate in the mornings, but Sandra had not come by that day. The woman went looking for Sandra, but by the end of the day, even after enlisting the town priest for assistance, she hadn't found her.

When Pastora heard this, she traveled to El Jordan and broke into Sandra's room. She found Sandra's television and other valuables missing. Clothes were thrown across the floor, and the bookcase was turned over. Sandra was gone.

Pastora spent the next several years desperately searching for her daughter. She first confronted paramilitaries for information, then paid them, and eventually traveled across the country to talk to people who said they knew something. She found clues, but none that brought her much closer to her daughter.

Meanwhile, Pastora began organizing other victims in San Carlos. There were no formal assistance programs for families who had lost someone or been displaced, so Pastora and others launched a political party. In the 2004 elections, the party won two seats on the municipal council. But when the husband of one of the winners was killed, the woman resigned. Pastora took her place.

## ACTION STEPS

### IF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS SUCCEED:

- Continue but reframe security operations to target crime, as some guerrillas will choose not to demobilize or will move into organized crime.
- Shift some cocaine interdiction activities and resources to other countries where demand will shift.
- The international community should supply resources to help implement the accords in communities across the country. Colombia will be eligible for new sources of international funding as a post-conflict country.
- Colombian peace builders should replicate what has been successful in some pilot communities and work with locals at the planning stages of any reconciliation and reconstruction programs.

### IF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS FAIL:

- Military should prepare for violence to increase, as both sides seek to hold and retake territory for continued warfare.
- Government should expand alternatives to cocaine eradication, such as crop substitution programs, because otherwise supply will be largely unaffected.
- Resources will be needed, potentially from the international community, to encourage guerrillas to demobilize individually.
- Communities must continue to build institutions locally that provide the best model for sustainable peace.

—*Jake Rollow*

Shortly thereafter, another tragedy struck Pastora's family. Her 15-year-old son was kidnapped by paramilitaries. Jorge had developed a reputation for being a rebellious teenager. Having lost a cousin, an uncle, and a sister to the violence, he had plenty of reasons to be angry. The paramilitaries didn't like this. In May 2005, they kidnapped him. Two weeks later, his body was found on the highway. Before being killed, he'd been tortured and raped.

Three days after Jorge's burial, Pastora heard someone screaming obscenities outside her home. It was a young paramilitary with a bandage on his leg. He'd

been injured by a land mine and abandoned by his group.

"I'll help you," Pastora told him, "if you temper your language."

She brought the young man into her home and called a friend who was a nurse. They cleaned his wound and gave him two injections. When they finished, he stood up and, for the first time, noticed on the wall a photo of Jorge.

"What are you doing with a picture of that bad guy we killed the other day?" he asked.

"Well this is his bed and his bedroom," Pastora said. "And I am his mother."

The young man sat down, stunned. Pastora filled with emotion, and her mind raced as she recognized her opportunity. A wounded paramilitary, who had possibly partaken in her son's murder, was sitting unarmed in her home. She could have her revenge.

But Pastora knew if she acted on any impulse for vengeance she'd be no better than any of the paramilitaries. Instead she mustered her self-control and asked the young man for every bit of information he had about Jorge, which he shared, and what he knew about Sandra, which was next to nothing. Then she sent him on his way.

#### FIGHTING FOR PEACE?

By the time Alvaro Uribe became president, Colombia's third attempt at peace negotiations with the FARC had failed. Indeed, the guerrillas had begun advancing toward Bogotá, where most of the country's wealthy and powerful elites lived. Uribe, whose father had been killed by the FARC, campaigned on a platform of war against the guerrillas. He won by a landslide.

Shortly after taking office—and with funds from the United States provided through Plan Colombia—Uribe stepped up military operations against the guerrillas, now labeled terrorists. The surge was especially strong in Eastern Antioquia. Some residents applaud this and believe it turned the tide on the violence in the region. Others suffered terribly. The incentives offered to soldiers resulted in what have come to be called “false positives.” Soldiers routinely killed civilians, then dressed their bodies in guerrilla camouflage to earn their rewards. Soldiers were also known to rape women and displace families and occasionally entire communities. Even when the army appeared to be operating legitimately, it often worked hand-in-hand with the paramilitaries.

