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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions [2366 \(2017\)](#), [2655 \(2022\)](#) and [2673 \(2023\)](#), provides updates on mandated tasks regarding the verification of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. In addition, pursuant to Council resolution [2694 \(2023\)](#), it contains information on the implementation of the ceasefire between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). The present report covers the period from 27 June to 26 September 2023.

II. Major developments

2. As the administration of President Gustavo Petro completed its first year in office, the reporting period was marked by the beginning of a new legislative period in Congress, the continued implementation of the Final Agreement, advances in the dialogues with illegal armed groups within the Government's total peace policy and increased activities in relation to the upcoming regional elections. All this against the backdrop of conflict-related violence still affecting communities in various regions of the country despite important efforts to consolidate peace.

3. In a speech marking the completion of his first year in office on 7 August, President Petro highlighted achievements, including the approval of a national development plan with a strong focus on peace matters; positive economic performance; the implementation of an ambitious agrarian reform; and the roll-out of the total peace policy. The President underscored his will to promote the transformations demanded by Colombian society and to address endemic problems, such as inequality and violence and, to that end, reiterated a call to all political forces and civil society actors to overcome differences and build a national agreement.

4. In the context of the anniversary, the Government emphasized the central role of the total peace policy in its agenda; referred to dialogues under way with eight illegal armed groups and two more about to begin; the reinvigoration of the key bodies for the implementation of the Final Agreement; and the strengthening of key institutions like the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Unit for the Search of Persons Deemed as Missing.



5. On 20 July, upon opening the new legislative session, President Petro acknowledged the role that Congress plays in key discussions, reiterated the State's obligation to fulfil commitments enshrined under the Final Agreement and pledged to continue moving forward with its implementation, in particular section 1 on comprehensive rural reform.

6. Meaningful progress was achieved in negotiations between the Government of Colombia and ELN, with two important milestones on 3 August: the start of the bilateral ceasefire announced in June; and the installation of the National Participation Committee, tasked to design a methodology for the participation of society in the peace process. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia continued to accompany the negotiations during a fourth round of talks in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, where the parties reached agreements on matters related to humanitarian actions and political prisoners, and which were announced at the conclusion of the round on 4 September. The Mission also began monitoring and verifying the implementation of the ceasefire pursuant to resolution [2694 \(2023\)](#) (see paras. 100–111).

7. Extensive legal and political discussions were held regarding peace-related matters. The Constitutional Court is studying several lawsuits to determine the constitutionality of a 2022 law that provides the legal framework for the total peace policy and the Government's engagement in negotiations with different illegal armed actors. The process has included a public hearing whereby a wide range of actors provided arguments both in favour and against aspects of said law.

8. Dialogue between the Government and the dissident group of the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) that identifies itself as the Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (EMC FARC-EP) is ongoing. After a three-day meeting in Cauca, the parties announced the installation, on 8 October, of a formal negotiation table, along with the entry into force of a 10-month bilateral national ceasefire, that includes respect for civilian populations. Provisions of the agreement on the protection of civilians and the ceasefire and its protocols, as well as rules for the negotiation table, are being defined jointly by the parties. Clashes between the public security forces and the group continue, often affecting civilians, in particular in Cauca Department.

9. In keeping with the dynamics observed during past months, while clashes between the public security forces and illegal armed actors have generally decreased, confrontations among illegal armed groups and criminal organizations looking to expand their reach and clashing over illicit rents continued. The impact of these confrontations on local communities was felt especially in Departments such as Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. However, there have also been reductions in key indicators, including mass displacements, confinements and killings of social leaders and human rights defenders.

10. Preparations for the second departmental and municipal elections since the signing of the Final Agreement, scheduled for 29 October, are under way. Governors and civil society actors have warned about the potential effects of violence. The Office of the Ombudsman issued a countrywide electoral warning stating that 113 out of over 1,100 municipalities are facing extreme risks, where the occurrence of violent events is imminent and where acts of violence by illegal armed groups have been registered. However, the Government has assured that the authorities are taking the measures necessary to ensure that elections are safely held across the country.

11. Members of the former FARC-EP continued to face violence, and several former combatants were killed during the reporting period, prompting Comunes to demand

urgent measures from the Government and judicial authorities to enhance prevention and protection and respond to those crimes.

III. Mission tasks

Comprehensive rural reform

12. Significant progress has been made during the Government's first year in terms of budget allocation and legal and institutional adjustments to accelerate the implementation of the comprehensive rural reform. Delivering land and support for production to landless peasants, women and victims is critical to materialize these efforts.

13. In a welcome development, in August, in Sincelejo, Sucre Department, President Petro launched the National Agrarian Reform System, a key inter-institutional coordination mechanism led by the Ministry of Agriculture aiming to ensure a coherent implementation, including by fostering the participation of peasant, women, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian organizations.

14. The Ministry has prioritized four geographical areas in the Caribbean and Magdalena Medio regions where there is both availability of and need for fertile land, combined with dire socioeconomic indicators. Efforts and resources will be focused in those areas to advance rural reform and deliver land alongside comprehensive support for rural development.

15. The Government continued to foster dialogue with peasants' organizations and convened a second peasant convention to discuss the establishment of the national mixed commission for peasant's affairs, which will include the Ministries of Agriculture and Interior and peasants' organizations. During the convention, the President presented the new article recognizing peasants' rights in the Constitution.

