

Testimony Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's Issues

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PEACE ACCORD IMPLEMENTATION

In 2016, when the Santos Administration and the FARC representatives signed the peace accord, they did so knowing that implementing it as written would be difficult to do. As an example, it was known that Colombian government cannot fully finance it, as estimated costs over a decade are in the billions<sup>1</sup>. It was also known that certain FARC fronts would never demobilize and that the highest ranking commanders might not be fully committed to abandoning their old ways.

As it happens, Iván Márquez and three other FARC commanders recently announced a renewed call to arms. Not surprisingly, the former peace negotiators blamed the Duque administration for failing to meet its accord-related commitments. Ivan Marquez's call to re-arm based on legitimate grievances is disingenuous and a mere excuse to return to narco-trafficking and other illicit activities. It is therefore crucial that a FARC 2.0 be stripped of political legitimacy if it indeed turns to violence.

Unfortunately, the Duque Administration's political rivals are also critical of its accord implementation efforts, going so far as to say it is *intentionally* sabotaging the peace accord. The Duque administration must more effectively counter this narrative and publicize its successes while explaining how it is addressing the challenges.

VENEZUELAN REFUGEE CRISIS – Supporting Colombian Army Efforts

To date, the Colombian people have been incredibly welcoming of the Venezuelan refugees. It is relatively easy for Venezuelans to obtain a temporary "border card" to enter Colombia and have access to emergency health services as long as they enter at an official border check point and remain in four of the departments bordering Venezuela. However, as hundreds of Venezuelans seek refuge in Colombia every day, the Colombian authorities will need more assistance in order to maintain security and good relations with the civilian population. To this

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-rebels/peace-will-cost-colombia-44-billion-over-10-years-senator-says-idUSKCN0HX1KC20141008>

end, the U.S. should increase funding for US Army Civil Affairs efforts that support the Colombian Army's *accion integral* teams in the border regions. *Accion integral* teams work for and with local communities. Their initiatives include relatively low cost community engagement and infrastructure projects. In addition to fostering a trusting relationship between soldiers and the people they protect, successfully executed *accion integral* projects lessen the influence of bad actors who rely heavily on civilian cooperation in their day-to-day operations. The more unstable a given area is, the easier it is for bad actors to wield influence over and recruit from the local population.

For example, given their dire economic circumstances, Venezuelan refugees are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by bad actors – especially if they feel government presence is lacking. In some border areas, the Colombian army is all there is in terms of state presence. Therefore, it is crucial for a soldier to win the trust of the community by working alongside civilians to improve it. Additionally, unchecked xenophobia can destabilize a community to the point where it becomes a security issue. Executing *accion integral* projects that engage Colombian and their new Venezuelan neighbors could lessen tensions between them.

#### IMPROVING COLOMBIAN ARMY INTELLIGENCE NETWORKS

No doubt members of our intelligence community have been working this issue, but it warrants a mention in this forum.

The United States should support the modernization of Colombian Army intelligence networks. Each Colombian army division has its own regional intelligence team—known as *Regionales de Inteligencia Militar* (RIME). The RIME teams are highly effective in gathering human intelligence within their respective areas of operation. However, intelligence sharing mechanisms between army divisions and across other branches of the armed forces are lacking. If Colombian military intelligence is to be prepared for an increasingly complex security situation, continued investment in overhauling existing databases and intelligence sharing networks is warranted.

In sum, Colombia continues to be one of the United States' strongest allies in the Western Hemisphere. While most Americans are not aware of what the United States and Colombia have accomplished together for the betterment of both our nations, I thank Senator Rubio and the members of this subcommittee for dedicating a hearing to this important bilateral relationship.