Partly because of this, and because they had become notorious for drug trafficking and human rights abuses, in 2005, Uribe made paramilitary operations illegal. He may have also done this because he was considered too closely aligned with them. Paramilitary leaders have since said Uribe was directly involved in paramilitary oversight, and he is now under investigation for such allegations. In a process called demobilization, paramilitary leaders were required to share information with the government in exchange for reduced prison sentences. Lower level paramilitaries could choose to go free without providing assistance to the government, but if they were later found to have participated in criminal activity, they would receive no judicial privileges. In the following years, across the country more than 30 paramilitary units, representing some 36,000 paramilitaries, demobilized.

After the military surge, the paramilitary demobilization, and the losses suffered by the guerrillas, the level of violence in Eastern Antioquia plummeted. Since then, the region has remained relatively peaceful. That may seem logical, but the same trend did not occur in much of the rest of Colombia. There are multiple explanations, each with a kernel of truth. The first is that the national military surge was strongest in Eastern Antioquia because the region was so embroiled in conflict. The guerrillas suffered more dramatic losses before the battles ended. Another explanation is that in Eastern Antioquia most of the guerrillas and paramilitaries were people recruited from the region, so more families lost loved ones, turning them against the war and the remaining guerrillas. A third theory is that the violence simply moved elsewhere. But because the underlying causes of the war continue—political and economic inequality—hostilities can return. This possibility is the worst fear

of many farmers in the region. It is also what has driven Pastora to fortify the community of San Carlos from within.

#### RECONCILIATION

As the paramilitaries demobilized, the victims whom Pastora had helped organize politically—the group that had then made her a city councilwoman—had to come to terms with the victimizers who returned to the community, some as members of neighboring families. Further, many villagers had conflicting feelings about their own role in the war. Even if they considered themselves victims, they knew that perhaps at some point they should not have passed along information, or provided food, shelter, or money to someone, even if they'd felt they had no choice.

Pastora and a team of about 15 other community leaders began organizing monthly reconciliation gatherings. Victims, demobilized combatants, and other members of the community switched roles and explained why they'd acted as they had, and how they felt. The dialogues built understanding among those who participated, those who were victimized, and about what had happened in their community. The conversations also helped everyone—those riddled with pain or guilt or both—to live more comfortably in San Carlos.

In 2007, Pastora and her colleagues planned another event that included both victims and demobilized paramilitaries. They invited the demobilized to take communion with them at mass, and then walk outside to the plaza to address the town. The idea made many people uncomfortable, especially the businesspeople and politicians who feared their connections to the paramilitaries would become public knowledge. But Pastora and the other organizers pressed ahead, and all of the municipality's

27 demobilized paramilitaries participated. Pastora also took communion that day, arm in arm with Farley Martinez, the man who had kidnapped her son.

Pastora says that walking with Martinez was not easy for her, but she did it to help bring demobilized paramilitaries into public view—so the community could identify them and hear what they had to say. Also, she said, “so that [the paramilitaries] would learn from having to take responsibility for what they'd done, and others would see that it's not worth it to be delinquent.”

As more paramilitaries demobilized, Pastora gained better information about her daughter. She learned Sandra had been killed, and that her body was buried in a forest near El Jordan's town center. Pastora spent long days searching the forest alone. She screamed to Sandra's spirit to help her, but to no avail.

Then, in 2008, one of the higher-level paramilitaries, who was required to share information with the government, learned that Pastora was looking for her daughter's body. With government officials and Pastora in tow, he began leading expeditions through the forest. On the first two occasions, he led the group to the bodies of two young women, but neither of them were Sandra. On the third attempt, he pointed out a small grave. The young woman inside had been buried vertically, in a squatting position. The grave was so narrow that to

---

## COCAINE PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING IS OFTEN CONTROLLED BY CRIMINAL CARTELS, AND THEY WILL NOT BE IMPACTED BY ANY PEACE ACCORDS.



fit, her arms had been cut off at the shoulders. Pastora recognized her daughter by the braces that still clung to her teeth.

#### WAR OR REVOLUTION?

Before becoming Colombia's president in 2010, Juan Manuel Santos served as President Uribe's defense minister. So it surprised many when Santos signed into law a bill affirming that Colombia's victims had been victims of an armed conflict, rather than the acts of terrorists or criminals. The law not only mandated reparations be paid to victims, but also legitimized the guerrilla groups as political actors, thereby paving the way for the peace talks that he began in 2012 with the FARC.