16. The Government is discussing two draft decrees regarding institutional adjustments to accelerate the purchase of land and ensure participation of peasants in rural reform efforts. Some sectors have expressed concerns in this regard, including cattle ranchers. Following a call by the Senate's Peace Commission, which is comprised of senators from across the spectrum, the Minister of Agriculture met with the President of the Colombian Federation of Cattle Ranchers to promote constructive dialogue around this key matter. A representative from the Mission was also in attendance.

Access to land

17. Although efforts to accelerate the purchase of land for rural reform purposes continue, results are still far from the goal of 1.5 million hectares set by the Government for its four-year term. The National Land Agency purchased 29,065 hectares during the reporting period, for a total of 41,651 since the Government took office.

18. Only 607 hectares of land were delivered to intended beneficiaries, for a total of 968 hectares since the Government took office. Despite its importance for materializing commitments to deliver land for productive purposes, the identification of potential beneficiaries among peasants, rural women and victims remains a challenge.

19. With a view to ensuring greater clarity regarding figures on access to land as provided for in the Final Agreement, the Ministry of Agriculture ordered an audit on the matter. The Office of the Inspector General had raised concerns in this regard since 2019. The audit should help overcome recent discrepancies between Government entities given the lack of standard criteria and information management gaps.

20. As at 1 September, private citizens had offered 1,564,841 hectares for purchase for rural reform purposes, 554,000 hectares of which were offered by the Colombian Federation of Cattle Ranchers under the October 2022 agreement. Around a third of these lands was deemed viable by the National Land Agency.

21. Since August 2022, the National Land Agency has formalized 340,689 hectares, 121,824 during the reporting period, which have contributed to meeting the goal of 7 million hectares of formalized land as foreseen in the Final Agreement. Of these, 59 per cent benefited Indigenous People, 28 per cent peasants, 9.6 per cent Afro-Colombians and 1.4 per cent victims of the conflict. The Agency also completed the formalization of a backlog of over 800,000 hectares. Whether or not it contributes to meeting the goals established in the Final Agreement has yet to be determined.

22. Despite initial Government efforts to match delivered land with the provision of goods and services needed to foster productive activities, more needs to be done to guarantee comprehensive access to land. In July, the Ministry of Agriculture established the first Food Production Special Protection Zone in La Guajira department with a view to mitigating food insecurity. This includes encouraging the purchase of land for food production, as well as technical assistance for peasants and small and medium producers by the Agency for Rural Development.

23. Currently, 7.5 million hectares of land are under judicial review for restitution purposes. Under the current administration, demands for some 29,000 hectares have been judicially resolved, benefiting 4,232 victims, as well as 17,693 hectares benefiting 480 families of collective ethnic groups. However, only 8,989 hectares were effectively restituted, and 16,456 restitution demands were pending processing owing to insecurity, among other challenges.

Development programmes with a territorial focus

24. The Government reports that, since taking office, the Agency for Territorial Renewal has approved 418 projects costing around \$240 million for implementation within municipalities with development programmes with a territorial focus. Implementing the 33,000 programme initiatives initiated since the signing of the Final Agreement will require sufficient allocation of resources and an adequate time frame, as well as the simultaneous implementation of the National Plans for Rural Reform.

25. The implementation of umbrella projects to ensure a more comprehensive approach has begun in the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander Department, with the construction of a university campus expected to leverage additional public investments, including road infrastructure, Internet access and economic development initiatives. The Government plans to design 32 such projects and to begin implementing 24 of them by 2026.

26. With a view to boosting participation in implementation beyond the existing leaders' group of the development programmes with a territorial focus, the Agency has established broader consultation mechanisms, including women, youth and victims' representatives. So far, 42 of these mechanisms have been established in 111 of the 171 municipalities with the programmes.

National plans for rural reform

27. Progress remains limited in the implementation of the National Plans for Rural Reform, which are key to extend State presence and improve access to public goods and services in remote rural areas. Swiftly implementing these plans is paramount for achieving poverty reduction goals in the National Development Plan. A mechanism coordinating the implementation of these plans could expedite the process.

Reintegration

28. Efforts by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization and former combatants to promote a more sustainable and comprehensive approach to reintegration continued. The National Reintegration Council met twice and discussed new ways to ensure the sustainability of economic opportunities, reinforce collective reintegration, promote a community-based reintegration process aimed at reconciliation, and guarantee access to employment. Nevertheless, violence continued to hinder the reintegration process in some areas.

Political reintegration

29. For the upcoming departmental and municipal elections the Comunes party endorsed 299 candidates (128 women), of which 69 (17 women) are former combatants. Another 76 former combatants (17 women) were endorsed by a broad spectrum of political parties and coalitions. The candidates, registered in 26 out of 32 Departments, are mostly running for municipal councils and local administrative boards. These numbers demonstrate the growing aspiration of former FARC-EP members to play an active role in local democracy.

30. Former combatants running for councils and mayorships in Antioquia, Cauca, La Guajira and Meta Departments reported threats and stigmatization during their campaigns, prompting some to withdraw their candidacies.

31. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization partnered with the National University of Colombia to strengthen capacities of some 300 former combatant candidates and leaders, including by providing recommendations for the design of their government plans and local development plans.

