

# THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: CONTENTION REMAINS

Third Year of the Gustavo Petro  
and Francia Márquez Administration

## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

**T**his report, 'The Challenge of Change: Contention Remains,' encompasses the third year of the Gustavo Petro administration. Nevertheless, as it has been pertinent in these Reports, it does not aim at an overall balance of the government; it strictly focuses on analysing the Human Rights situation and the responsibility the Colombian State has regarding it. Assessing structural factors explaining the violation of many of said rights is especially significant in this analysis, as it gauges how much they have been modified or whether they still remain, taking into consideration that a change was projected, an offer awakening much expectation.

It has been split into six chapters, each of which touches upon a particular point of view to lay on the facts and analyse the Hu-

man Rights situation in Colombia. Its starting point is the international framework via a general assessment; it is followed by evaluating the result of the social reform endeavours; later on, the difficult situation faced in six regions is reported, followed by a chapter devoted to the balance of the 'Total Peace' policies; it finishes off with appraising the current democratic conditions in Colombia from a number of angles, as that has been highly controversial. Each chapter comprises a series of articles, having an interpretation hypothesis as a guiding thread.

A summary of the text and its main conclusions will be listed below, not without forewarning, of course, that a thorough comprehension and an improved value may only be obtained from an in-depth reading of the Report.

### Chapter 1. International Context

Analysing the human rights situation in Colombia requires placing it within the world order transformations framework. The support the country has historically received in terms of cooperation and peace building is

now under pressure from global changes altering the role of human rights as an ethical and legal landmark.

Moving towards a multipolar world led to a fierce hegemonic dispute where hu-

man rights cease being the common ground amidst international affairs and often constitute an obstacle to overcome.

The ‘America First’ motto in the US government has radicalised demotion policies towards the region, tempering migration, cutting off financial aids, dwindling multilateralism and disdaining related values such as supporting the Peace Agreement. In practical terms, no concrete actions have materialised beyond deportations, withdrawing USAID, some public quarrels with Repub-

lican senators and politicians, and certain warnings related to an alleged ‘closeness with China’, and the possible ‘decertification’ foreseen for September is still pending.

In Europe, political polarisation and the rise of the far right have redefined the global agenda, displacing cooperation priorities and reducing external resources, despite of which Colombia is still deemed a strategic ally and relevant commercial partner, though with financial adjustments in international aid.

## Chapter 2. Right to Life: Old and New Risks

Colombia straddles one of its most critical humanitarian phases in the past eight years, visibly exacerbated in 2025. Violence is currently displayed collectively on entire communities subdued by different armed agents –including the State– amidst a territorial dispute leading up to different forms of violence such as recruitment, seclusion, massive forced displacement and, of course, murders and threats confirming the magnitude of the crisis.

The chapter puts together five articles reflecting the crude outlook: the persistent persecution to peace signatories and advo-

cates, violence against women and LGBTQI+ individuals; and structural State limitations in inclusion and protection.

It also underlines tensions surrounding regulatory progress in inclusions and rights, with a sector siding with equality and another one (e.g. the Congress) with global regressive trends. Women and LGBTQI+ organisations note the gap between the official discourse and the actual ineffectiveness of the State, which excludes their voices from crucial decisions involving peace, democracy and foreign policies.

## Chapter 3. Change Indicators

The government accessing power under the ‘change’ promise rose expectations of social and political transformation, whose realistic progress in human rights relied on largely postponed structural reforms. A year from the administration concluding, results show partial progress, strong resistance from political and economic powers and a notorious gap between discourse and action regarding the environment.

Labour and pension reforms managed to gain access despite strong opposition and tortuous legislative proceedings. Though limited to recovering basic rights and overcoming inequities of the private system, these reforms were backed by citizens and mobilisations; on the other hand, the healthcare reform –despite the same social legitimacy– was thwarted by the Congress and Courts, leaving inequality, corruption

and structural crisis of the current system completely untouched.

The agricultural reform has been a historical and categorical grievance posed by the farming sector, rendering its substantiation unnecessary. In this case, the current government chose to lean on existing instruments, especially those laid out by the 2016 Peace Agreement and the land restitution law issued in 2021. There has been

some progress in reinstatement, formalisation and restitution despite hardships, still far from what was avowed. Environmentally, the extraction model and the reliance on fossil fuels remain despite the official discourse of energetic transition. Communities in Cundinamarca, Boyacá and Santander uncover the territorial impact and question the government coherence before the climate crisis.

## Chapter 4. Territorial Voices

A six-region sample illustrates one of the worst features of human rights disregard in Colombia, where violence befalls communities already worn by lack of financial choices and poor living conditions. 1) Catatumbo: the national peace capital in waiting; 2) Micay: bullets are not the

way; 3) Chocó: humanitarian situation; 4) Towards conflict characterisation in Mid-Magdalena; 5) Violence, isolation and illegal armed group expansion in five Caribbean departments; 6) North Tolima and human rights: a musing of inner Colombia.

## Chapter 5. Perspectives on Peace: An Early Balance

Despite the initial good will from the government, it is clear no conducive peace process has been materialised. Due to the intricacy of violence manifestations, several aspects ought to be analysed to explain these regrettable results, some stemming from limitations in policies and others from challenges and resistance.

