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## ***Peace and social justice: two of the great challenges of the new Colombian government***

The armed conflict in Colombia has been going on for six decades and has resulted in thousands of deaths and disappearances, millions of people suffered forced displacement or had to go into exile from the country to save their lives. To this are added the neoliberal policies that have transformed that country into one of the most unequal in the world. The government of the Historical Pact has the enormous challenge of beginning to change this tragic reality.



From the magical realism of García Márquez to the tragic realism left in Colombia by the decades of right-wing governments. Since the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in 1948, Colombia has been plunged into a long and dark night. The new government, led by Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, faces innumerable challenges, two of the main ones

are: the consolidation of definitive peace and the construction of a nation with social justice.

Six decades of armed conflict have resulted in thousands of deaths, disappearances and millions of people who suffered forced displacement. To this is added that right-wing policies, according to World Bank data, have transformed Colombia into one of the most unequal in the world.

The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition in Colombia, issued a report where it is assured that the armed conflict left at least 450,666 people lost their lives; 121,768 were victims of enforced disappearance; 50,770 were abducted; 16,238 children and adolescents were recruited; 32,446 people were victims of acts against sexual freedom and integrity; among other human rights violations. Between 1985 and 2016, there were 6,402 extrajudicial executions known as "false positives". The conflict also meant that more than one million Colombians had to go into exile to protect their lives and more than 7.7 million people had to leave their homes victims of forced internal displacement.

After more than five years of dialogues in Havana (Cuba) and a first agreement discarded after a plebiscite, new negotiations led, in 2016, to the signing of the Peace Agreements between the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) and the Colombian State represented by the Colombian Government of Juan Manuel Santos.

The day after taking office, the president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, reaffirmed his willingness to resume peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN), which had been interrupted with the arrival in government of Iván Duque, representative of uribismo, who also put a brake on the implementation of the Agreements with the FARC.

Petro said he has "the desire to continue the processes initiated in the Santos Government and enrich them, first complying with those that were signed, the processes with the FARC. Second, continuing with the interrupted, one with the ELN and a very incipient one, which did not settle, with the Clan del Golfo, because the prosecutor of the time did not allow it either."

The Colombian president stressed the importance of the countries that hosted and guaranteed the negotiations for these agreements: Cuba, Norway, Venezuela and Ecuador.

According to the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (Indepaz), during the government of Iván Duque 957 leaders and human rights defenders were murdered, there were 555 kidnappings, 261 peace signatories murdered, 545 events of forced displacement, and 313 massacres were committed with 1,192 victims.

Indepaz also pointed out that so far in 2022 alone, in Colombia, 61 massacres were committed, which left a total of 215 people killed.



Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Vice President Francia Márquez at their inauguration ceremony in Bogotá on August 7. Petro and Márquez make up the country's first left-wing government, and proposed ambitious social and environmental goals.

(Image: Long Visual Press/Alamy)

The neoliberal heritage

The construction of social justice will be another of the great challenges of the government of the Historical Pact.

According to a [World Bank report](#): "Colombia is one of the countries with the greatest income inequality and informality in the labor market in Latin America." The richest 10 percent of Colombia have 11 times more wealth than the poorest population.

Unemployment stands at 12.1 percent, which in concrete numbers represents 3 million people.

Several studies also indicate that poverty affects four out of 10 Colombians (42%), which in concrete figures represents 20 million people, and of these, six million live in extreme poverty. To that is added that half of those over 65 years of age do not have a pension.

In the same vein, [the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#) pointed out that in Colombia "60% of workers are in a situation of labor informality, which excludes them from access to social security and reduces productivity and tax revenues."

Different reports also indicate that Colombia's public debt in 2021 was estimated at 63.8% of GDP.

The path that the Colombian people and their government must travel is not easy, but the first step has already been taken, a fundamental step that excites all of Latin America.

*Héctor Bernardo for La Pluma*

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Read in La Pluma: [Gustavo Petro's inauguration: The left opens an unprecedented path in Colombia with Petro at the helm \(Video\)](#)

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