32. Regarding the work of Comunes in Congress, two Comunes senators were elected as vice-presidents to commissions dealing with economic and agrarian issues, respectively.

Access to land and housing

33. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization and the National Land Agency have extended the scope of access to land to former combatants outside former territorial areas for training and reintegration within the framework of the comprehensive rural reform. The National Land Agency is currently reviewing requests for the purchase of plots (mostly corresponding to projects from outside former territorial areas for training and reintegration), and the National Land Agency delivered a 500-hectare plot to a former combatants' cooperative in Bolívar and Sucre, intended for productive purposes. Clarity regarding the criteria to access land for productive purposes would help expedite the process.

34. Out of 24 former territorial areas for training and reintegration, 13 have land that was purchased by the State. The National Land Agency granted collective land titles to former combatants' associations in five former territorial areas, and one land title outside of the areas, for productive projects.

35. Two former territorial areas for training and reintegration in Meta Department were relocated during this period owing to insecurity. The one from Mesetas moved to a plot of land purchased by the Government in a nearby municipality. The residents of the former territorial area for training and reintegration of Vista Hermosa temporarily relocated to a transitory location while a plot of land purchased by the National Land Agency is made available for their transfer. Providing former combatants and their families with dignified living conditions in their new locations is essential, as is continuing to support the former host communities who for years

benefitted from the services available in and around the former territorial areas for training and reintegration.

36. Finding solutions to relocate former territorial areas for training and reintegration in Antioquia, Cauca and Putumayo Departments which have faced serious security threats for years remains critical.

37. Progress has been slow in providing housing to former combatants. Construction has begun in only four former territorial areas for training and reintegration since 2020 and only 18 former combatants in urban areas have received subsidies. Greater efforts, including former combatants building their own housing and the allocation of additional resources, are necessary.

Socioeconomic reintegration

38. To date, 77.6 per cent of accredited former combatants participate in State-sponsored projects (86 per cent of women former combatants), with roughly two thirds implementing individual initiatives. No additional collective projects were approved by the National Reintegration Council and 54 individual projects were approved by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization during this period (nine for women).

39. Within the framework of the sustainability strategy to boost productive initiatives, an assessment has been launched to determine their viability for potential financial support. According to the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, some 30 initiatives could be funded this year, prioritizing women-led projects. The Government has yet to devise ways to support individual projects.

40. In a welcome development, the National Reintegration Council approved a strategy to promote former combatants' access to employment by providing incentives to private companies and fostering employment in the public sector, while helping to address stigmatization and prioritizing women.

41. There are 218 former combatants' cooperatives (56 led by women) grouping some 7,000 former combatants countrywide. Those collective efforts remain a cornerstone of economic reintegration. In August, President Petro took part in a national assembly that brought together some 4,000 people in Huila to promote the work of cooperatives in peacebuilding, 27 former combatants' cooperatives participated.

Community-based reintegration

42. In a welcome development, as part of a new community-based reintegration strategy, the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization is conducting a pilot project in Yotoco, Valle del Cauca Department, fostering dialogue with local actors with a reconciliation approach. Based on lessons learned from this pilot and the necessary consultation with former combatants, the strategy will be implemented in 63 municipalities, starting in October 2023.

43. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization allocated approximately \$1 million for the implementation of a new strategy to empower women former combatants and is hiring 19 staff members in territorial offices to ensure the inclusion of the gender approach in the reintegration process.

44. To date, 10,082 former combatants (2,413 women) reside outside former territorial areas for training and reintegration. Within the National Reintegration Council, the parties agreed to jointly visit collective reintegration areas to define common criteria with a view to official recognition. Tailored reintegration plans and security measures will be defined based on their specific needs.

Reintegration policies and institutions

45. The scope and actions of the Comprehensive Reintegration Programme are being discussed taking into consideration inputs from former combatants across the country. The Programme is expected to be launched in November. The swift approval of the decree regulating the National Reintegration System would help ensure institutional coordination regarding reintegration.

Security guarantees*Public policies and regulatory framework of section 3.4 of the Final Agreement*

46. In a welcome development, in September, the National Commission on Security Guarantees approved the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organizations and its action plan, a long-awaited instrument for halting violence in conflict-affected areas. The policy is based on a human security approach and seeks to address the root causes underpinning the creation and persistence of the aforementioned groups by targeting the financial, political, institutional, armed, transnational and border dimensions of the criminal phenomenon. In addition, the Ministry of Defence is developing specific plans to operationalize the security and defence policy launched in April 2023.

47. The first draft of the Strategic Security and Protection Plan for former combatants is finished and consultations are ongoing with former FARC-EP members and local authorities. Additionally, the decree establishing the Comprehensive Protection Program is under final revision. The swift adoption of both instruments would further individual and collective protection.

48. The creation of a dedicated office within the Office of the Presidency to advance the implementation of the Final Agreement and the activation of the High-level Unit of the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics are essential to coordinating entities and policies related to the security guarantees provisions of the Agreement.

49. Violence against former members of FARC-EP remains unabated. Fifteen former combatants were killed in Antioquia, Arauca, Caquetá, Cauca, Huila, Meta, Nariño and Tolima Departments. Four former combatants survived attempted homicides and three others were reported missing. A former combatant and member of the Technical Committee on Security and Protection survived unharmed from an attack in Bogotá in August, in which two of his bodyguards were injured. Dozens of former combatants and members of the Comunes party demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Interior and the Office of the Attorney General demanding urgent protection and prevention measures.

