

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SOCIAL LEADER IS KILLED?

Colombia's historic 2016 peace accords was a remarkable achievement.

It ended the world's longest conflict—a 50-year affair between the Colombian state, right-wing paramilitaries, and a guerrilla movement known as the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) that killed more than 200,000 people and displaced another 8 million.

But the peace accords also did so much more than end a long and bloody conflict.



A ROADMAP TO TACKLING INEQUALITY, RACISM, AND VIOLENCE

The peace accords laid out a detailed roadmap that, if implemented, would tackle the structural challenges that fueled the Colombian conflict: inequality, racism, and violence.

They committed the Colombian state to providing basic services in remote areas of the country where the violence had been most acute.

For a group of enterprising and committed people in these communities, the peace accords were a galvanizing moment: they began the hard, grassroots work of building peace in Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and rural towns and villages all over Colombia.

In the years since, these people—known as social leaders—have hustled to implement key components of the peace accords in their communities. Social leaders have organized communities to implement voluntary coca substitution programs in regions controlled by cocaine traffickers. They've secured ethnic, land, labor, and environmental rights in communities where extractive industries like mining operate. They've sought justice for the human rights abuses committed against their neighbors during the conflict.

Every day, their work has challenged the entrenched interests of powerful and violent groups: drug traffickers, economic and political elites, and illicit armed groups. And as they've waited for the Colombian state to hold up its end of the bargain, they've faced rising danger.

WHEN SOCIAL LEADERS ARE KILLED, PEACE BECOMES MORE TENUOUS



Thousands of social leaders have been threatened by these groups, and since 2016, more than 500 have been assassinated as a result of their work.

For the communities they leave behind, the death of a social leader often means an end to the fight for peace: neighborhoods are cowed into silence, voluntary coca substitution efforts are abandoned, the push to secure fundamental rights is halted, and violent actors reassert control over entire communities.

The end result? With each additional killing of a social leader, Colombia's grasp on peace becomes more tenuous.

WITHOUT PROTECTING SOCIAL LEADERS, PEACE IN COLOMBIA IS NOT POSSIBLE

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WOLA

Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas