

FACT SHEET- Ethnic Chapter

- After years of negotiations in 2016 the Colombian government signed a Peace Agreement with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) Guerrilla group, seeking to put an end to the longest civil war in the Americas
- Half a century of war (1964-2016) between guerrillas, paramilitaries and the state produced at least 261,619 fatal victims, the vast majority civilian population (214,584); 80,514 disappeared; 37,094 kidnappings; and 15,738 victims of sexual violence. The United Nations reports Colombia as having the highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs), over 7 million total. Most forced displacement was concentrated in the period between 1996-2006 (at least 2.5 million) but has continued after the post-accords were signed. The Colombian Truth Commission recognizes 8.9 million victims of the internal armed conflict.
- Even though Black and Indigenous people have and continue to be disproportionately affected by the armed conflict, they were initially denied a seat at the negotiating table. Thereafter Afro-Colombian and indigenous social organizations mobilized to draw international attention to their plight and to convince the government that their participation was essential to creating durable peace with justice. On March 2016 a coalition of ethnic organizations created the Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defense of Territorial Rights, to advance these efforts
- One day before the signing of the 300-page accord, they won inclusion of “The Ethic Chapter” in the peace agreement intended to consolidate the rights of Indigenous and Black Colombians stipulated in the 1991 Constitution including to life, culture, collective territories and prior consultation.
- The Ethic Chapter also stipulates that the specific circumstances, collective interests and other important concerns of indigenous and rural Afro-descendent communities must be taken into account in each section of the accord – in rural reform, the effort to substitute legal crops for coca, political participation, reparation of victims of the armed conflict, etc. It calls too for reinforcement of the Guardia Indígena and Guardia Cimarrona to provide security according to cultural and self-governance frameworks.
- To assure implementation of the peace accords from an ethnic perspective and in ethnic communities, the Ethnic Chapter called for the creation of a new institutional body – an oversight board -- with direct participation of ethnic leaders
- In Colombia, indigenous people and those of African descent, together with the Roma population, are identified as “ethnic” peoples in the 1991 Constitution of Colombia. While indigenous groups, who comprise approximately 4.4% of Colombians, Afro-Colombians comprise about 20% of the Colombian population. The 1991 Constitution defined Colombia as a multi-cultural and pluri-ethnic nation in which citizens of African descent and indigenous people had legal rights to their collectively owned territories, a measure of local self-government, their ancestral cultural practices, and prior consultation (*consulta previa*) about any economic projects or major policies directly relevant to their territories . The collective territories of Colombian ethnic peoples today are over 35 million hectares, many in areas difficult to navigate and areas of sensitive ecosystems.
- The inclusion of this Ethnic Chapter was a major achievement of popular self-mobilization and international support. This is the only peace accord in the world to stipulate the differential rights of ethnic populations. Yet, these hard-won rights are under threat.