50. In this context, the Technical Committee on Security and Protection was convened for the parties to jointly assess this critical situation and address differences regarding the challenges facing the mechanisms to ensure security and protection for former combatants. Strengthened dialogue between the parties and clearer procedures within the National Protection Unit are urgently needed.

51. Since the signing of the Final Agreement, the Mission has verified 394 killings of former FARC-EP combatants (11 women, 57 Afro-Colombians and 39 Indigenous Persons), 134 attempted homicides (11 women), and 33 deemed as missing (all men).

52. Over 10 per cent of the killed former combatants had previously requested protection measures from the National Protection Unit, underscoring the urgency of allocating additional resources and reviewing protection strategies. Regular meetings of the Technical Committee are essential to address longstanding challenges.

Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General

53. The Special Investigation Unit reported three new convictions, for a total of 70, in the 475 cases of attacks against former combatants under its investigation. No new convictions against those who ordered the attacks were reported. To date, of the 267 persons arrested linked to the attacks, only 23 are persons who allegedly ordered them. According to the Unit, almost 80 per cent of the attacks were carried out by criminal organizations.

Judicial measures issued by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Constitutional Court

54. In August, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace opened an incident of contempt against the Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General for failing to provide information on its investigations into attacks against former combatants and the dismantling of criminal organizations, as ordered within the framework of the precautionary measures issued by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

55. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace convened a hearing on 20 September for the Office of the Attorney General, the High Commissioner for Peace and the Unit for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement to report on progress regarding investigations into attacks against former combatants, the Strategic Plan on Security and Protection, and the policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organizations.

56. Following previous hearings regarding the unconstitutional state of affairs, the Constitutional Court ordered, among others, the National Protection Unit to strengthen former combatants' security and protection during the electoral period; the Government to respond to the situation of former combatants relocated from the former territorial area for training and reintegration of Vista Hermosa; and the Office of the Attorney General to adopt measures to boost investigations on attacks against former combatants.

Violence against social leaders and conflict-affected communities

57. From 27 June 2023 to 30 August 2023, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs registered the forced mass displacement of 8,556 persons and the confinement of 27,183 persons bringing the total to 87,098 people affected countrywide in 2023. This represents a reduction of 31 per cent compared to the same period in 2022. Fifty-nine per cent of those affected are ethnic communities. The persistent use of landmines continues to affect vulnerable communities. Sixty-three landmine victims have been recorded since January, including three children and 17 members of ethnic minorities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) registered 25 massacres (12 verified and 13 under verification). Most cases were registered in Norte de Santander and Valle del Cauca Departments. Verified incidents involved 38 victims, including 8 women and four children.

58. OHCHR received 52 allegations of killings of human rights defenders (4 verified, 44 under verification and 4 inconclusive). This represents a 13 per cent decrease when compared with the previous period. Of the allegations received, 14 involved Indigenous leaders, 10 peasant leaders, 11 Afro-Colombian leaders, 4 women leaders and one leader of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons community. The concentration of violence in Valle del Cauca (9), Nariño (8) and Cauca (7) Departments, is particularly concerning.

59. The Mission received reports of several killings of members of political parties from across the spectrum, including from the Government coalition and from opposition parties, including the killing of a woman candidate and an Indigenous

candidate to the upcoming elections. A trans candidate withdrew from the race due to threats.

Early warning system of the Office of the Ombudsman

60. The Office of the Ombudsman issued four early warnings, for municipalities in Caquetá, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Santander Departments. With a view to enhancing a State-wide response to the risks identified, the Office is now including specific recommendations, deadlines and roles and responsibilities to relevant entities. Implementing a strategy to improve rapid responses to the early warnings and ensuring that entities failing to respond face disciplinary measures could propel timely actions, for example in response to the warning on risks facing social leaders issued in May.

Restorative sentences

Progress on cases of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace

61. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace continued its work towards the issuance of the first restorative sentences after public hearings for victims and those indicted to provide their observations were held in Case 01 (on hostage-taking, other serious deprivations of liberty and other concurrent crimes committed by FARC-EP) and Case 03 (on killings and forced disappearances presented as combat casualties by State agents) regarding crimes committed in the Caribbean region.

62. Furthermore, in Case 01, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace issued the first regional indictment against 10 former mid-level members of the FARC-EP central command which operated in Huila, Quindío and Tolima Departments. Those indicted were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity, including torture, sexual violence and slavery, and were required to provide the Unit for the Search of Persons Deemed as Missing and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace with information and a detailed plan for locating and identifying missing persons. Similarly, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace indicted nine members of the army within Case 03 (including a former Commander of the Fourth Brigade and later top Commander of the Army) for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Antioquia during 2002 and 2003, which resulted in 130 victims of extrajudicial killings.

63. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace continued the investigation of Case 03 at the national level with a new strategy directed at determining the responsibility of top commanders of the Colombian army from 2005 to 2008 for extrajudicial killings committed by members of the public security forces and illegitimately presented as combat casualties.