First of all, there is the paramilitary, reshaped and cemented via illegal economies and subjugating territories left with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia having demobilised, favouring groups not involved with the Peace Agreement. The main weakness of the policies posed has been not acknowledging them as the main obstacle for peace, lacking an integral strategy for its decommissioning, and trusting their alleged will to legalise. 'Civil security

fronts' fuelled by local powers reappear, there is no satisfactory progress by the National Commission of Security Guarantees, and defence policies reflect a paradox as both civilian space and respect to protest have expanded but territorial violence persists, setting up illegal co-government forms between authorities and armed actors. Structural pledges such as aligning intelligence to human rights standards have not been met.

Adding to that, there are design errors and lack of a clear negotiation strategy, as well as lack of clear subjugation rules, ceasefire problems and weak humanitarian care. Systemic resistance is evident either by the Congress, the Armed Forces or local powers. Setbacks with the National Liberation Army led to breaches, violence and

the political negotiation being forsaken in favour of military logistics.

Drugs policies have swerved towards security and control focus, a strong down-

turn regarding initial proclamations and grave uncertainties on programme continuity and concerns on reactivating practices such as chemical spraying.

## Chapter 6. Democracy Redefinition Attempts

Addressing the Social Rule of Law and current state of democracy in Colombia, two approaches are seen: institutional behaviour respecting liberal democracy rules despite intense opposition and a will to move towards participative democracy despite limited institutional results.

Articles collected gauge chief items of this clash: tensions between representative and participative democracies; weight of de facto powers such as entrepreneurial groups and the media; barriers set up by Courts and Congress to suggested reforms, defending a largely unequal social order.

Control bodies renovations and their partial progress facing serious debts in hu-

man rights guarantees are also analysed as well as the historical challenge faced by the Attorney General to overcome decades of impunity, as exemplified by the case of the conviction against Álvaro Uribe Vélez, itself a milestone considering the persistence of the aforementioned impunity previously observed, rendering it significant and emblematic.

It is finally posed that the on-going changes must not be reduced to a government programme but instead understood as part of a historical transition which is already underway both socially and politically, whose effects set up the future political debate.

## Recommendations

### ***Social Rights and Democracy Redefinition Attempt***

1. Prioritising guarantees and expansion of social rights such as healthcare, work, pension and education as a nucleus of national democracy, above partisan and electoral disputes. Reforming the Healthcare System, materialising the Pension Reform and regulating and implementing the Labour Reform. Urgent measures, additionally, must be carried out to overcome poverty, reduce inequality and curtail land concentration, guaranteeing social transfor-

mations effectively reach the most excluded and vulnerable communities.

2. From the three human rights platforms we urge all expressions, political movements, the High Courts, the National Government, the media, the entrepreneurial guilds and the citizens to commit to an electoral process which is participative, plural and, especially, respectful of human rights. Democracy is based on diversity and dissension, but no social or political leadership should lose its life. All Colombians have the right to political and electoral participation, and current and

upcoming generations deserve institutions which are sound, transparent and guarantors of rights.

### ***Territories, Human Rights and Peace***

3. Prioritising the implementation of humanitarian agreements and immediate relief measures across areas which have been most deeply affected by the armed conflict and other forms of violence. It is key to make progress in tangible commitments between the National Government and armed groups guaranteeing the protection of civilians. It is thus required to thoroughly strengthen State presence in critical regions such as Catatumbo, Chocó, Cauca and Mid-Magdalena. Said actions must focus on reducing hostilities, freeing abductees, abiding by International Humanitarian Law, opening up humanitarian corridors, mitigating confinements and forced displacements, as well as guaranteeing food safety amongst communities.
4. Making progress against impunity whilst dismantling paramilitary and criminal structures as well as their acquiescence with the armed forces. It is necessary and urgent to integrally implement the criminal organisation dismantling policy adopted by Decree N° 665 issued in 2024, especially its legal removal and the State transformation to prevent co-opting risks. The Attorney General ought to adopt an investigation strategy prioritising tracking down ultimate perpetrators, determiners and beneficiaries of criminal organisations, and the Director of Public Prosecutions must establish an investigation protocol focused on analysing the liability for omission by civil servants in armed group operation in critical conflict zones.
5. Peace is, and must remain, the fundamental pathway for the Colombian so-

ciety. The State must prioritise political ceasefire negotiations, guaranteeing ample and effective civilian participation. It is also urgent to make progress in the thorough implementation of the Final Peace Agreement from 2016, especially the territorial transformation measures, which requires sustained social, economic and cultural investment directly arranged with communities as structural means to substitute illicit crops and shape development, dignity and stability across the territories.

### ***Inclusion and Guarantees***

6. Urgently curbing violence against women and the LGBTQI+ sectors. It is imperative for the State to adopt efficient immediate measures to stop femicides and systematic violence affecting both women and LGBTQI+ individuals nationwide. These actions must include national prevention and care programmes, massive awareness campaigns against violence and bigotry, and the creation of accessible and timely protection routes. It is also necessary for integral long-term policies strengthening women and diverse population organisations to be reinforced, therefore acknowledging their role in human rights advocacy and guaranteeing conditions for the full realisation of their citizenship and dignity.
7. The Government ought to issue the instrument to implement the Integral Public Policy of Guarantees as well as its National Plan of Action in Human Rights, underlining its commitment with human rights in the country.
8. The National Government and involved State entities must effectively abide by Ruling SU-546 issued in 2023, which orders structural protection and prosecution measures regarding crimes against social leaders and human rights advocates.



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