

THE SCOPE OF CHANGE: MIST ON THE HORIZON

Fourth Year of the Government of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“*The Scope of Change: Mist on the Horizon*” presents an assessment of the fourth year and the overall tenure of the Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez administration from a human rights perspective. This period marked a significant political turning point: equality, peace, social justice, the peasantry, care, the energy transition, and the rights of historically excluded populations took on greater prominence on the state’s agenda. However, the assessment also reveals the limitations in translating this political and policy orientation into effective guarantees, especially in the most marginalized regions.

The report places this national assessment within an international context in which human rights face new threats. The expansion of war and militarization, the weakening of multilateralism, the selective application of international law, and the rise of authoritarian movements that resort to racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and stigmatization reveal a deeper struggle over the very limits of power. Against this backdrop, the Platforms reaffirm the validity of human rights as a common framework for defending life, dignity,

equality, peace, the sovereignty of peoples, and democracy.

One of the main outcomes of the period was the simultaneous reduction of poverty and inequality. Between 2022 and 2025, monetary poverty fell from 36.6% to 28%, extreme poverty from 13.8% to 9.6%, multidimensional poverty from 12.9% to 9.9%, and the Gini coefficient dropped from 0.556 to 0.531. This improvement was linked to a recovery in employment, an increase in real labor income, a reduction in inflation, and higher social spending.

Yet national averages mask deep gaps. Poverty remains higher in rural, ethnic, and peripheral areas, and disproportionately affects households headed by women, Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and people with disabilities. More than half of the employed population continues to work in the informal sector, and the employment rate for women remains well below that of men. In 2024, Colombia recorded a monetary poverty rate of 31.8%, compared to 25.5% in Latin America, and a comparative extreme poverty rate of 15.8% –six percentage points

above the regional average. Added to this is a fiscal constraint that limited government action, though it did not begin with this administration: in 2021, the central

government's deficit already stood at 7% of GDP and net debt at 60%; by the end of 2025, these indicators stood at 6.4% and 58.6%, respectively.

Peace, Territorial Control, and the Defense of Human Rights

Total Peace (*la Paz Total*) once again placed political negotiations at the center of the discussion on the armed conflict, but it did not produce the expected sustainable results. The report identifies resistance from sectors historically linked to the dynamics of war and illegality, as well as problems related to planning, methodology, the coordination between peace and security, and the characterization of armed actors within the government itself.

The most striking expression of this challenge was the expansion of armed groups. Between December 2022 and July 2026, their members grew from 15,120 to 28,802, an increase of nearly 90%. The Clan del Golfo grew by 152%, dissident groups by nearly 109%, groups linked to the Segunda Marquetalia by 108%, and the ELN by 22%. Dissident groups came to have a presence or control in 376 municipalities, compared to 124 three years earlier, while the Clan del Golfo expanded from 213 to 429 municipalities between 2019 and 2025.

This expansion had direct consequences for communities and their leaders. Between January and August 2025, 544 civilians were killed or injured by explosive devices, a 145% increase compared to the same period in 2024; between January and November, more than 120,000 cases of force displacement were recorded, and the number of anti-personnel landmine victims rose by 23%.

Attacks against human rights defenders must be understood within this same

context. During the Petro administration, 3,115 attacks were recorded, compared to 3,544 during the previous administration. Although the total decreased by approximately 12%, 618 murders were documented –virtually the same number as during the Duque administration. Threats decreased, but enforced disappearances rose by 34%, from 52 to 78 cases, and forced displacements reached 177 recorded incidents. Violence has thus shifted toward forms of silencing and territorial displacement that continue to make the defense of rights a high-risk activity.

Despite this critical assessment, institutional progress was made. Territorial Guarantees Committees (*Mesas Territoriales de Garantías*) were established in 29 departments; the Comprehensive Public Policy on Guarantees for Leadership and the Defense of Human Rights and the Comprehensive Program on Guarantees for Women Leaders and Defenders were adopted; and progress was made on the Public Policy for Dismantling Criminal Organizations.

The assessment of the peace process thus leads to a key conclusion: the failure of various negotiation processes does not prove that a predominant military strategy can resolve the conflict. Peacebuilding continues to require political negotiation, sustained social investment, territorial transformation, the dismantling of paramilitarism and its support networks, and guarantees of truth, justice, and reparations.

The Boundaries of Equality

En The report emphasizes that the formal recognition of rights did not uniformly translate into effective guarantees. The peasantry was recognized as deserving special constitutional protection; progress was made in the Agrarian and Rural Jurisdiction; and measures aimed at women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and other historically excluded populations were strengthened. However, access to these protections continues to depend heavily on geographic location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and available institutional capacity.

For women, this period brought about progress such as the strengthening of the Comprehensive Guarantees Program for Women Leaders and Defenders (*Programa Integral de Garantías para Mujeres Líderesas y Defensoras*) and the adoption of the first National Action Plan to imple-

ment Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Nevertheless, gaps persist in economic autonomy, the redistribution of care work, sexual and reproductive rights, and the protection of women leaders and peacebuilders.

The expansion of recognition also extended to LGBTIQ+ people, with new institutional mechanisms and greater incorporation of their rights into the public agenda. However, violence continued to reveal the limits of that recognition, especially against transgender people and in areas where armed groups are present. The challenge is not only to preserve normative progress but also to ensure effective protection, institutional access, and conditions that allow people to exercise their rights without their territory or identity exposing them to greater levels of risk.

Institutions, Participation, and Continuity

In terms of public policy, the adoption of the National Action Plan on Human Rights 2026–2036 and the Comprehensive Public Policy on Guarantees for Human Rights Leadership and Advocacy constitutes one of the period's main institutional legacies. Both instruments were developed with the participation of civil society organizations, human rights platforms, and state institutions. Their approval, however, is not the endpoint: their sustainability will depend on funding, staff, coordination, institutional memory, and implementation capacity.

The final assessment cannot be reduced to a single formula. The Petro

administration broadened the public agenda on rights and achieved significant social improvements, but it also demonstrated that a reformist approach alone is not enough. Political and economic resistance, the blocking of reforms, fiscal constraints, and problems with management, implementation, and coordination limited the ability to turn normative advances into lasting transformations.

This assessment also comes against the backdrop of an increasingly adverse international context for human rights. The rise of militarization, the weakening of multilateralism, pressures on state

sovereignty, and the expansion of political agendas that challenge the rights of women, diverse, and migrant populations pose new risks. In this scenario, preserving established policies and sustaining the participation of civil society organizations will also mean struggling to prevent changes in government from leading to setbacks in rights.

The main challenge left by this period is, therefore, to ensure that the rec-

ognized rights, the agreed-upon policies, and the progress achieved do not depend on any particular administration but rather become sustained guarantees for communities and territories. In this sense, “The Scope of Change: Mist on the Horizon” does not close the discussion: rather, it leaves open the disputes over peace, equality, democracy, and the defense of human rights in the new political landscape.

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