64. In July, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace issued its first indictment within Case 02 (on the situation of Tumaco, Ricaurte and Barbacoas, Nariño Department) against 14 former mid-level members of the Western front of FARC-EP and one former top commander of the Secretariat also indicted in Case 01. Those indicted were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity, including sexual and gender-based violence, and the “war crime of environmental destruction” and “destruction of cultural objects and of places of worship”. Over 109,000 victims are accredited in this case, including peasants, Awá and Eperara Siapidaara Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombian communities and their territories.

65. Amid a complex security environment in Dabeiba, Antioquia Department, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace held a hearing of public acknowledgement within the joint Case 03 and 04 (on the situation in the Urabá region). In an expression of support to the magistrates of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and other actors that had received death threats and had faced attacks in relation to the case, the Ministers of

Defence and Justice, the High Commissioner for Peace and representatives of the Mission attended the hearings where eight members of the public security forces acknowledged being most responsible in the disappearance and assassination of 47 individuals between 2002 and 2006. To date, 11 victims who were presented as combat casualties and buried in the Las Mercedes cemetery in Dabeiba have been identified and their remains returned to their families. The Ministry of Defence provided reassurances that the Government would provide the necessary guarantees so that all those appearing before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace can provide the truth. Furthermore, security concerns have been raised regarding Case 05 (on the situation of northern Cauca and southern Valle del Cauca), hindering the normal conduct of activities within the case in the field.

66. In September, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace held a hearing of public acknowledgement within Case 03 in Yopal, Casanare Department, regarding 296 extrajudicial executions allegedly committed by members of the public security forces and third-party civilians in Casanare between 2005 and 2008. Twenty-one former members of the public security forces, including a former General, as well as one State agent and two third-party civilians publicly acknowledged their responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

67. On 10 August, the Appeals Section of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace reiterated the Review Section's order to the Recognition Chamber, giving it 30 business days to decide on the opening of Case 11 on sexual and gender-based violence.

Preparations to verify restorative sentences

68. In July, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General attended a plenary session of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The exchange highlighted the need to swiftly advance towards the issuance of the first restorative sentences given their importance for the reparation and restoration of victims and for the comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement more broadly. Magistrates raised concerns, for example, regarding the amount of time needed to finalize investigations and the security of individuals appearing before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Magistrates also acknowledged the importance of the work of the Mission, particularly its coordination within the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism of restorative sentences; its support to field visits; and its advocacy and liaison with Government entities in preparation for the implementation of the sentences.

69. In August, the coordination mechanism established by the Government and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the sentences adopted its regulations, which sets out bases for a more effective interministerial cooperation. The mechanism aims to ease the preparatory work towards the provision of enabling conditions for restorative sentences and allow the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Government to communicate and work harmoniously. Meetings with senior officials will be held every two months, while a more technically focused working group will meet more frequently.

Ethnic chapter

70. Despite the reiterated commitment by the Government to advance the ethnic provisions of the Final Agreement, most efforts continue to be in the planning stage, including extensive consultations with Afro-Colombians and Indigenous peoples. In addition, information from entities with implementation responsibilities is limited and not up to date, making it difficult to monitor progress and expenditures effectively and limiting the identification of bottlenecks.

71. In August, the Vice-President, Francia Márquez, presented the priorities of her Office regarding the implementation of the ethnic chapter to a group of representatives

of the international community, led by the United States of America, one of the countries accompanying its implementation.

72. The Office of the Vice-President has expanded priority areas to meet the needs of Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians by including actions to strengthen self-protection and prevent child recruitment and gender-based violence. A Vice-Ministry of Ethnic Peoples within the Ministry of Equality has been tasked to coordinate actions related to the implementation of the ethnic chapter alongside the Office of the Vice-President.

Land-related developments

73. The Government has made progress in granting titles, especially to Indigenous peoples. However, there is no clarity on figures of what corresponds to provisions in the ethnic chapter and what corresponds to broader agrarian reform initiatives. Indigenous representatives to the National Commission of Indigenous Territories have insisted on the need to avoid double counting of land already delivered or in process of delivery to Indigenous peoples, as it would impair previously acquired rights.

74. Regarding the development programmes with a territorial focus, no project specifically designed to benefit ethnic communities has been implemented yet, despite prioritization work and activities carried out by the Agency for Territorial Renewal and special concertation mechanisms for ethnic peoples. Efforts by the Agency to prioritize specific demands from some communities in the Pacific region in areas such as health, food security and self-governance are noteworthy, as programmes in this region are lagging.

Political participation

75. The National Civil Registry has registered 700 Afro-Colombian (319 women) and 416 Indigenous (157 women) candidates taking part in the October elections, less than 1 per cent of candidates countrywide. Electoral authorities have installed 252 polling stations in Indigenous reserves and 608 in Afro-Colombian communities, contributing to guarantee their right to vote and in compliance with provisions of the Final Agreement.

76. In its electoral early warning, the Office of the Ombudsman highlighted the lack of an ethnic approach to guarantee the electoral rights of candidates and voters of ethnic origin, necessary to enable effective political representation and meaningful participation.

Security guarantees

77. Concerns remain over the disproportionate impact of violence on ethnic communities. The persistent violent actions of illegal armed actors fighting over territorial control in ethnic territories, notably along the Pacific Coast, continued to hinder implementation of the ethnic chapter, alter community dynamics and weaken self-government.

