

**Colombia 2013:
Towards ending the longest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere?**

26 October 2012

Institute of the Americas
University College London
50/51 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury

Convenors:

Dr. Andrei Gómez-Suárez (A.Gomez@sussex.ac.uk)
Dr. Par Engstrom (p.engstrom@ucl.ac.uk)

Partner institution:

London Transitional Justice Network

Rationale

On 4th September 2012 Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos openly recognised that a first phase of peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-Peoples' Army (FARC-EP) had successfully ended. Santos announced that the second phase was about to begin in October 2012 and that by the end of the second phase the Colombian people could expect a final agreement to end the armed conflict in Colombia. Santos' peace policy consolidates a radical shift from his predecessor's. This new attempt to bring to an end the longest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere has been interpreted by many as the right decision at the right time: not only has the international context changed but the FARC-EP has also been weakened. This confluence of factors appears to provide a window of opportunity for negotiations even in the absence of a military defeat of the FARC-EP. For some critics however, including former President Álvaro Uribe, the incipient peace talks reflect the failure of Santos's security strategy and offer a carte blanche to "terrorist groups" to do politics. Whatever the merits of such criticisms, important questions regarding the Colombian armed conflict and the challenges for the Santos-FARC peace talks to succeed remain to be addressed.

This event is timed to follow a crucial political conjuncture for Colombia with the opening of the second phase of peace talks in Oslo in October 2012. Three clusters of questions underpin the roundtables:

1. *What are the root causes of the armed conflict and in what ways has it been transformed over time?*

- In order to understand the Colombian armed conflict today, a sense of history is crucial. We need to understand when and why the conflict started in order to assess the extent to which, if at all, the underlying logic today's armed conflict has changed. In particular, given the history of land dispossession in Colombia, is the conflict about land distribution or drug trafficking?
 - Moreover, we also need to examine the motivations of the various actors involved in the conflict in order to understand the transformations they have experienced. For example, how significant has the modernization of the Colombian Armed Forces (COLAR) been? In what ways has the FARC-EP adapted to the modernization of its enemy? To what extent has the demobilisation of paramilitary groups transformed the armed struggle between the COLAR and the FARC-EP?
2. *Why have previous peace negotiations with FARC-EP failed, and to what extent will this history of successive failures shape current efforts?*
- How should the history of failed peace talks be understood? Successive failed attempts to reach peace agreements have created widespread distrust amongst the various groups involved in the armed conflict. We can, however, also draw lessons for the future from these attempts. It therefore becomes important to examine whether lessons have been learnt from past peace negotiations, regarding, for example, the sequencing of ceasefire agreements, the size and composition of both sides at the negotiation table, the role of the international mediators, and the time-frame for reaching a final settlement.
 - Moreover, we need to understand how spoilers have negatively impacted peace talks in the past. Crucially, how has the lack of a clear strategy to deal with spoilers, on part of both the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, contributed to successive failures to bring an end to the conflict?
3. *What explains the current momentum behind the peace talks between the Santos government and FARC-EP, and what are the prospects for the talks to bring an end to the armed conflict?*
- What are the main reasons for the start of peace negotiations?
 - The composition of members of both negotiation teams may prove to be crucial. What are the FARC-EP's and the Santos Administration's negotiation strategies; and how can they best be assessed?
 - What are the most significant obstacles to reaching an agreement? What areas of contention and agreement can be identified?
 - Predicting the future is clearly more of an art than a science. Yet, participants will be invited to critically reflect on how likely it is for the Santos-FARC peace talks to succeed and what the main challenges are.

Programme

26 October 2012

Venue: UCL Institute of the Americas, 50-51 Gordon Square, WC1H 0PQ

1-1.15 Welcome and Convenors' Introduction

1.15- 3.45 Colombian Peace Talks: 30 years of failures and escalation of the conflict

Themes:

- (i) A brief review of the armed conflict – When did the conflict start and how has it changed?
- (ii) The armed conflict and Peace Talks since 1982 – When does the history of peace talks with FARC begin and why have the talks failed so far?

Roundtable discussion:

- Nick Morgan (Newcastle)
- Malcolm Deas (Oxford)
- Jenny Pearce (Bradford)
- Louise Winstanley (ABColombia)

Chair: Paulo Drinot (UCL-IA)

3.45-4 Coffee

4-5.30 The Santos-FARC Peace Talks: negotiation strategies and the challenges for the future

Themes:

- (i) When and how did the Santos-FARC peace talks start?
- (ii) How different are the Santos-FARC peace talks from previous experiences?
- (iii) How likely are the Santos-FARC peace talks to succeed?
- (iv) What are the main challenges after Oslo?

Roundtable discussion:

- HE Mauricio Rodríguez Múnera (Ambassador of Colombia to the UK)
- David Maher (Kent)
- Markus Schultze-Kraft (IDS)
- Grace Livingstone (Cambridge)

Chair: Maxine Molyneux (UCL-IA)

5.30-5.45 Convenor's Conclusions – Colombia 2013: peace without conflict or conflict without peace?

5.45-7 Drinks reception