Negotiators have since been meeting regularly in Havana with the stated goal of addressing the root causes of Colombia's war—economic and political inequality. So far they have reached agreement on issues of land reform and rural development, political participation, and drug trafficking, but no details have been released.

Santos has said the world should expect to have less Colombian coca if the accords are signed. Currently, guerrillas control territory where coca is grown to fund their movements. However, cocaine production and trafficking is often controlled by criminal cartels, and they will not be impacted by any peace accords. Moreover, undiminished cocaine demand should quickly spawn new supply, likely from elsewhere in Colombia, as well as other countries.

Among the three remaining issues—victims, disarmament, and implementation—disarmament is the most daunting, as it must answer difficult questions of transitional justice. How will former guerrillas be treated by the judicial system? How will they be reincorporated into mainstream

society? And what will keep them from joining organized crime cartels, as so many other demobilized combatants have done?

One way to get perspective on these questions is to talk to the paramilitaries and guerrillas who have already demobilized. Ten gathered recently at a school in Medellín, where they receive free education. Three were former paramilitaries, four had been with the FARC, and the remaining three worked for the ELN, though none had held particularly high ranks.

Most striking was the reason each gave for enlisting and demobilizing. One had joined because he liked guns and another to escape an abusive home. But the other eight had joined, at least to some extent, for economic reasons. Some also believed in the mission of the group they joined, but still it seemed the primary common motivator was poverty. And now that they had demobilized, many said the state assistance they receive, paired with work, is hardly enough to make ends meet.

"If the state provided something dignified, I'm sure thousands would demobilize," said one. "This is the war of our country—money."

Colombia is one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of income distribution. It ranks 11th, behind only Bolivia and Honduras in Latin America. In Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena, there are expensive restaurants serving food and drinks to the wealthy at New York prices. Meanwhile, the going rate for a maid in those cities is \$20 per day. Thirty percent of Colombia's population lives below the poverty line, earning less than \$100 monthly.

If any future peace accords were to substantively address inequality, as negotiators say they will, life would change for millions of Colombians. But it is also possible that some superficial pact might

be reached, failing to address substantively central issues of economic or political inequality. If this were to occur, it would mean, according to Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, that Colombia had achieved negative peace. A cease-fire would have been achieved, but the actual causes of the conflict would not have been addressed, which is necessary for positive peace. Of course, it is also possible that negotiations will fail.

Whatever the outcome, there will be an impact on Colombia and all nations that do business with it. If substantive accords emerge, Santos has said the international community could play a vital role in the process, by providing funding and other support for programs to keep the demobilized from organized crime and for crop substitution for coca growers. Colombia would also be able to access new resources from organizations including the United Nations, which supports peacekeeping and peace building.

International funding could also be sought if negotiations fail, as the Colombian government would likely expand the demobilization programs that already exist, in an attempt to encourage guerrillas to lay down their arms as individuals. Meanwhile, the military could stage an offensive in an attempt to end what has become effectively Latin America's longest-running civil war.

It is also likely that even if accords are signed, some guerrilla fronts will refuse to obey their leadership and demobilize. Those who continue the insurgency, however, would lose legitimacy in the eyes of Colombians and the international community, and the Colombian government would pursue them as terrorists and criminals.

Additionally, if accords are signed but fail to address economic inequality, many

former guerrillas may join drug and crime cartels for financial reasons. Under this scenario, Colombia would begin to look more like Mexico, with the army fighting thousands of cartel soldiers. Such superficial accords could still provide some benefit, as they would largely end the guerrilla movements. Government officials could no longer accuse civilian protesters seeking equality of being supported by the insurgency. Such accusations have been standard practice for years.

#### BEYOND NEGATIVE PEACE

According to Galtung's framework, Eastern Antioquia has achieved negative peace. The violence has diminished significantly, but the structural conditions that caused it have not changed, and the war could return. However, many residents—Pastora among them—have been working hard to try to ensure that does not happen. And those who hope to build peace elsewhere in Colombia and other similarly situated nations would be wise to learn from their example.

At the local level, residents would rebuild their communities physically and socially. Nearly a decade ago, Eastern Antioquia's displaced residents began visiting, then moving back to their rural hamlets, where they probed for landmines, in some cases by sending older livestock down abandoned roads, re-constituted community work-days, and pressed officials to return teachers to their schools.

---

**MANY STILL BELIEVE THE SYSTEM IS MANIPULATED BY THE WEALTHY ELITES IN COLOMBIA'S CITIES FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT.**

They also reactivated Community Action Groups—one of the few structures of Colombia's government that targets rural communities—thereby gaining a platform to address local government.

Public memory activities would also be carried out. In many municipalities of Eastern Antioquia, residents built memorials to those who were killed. In some cases, the memorial may be no more than a statue listing the names of the dead, while in Granada, to the west of San Carlos, where the murder rate hit 46 percent in 2003, residents have built a memorial museum. "The Hall of Never Again" features photos and stories of victims donated by family members. As more families become comfortable telling their stories, the exhibit expands. In San Carlos, Pastora and her colleagues built a floral-themed memorial in the main plaza—one flower for each victim—which doubles as a fountain, where children play on hot days. They also converted a former paramilitary house into a center for reconciliation. Tours through the city center are held for adults and children, recounting the stories of the violence, how it came to pass, and who committed it, all in an effort to make sure it never resumes.

Municipalities could also attempt to address inequality locally. In 2011, a progressive mayor in San Carlos, Francisco Alvarez Sanchez, instituted a participatory budgeting process, ceding each rural hamlet of the municipality control over its own share of the budget. The former mayor says he wanted rural farmers to know the local government is theirs. When they visited him in his office, he had them sit in the mayor's chair, while he sat on what would typically be the visitor's side of his desk. "In this way they felt that the power really was theirs," he

says. "They have social inclusion, and tacitly, that reduces inequality."

Of course, the ultimate ability to address the structural causes of the war lies with the federal government. It adopts the measures that determine the prices of the foods farmers grow. It regulates what percentage of profits, if any, companies return to communities for use of their natural resources. And it directs funds for education and infrastructure to the countryside. Yet although federal legislators are democratically elected, many still believe the system is manipulated by the wealthy elites in Colombia's largest cities for their own benefit. It remains to be seen if the guerrillas will truly change these policies in their negotiations.

Still, San Carlos' leaders have shined when partnering with federal officials offering support, and other communities should replicate what they have done. In recent years, as federal reparations planning was underway, officials often visited San Carlos. But instead of closed-door meetings in the city center, they were taken to some of the most remote areas of the municipality. Wilson Murrillo, one resident who helped plan and lead these visits, said the officials from Bogotá met with displaced farmers, listened to their stories and needs, and were made to walk for hours on their winding, rocky roads.

"Shut in by four walls," Murrillo said, "they're not going to understand the reality."

To their credit, the federal officials acted on what they learned. Post-conflict programming is now in place in Eastern Antioquia. The programs provide financial reparations to thousands of families, as well as guidance on how to invest these funds in their homes and farms. The goals also include repair of public infrastructure lost during the conflict,

including abandoned roads needing maintenance, while launching cultural and athletic events that build social fabric. The federal government is in the process of taking this model to other regions. If peace accords are achieved, the government will likely want to expand the programming to regions across the country. Hopefully it will replicate the community input process as it plans those expansions.

Pastora also played a role in the reparation projects in Eastern Antioquia, and was among a handful of victims selected nationwide to help draft the 2011 Victims Law that made the programs possible. Yet even as her stature as an advocate has grown, she continues to focus on local work. In San Carlos, nearly 200 disappeared bodies have been discovered, and Pastora has accompanied

many of the families through the search process then, just as she did the stages of mourning and moving forward. Commendably, the government has provided resources and support to Eastern Antioquia families seeking lost loved ones.

Pastora believes that although San Carlos is a reconciled community, there is more work to be done. Achieving sustained peace in San Carlos and the rest of Colombia, she says, will ultimately require both the federal government and local communities working toward the same ends. Federal-level peace accords are necessary. They provide the structure and legitimacy that community members need to do their work locally. But according to Pastora, the accords alone will not be enough.

“Peace cannot be decreed,” she says. “It must be built.” ●