78. Traditional government and local authorities in Cauca and Chocó Departments have raised concern about the continuing recruitment of Indigenous children by illegal armed groups. According to an Indigenous organization, 82 children were recruited in Indigenous territories of Northern Cauca Department from January to August 2023.

79. The situation of the Awa Indigenous Peoples in Nariño Department continued to worsen. In July, three members of the community, two of them children, were killed by unknown perpetrators.

80. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Interior, Government entities are working to reinforce self-protection mechanisms of ethnic peoples, including by clarifying roles and responsibilities in the implementation of ethnic provisions of the Final Agreement.

Solution to the illicit drugs problem

81. The Government adopted internal regulations to ensure an ethnic approach to its work in the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops. This should help identify risks and ensure that the specific needs of ethnic communities and their recommendations can inform decision-making.

Victims

82. A land restitution tribunal recently recognized the semi-nomadic Sikuani and Piapoco Indigenous Peoples of the Florida Kawananae territory as victims and ordered the restitution of over 16,000 hectares in Meta and Vichada Departments.

83. In a remarkable decision, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace accredited the Cauca River as a victim of the conflict within Case 05 (on the situation of northern Cauca and southern Valle del Cauca), as requested by Afro-Colombian communities and in line with their views and beliefs. According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, there was widespread use of the river as a mass grave by public security forces and paramilitary groups, as well as environmental damage from illegal mining and the production of illicit drugs by illegal armed groups.

84. As part of its precautionary measures to protect 15 areas of forensic interest in Caldas Department, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace handed over to the authorities of the Embera-Chami people the remains of a man who disappeared 20 years ago. These are the first remains to be handed over in the framework of these precautionary measures for an area where over 200 persons deemed as missing could be buried.

IV. Other developments related to the implementation of the Final Agreement

Political participation

85. The Constitutional Court ruled that a presidential decree issued in 2021 regulating the election of the special transitional electoral districts for peace is unconstitutional owing to procedural issues. While the decision does not affect the election of the 16 representatives for the 2022–2026 and 2026–2030 terms, the Court urged the Government and Congress to issue the necessary regulations.

86. Two representatives of the special transitional electoral districts for peace were elected President and Vice-President of the boards of key commissions in the House of Representatives in charge of environmental and labour issues, respectively.

Solution to the illicit drugs problem

87. Despite positive initial results of the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops in the eradication of sizeable coca crops, years into its implementation, communities insist on challenges and delays facing key components, notably productive projects key to the sustainability of voluntary substitution.

88. Comunes representatives to the Commission for the Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement have raised similar concerns, underlining the need for dialogue on the matter and calling for actions to overcome obstacles to fully meet Government obligations. Comunes has also

emphasized that new crop substitution initiatives cannot be detrimental to commitments enshrined in the Agreement. The parties have recently established a working group to discuss these matters.

89. The Government launched a new national drug policy aiming at providing opportunities to territories and communities affected by the drug problem while concentrating law enforcement efforts on criminal actors generating violence and profiting from narco-trafficking. The policy acknowledges objectives set forth in the Final Agreement and stipulates that Government commitments under the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops will be fulfilled.

Victims

90. The Committee for follow up on the recommendations of the Truth Commission presented its first report, underscoring that around 20 per cent of the recommendations were included in the National Development Plan, and highlighting the approval by Congress of several bills related to their implementation. The Committee emphasized the need for inter-institutional coordination to fully implement the recommendations.

91. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations adopted a resolution requesting OHCHR to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to the Colombian stakeholders regarding the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, including on victims, the gender and ethnic approaches and the protection of leaders and human rights defenders.

92. The Unit for the Search of Persons Deemed as Missing handed over the remains of seven missing persons to their relatives in Córdoba, Huila, Meta, Santander and Quindío Departments. Since 2018, the Unit has recovered 929 bodies; handed over 196 to their relatives; found 16 people alive; received 28,815 search requests; and identified 7,689 locations where there could be people who have been reported as missing.

Dialogue mechanisms for implementation

93. The Commission for the Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement held four sessions during which Government officials with implementation responsibilities briefed on key aspects of the Final Agreement, including former combatants' security guarantees and access to housing, the development programmes with a territorial focus, illicit crop substitution and the search for persons deemed as missing. In addition, the Special Forum on Gender briefed on the status of gender provisions.

V. Cross-cutting considerations

Gender

94. Government efforts to accelerate the implementation of gender provisions of the Final Agreement have continued with broad participation, including by women leaders, women's organizations and women former combatants. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, the technical working group on gender of the National Reintegration Council and a group of 40 women former combatants, supported by the Mission and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), joined efforts to design the Caquetá department's gender reintegration plan, providing an opportunity to discuss the specific needs of women former combatants. The Agency also hosted a meeting of

family members of killed former combatants and provided psychosocial support to 19 women.

95. Some 1,200 women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons took part in the ongoing participatory design of the National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), expected to be adopted in October. Several forums were held to discuss specific issues facing Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women, as well as women living along borders. With support from international partners, including the Mission, two such forums brought together 60 women former combatants who identified caregiving and stigmatization among the main obstacles to their economic autonomy.

96. The Ministry of Interior organized 11 workshops, including one focused solely on women former combatants, in various departments to update the Action Plan of the Comprehensive Programme for Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, expected to be launched on 29 November, International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders.

97. The Mission remains in contact with the Office of the Attorney General regarding sexual and gender-based violence cases involving former combatants as victims or perpetrators. One of the alleged perpetrators, accused of at least four cases of sexual violence against women former combatants, was captured in July.

Children

98. The Agency for Reintegration and Normalization continued to implement the programme “A Different Path of Life” for children formerly associated with FARC-EP. A total of 108 participants (65 women) remain active in the programme, 6 are deceased and 10 are absent or have been separated. The Agency is also in charge of the reintegration of 220 former combatants (113 women) recognized as children at the moment of accreditation, 19 of whom have been killed or have died, and another 19 are absent. Specific measures to strengthen this vulnerable group’s security, psychosocial support and economic reintegration are required.

99. The Mission registered several cases of forced recruitment of children by illegal armed groups in Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Norte de Santander Departments. Despite the urgency, the Government’s Intersectoral Commission for the prevention of recruitment and use of children has yet to deploy its delegates to coordinate efforts locally.

VI. Developments related to negotiations with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional

100. Following a meeting in Cuba in July, during which the parties reached agreements on protocols necessary to implement the 180-day bilateral, national and temporary ceasefire announced in June, dialogue continued with a fourth round of talks in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, from 14 August to 4 September. The talks, held in the presence of the guarantor countries, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Catholic Church, were held in a constructive environment and against the backdrop of the ongoing implementation of the agreements reached to date, in line with the principle adopted by the parties whereby implementation of agreements starts immediately.

101. The fourth round ended with three agreements: a framework with principles and approaches for humanitarian actions as defined by the parties in the territories; the development of mechanisms to provide assistance to political prisoners of ELN; and the definition of critical areas for humanitarian action, namely Bajo Calima, Valle del

Cauca Department, San Juan, Chocó Department, Bajo Cauca, Antioquia Department; and north-east Antioquia and southern Bolívar. In these areas, there will be concerted actions to alleviate the situation of conflict-affected communities through the implementation of the ceasefire, participation of society in the peace process, humanitarian actions and development interventions.

102. The ceasefire came into effect on 3 August, and on the same day, the parties established the National Participation Committee during an event in Bogotá with the participation of President Petro, the Government and ELN delegations, civil society, State entities, political parties and the international community. The parties underscored that the participation of society is a key aspect of the peace process that should contribute to the content, as well as the implementation of agreements reached.

103. The Committee is comprised of 82 members from 30 sectors of society, including peasants, victims, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Colombians, members of the private sector, unions, women's organizations, representatives of the Colombian diaspora and prisoners. It is tasked with designing a methodology for the participation of society and will operate until February 2024, under the coordination of the negotiation table. The Committee is developing its workplan and is planning to hold 16 sectorial and nine regional forums between September and December 2023 to gather inputs from society.

104. In August, five women's platforms and one lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons organization belonging to the Committee held a meeting with representatives of the international community with a view to consolidating support to strengthen their participation in the process.

105. At the request of the parties, the Mission and the United Nations country team are supporting the work of the Committee, including through funding activities and assisting its technical secretariat.

106. Pursuant to Security Council resolution [2694 \(2023\)](#), the Mission has begun monitoring and verifying the implementation of the bilateral ceasefire between the parties. The Mission assumed its duties within the quadripartite ceasefire Monitoring and Verification Mechanism on 4 August, alongside representatives of the parties and the Catholic Church. The Mechanism at the national level is working out of the Mission's headquarters.

107. The deployment of up to 68 additional international observers, as authorized by the Security Council, is set to occur gradually and is expected to be completed by early November, thanks to the timely contributions of personnel by Member States. Some 40 current Mission personnel are supporting activities regarding the monitoring of the ceasefire.

108. The Monitoring and Verification Mechanism is comprised of 90 persons (20 women) working at the national, regional and local levels. The Mechanism has installed 8 regional and 13 local branches and has been deployed to all the locations agreed upon by the parties.

109. The Mechanism has been meeting daily and has carried out technical-level work to ensure the smooth functioning of its internal information management and organizational processes. In addition, it has carried out extensive outreach and awareness-raising among regional and local authorities in priority areas where it is set up, including Norte de Santander and Valle del Cauca Departments.

110. With its primary goal being the prevention and resolution of problems on the ground, the Mechanism began documenting events which could potentially contravene the terms of the ceasefire agreement, has facilitated dialogue among the parties to prevent incidents and, has requested the Mission, as the international

component of the Mechanism, to verify the cases in the field, along with the Catholic Church.

111. The Mechanism has been conducting monitoring and technical analysis of information received from different areas of the country, in accordance with the protocols agreed by the parties. Information exchange between the parties and among the components of the Mechanism has been fluid. The Mechanism submitted its first report to the delegations at the negotiation table on 3 September describing its activities, including the installation of the Mechanism at the regional and local levels as well as training and public awareness activities. The parties have successfully avoided any significant confrontation and both the ceasefire and the work of the Mechanism contribute to conflict de-escalation, ultimately benefitting local communities. However, the impact of the bilateral ceasefire on the overall humanitarian situation has been limited by ongoing violence among other armed actors operating in some of the same areas.

VII. Coordination with the United Nations country team

112. The United Nations country team continued to provide support to peace-related efforts in coordination with the Mission, with regards to the comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement and to broader actions under the total peace policy. For example, the working group on rural reform met for the third time this year to take stock of progress in implementation and to coordinate complementary actions.

113. The Mission, the country team and the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia continued to align priorities and engaged jointly with national authorities regarding actions to support implementation, including on reintegration and rural reform. There has been progress in the definition of priorities with the Agency for Territorial Renewal and the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization.

114. In August, the Special High-Level Forum with Ethnic Peoples received funding from the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace to support the Forum's capacities to follow-up on the ethnic chapter's implementation.

115. Implementation of the project funded by the Immediate Response Facility of the Peacebuilding Fund started under the joint coordination of the Mission and the Office of the Resident Coordinator. The project has provided support to the Catholic Church with a view to strengthening its accompanying role in the peace process with ELN and funded the establishment and public presentation of the National Participation Committee.

VIII. Mission structures

Conduct and discipline

116. The Mission continued to implement a strong misconduct prevention programme which included updating the Mission's enterprise risk management framework, as well as training on the zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse and prohibited conduct. "United to Respect" dialogues were conducted in field offices, providing an opportunity to reflect on the Secretary-General's bulletin on addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority.

117. One allegation of misconduct was reported from 1 June to 31 August 2023.

IX. Observations

118. Colombia is nearing the halfway point of the 15-year time frame for implementation of the Final Agreement between the Government and FARC-EP. The first year of the administration of President Petro provided an opportunity to renew commitments therein and to take decisive actions to fulfil their promise. The year has also served to set in motion other equally ambitious initiatives in the framework of the Government's total peace policy. I salute the steps taken and urge redoubled efforts to accelerate progress. Honouring the State's commitments to victims and vulnerable communities and working to enhance the State's presence throughout the territories is a profound responsibility and an unparalleled way to demonstrate political will and to strengthen the State's legitimacy, with significant practical implications as the Government embarks on new peace negotiations.

119. I welcome the Government's efforts to accelerate the implementation of the comprehensive rural reform, which is instrumental to close urban-rural gaps and to transform conflict-affected areas with a view to durably reducing violence. To that end, I call upon the Government, the private sector, peasants and all other actors involved to prioritize dialogue as the foremost means to foster progress and attain common goals.

120. While I acknowledge the work of the Unit for the Implementation of the Final Agreement created under the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, it is essential to take all the necessary actions to deliver on President Petro's important decision, announced six months ago, of reinstating an office within the Presidency, with sufficient rank, capacity and resources to advance implementation.

121. The progress across the cases of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, guided by the principle of the centrality of victims, is a cause for optimism, and I am confident that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace will continue to carry out its crucial task to uphold the rights to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition. Promptly reaching the stage whereby the Special Jurisdiction for Peace issues its first restorative sentences is of the essence of the transitional justice process, to the overall implementation of the Final Agreement, and to broader peacebuilding efforts in Colombia. To that end, additional efforts by the Government to ensure the conditions for the implementation of restorative sentences remain essential.

122. I salute the meaningful and unprecedented progress made recently in negotiations between the Government and ELN, which reflects both parties' resolve to end decades of conflict. I welcome the ample participation of women in both peace delegations. The ongoing ceasefire, the work of the National Participation Committee and recent agreements regarding critical areas for humanitarian interventions are an encouraging call to all actors invested in Colombia's lasting peace to continue to assist the parties as they move forward with the negotiations' agenda. Preliminary results speak of the potential of sustained de-escalation of violence, which I hope will continue in the interest of conflict-affected communities. To that end, the parties and the people of Colombia can continue to count on the resolute support of the United Nations.

123. I also welcome the ongoing talks between the Government and EMC FARC-EP and trust that recent steps towards de-escalating violence and the start of official negotiations, including an agreement on a ceasefire with protections for civilians, will materialize and lead to tangible benefits, as is the desire of communities in conflict-affected areas.

124. As we hope for peace dialogues to bear fruit, I remain gravely concerned about the persisting violence against former members of FARC-EP. There can be no failure by the State to honour its obligations to the men and women who took the right decision in striving for a negotiated solution to decades of war, while hoping for an opportunity to live the rest of their lives in peace. I urge the Government to take all measures necessary to ensure their security and protection and call upon judicial authorities to swiftly bring those responsible for these crimes to justice.

125. The violence in areas still affected by armed conflict must cease. I call upon all armed groups behind this violence to halt their actions against civilians, to engage in good faith in ongoing peace initiatives and to also seek to de-escalate violence against one another. This is the way to demonstrate to Colombians and to the world their true will for peace.

126. I reiterate the urgent need for the Government to improve security for vulnerable populations, including by making quick use of new tools at its disposal with the recent adoption of the long-awaited public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organizations, alongside the measures included in the new security and defence policy. Crafting context-specific responses, ensuring complementarity, developing a system to monitor impact, and allocating sufficient resources is now instrumental to the success of these key instruments.

127. Enhanced security measures are particularly important in the light of the upcoming elections, which I hope will be held in an environment of peace, respect and wide participation.

128. I am grateful to the Security Council for the continued trust in the work of the Mission in these promising yet challenging times, and I thank all personnel in the Mission working tirelessly to effectively deliver on the multiple tasks at hand.

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

Verification Mission Geospatial 

