

COLOMBIA IN CONTEXT

This is a publication of the Colombia Human Rights Network, CHRN. CHRN is comprised of committees whose members are all volunteers. We support efforts for peace, human rights, and social justice in Colombia. We work with communities and organizations in Colombia that pursue peace and social justice by peaceful means. As an independent human rights initiative, we are not affiliated in any way with any armed group or political party in Colombia, the United States, or anywhere else.

The CHRN was formed in 1990, at which time it adopted the Colombia Update (1989-2003), already being produced by the Colombia Human Rights Committee (Washington, DC), as its own. In the Colombia Update we shared perspectives from human rights defenders and the communities impacted by human rights violations in Colombia. With Colombia in Context, we seek once again to provide information and insights to help understand issues in Colombia and U.S.-Colombian relations in light of their impacts on human rights.

In this May 2026 report, we highlight recent events affecting peace and justice in Colombia and provide context.

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1

U.S.-COLOMBIA RELATIONS

A

U.S.-Colombia tensions, accentuated in 2025, ease in 2026 as Petro visits White House at Trump's invitation

In **2025**, with the return of Donald Trump to the White House, tensions with Colombia's Petro Administration were exacerbated, first with Petro's refusal to accept Colombian deportees returned from the United States in shackles (January); later, after a meeting in Bogotá between Petro and then-Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, after which she claimed Petro had declared himself a friend of the Tren de Aragua criminal organization (he did not) (March); and after Petro addressed a pro-Palestinian rights rally in New York, where he called on U.S. troops to disobey orders by President Trump (September).



In response to that incident, Petro and some of his family members and aides had their U.S. visas stripped (in September), and some were included on the list maintained by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of Treasury (in October), subjecting them to U.S. sanctions.

As the U.S. military presence in the Caribbean escalated in the latter part of 2025 – including bombing speedboats and semi-submersible boats the U.S. says are transporting illegal drugs, and culminating in the attack and seizure of President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores on January 3, 2026 – President Trump accused President Petro of being the “illegal drug leader of drug traffickers.” (As of this writing, in late May, at least 60 vessels have been destroyed and 194 persons killed).



In that context, President Trump agreed to speak with President Petro on January 7 (2026), just four days after the U.S. assault on Caracas – a meeting the Colombian embassy had been pursuing and which, according to news reports, was facilitated by Sen. Rand Paul (R-Kentucky). Sen. Paul, who consistent with his libertarian political philosophy is staunchly opposed to U.S. foreign military interventions, had reportedly been upset about the U.S. bombings of the boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. Concern that the U.S. might take military action against Colombia increased when, on January 4, a reporter on Air Force One asked Trump whether Colombia would be next, after the attack on Caracas, and he responded that it “sounds good.” On that occasion, Trump described Petro as “a sick man who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States.”

The phone call on January 7, which reportedly lasted almost an hour, appeared to dissipate tensions and ended with an invitation by Trump to Petro to visit the White House. The White House visit on February 3, without press, lasted almost two hours. Afterwards, both sides said the meeting went very well. Trump described the meetings as “very good” and “terrific,” acknowledging that while beforehand they weren’t “exactly the best of friends,” they got along very well. Comments by both presidents suggested that the issues discussed included cooperation on fighting drug-trafficking, as well as possible Colombian help for the recovery of Venezuela’s oil and gas industry in northwest Venezuela, near Colombia.

B

Concerns about the 2026 Colombian Presidential elections

National and international observers are watching the Colombian presidential elections carefully. Since no candidate received more than 50% of the vote on **May 31**, a runoff will be held on June 21, 2026 between Ivan Cepeda, a Senator from President Petro's Pacto Historico party, and Aberlardo de la Espriella, an extreme right-wing candidate running as an outsider.

This election season has included the assassination last year of presidential candidate Miguel Uribe, and this May of Rogers Mauricio Devia Escobar, the campaign manager for presidential candidate Abelardo de la Espriella in the department of Meta.



Human rights defenders have raised concerns about the impact of political violence on citizens' ability to make it to the polls, and how lack of transparency in the election process may affect people's ability to have their votes fairly counted

Thousands sign a letter asking for international monitoring and transparency in the upcoming elections. A letter assembled by a group of former members of Colombia's Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, Council of State, and lawyers dedicated to supporting the integrity of the upcoming elections was signed by over **3,000** individuals and groups, including Colombian and international academics, human rights defenders, and legal experts concerned about the integrity of the elections.

The letter asks the National Registrar, Hernán Penagos Giraldo, to ensure transparency and fairness in the conduct of the elections. The use of new voting technologies, and previous failures of these technologies, included findings that in the 2022 Congressional elections 659,539 votes for the Senate and 271,883 votes for Congress were not properly counted until the incorrect totals were challenged. Additional concerns include that private companies, owned by non-Colombian corporations, exert control over the elections and could be manipulated.

Concerns about the U.S. and other countries intervening in the upcoming Colombian elections. In previous elections, the Thomas Greg voting machines were used in instances where the votes for some political parties were not recorded. A small Christian party was reported to have zero votes, when in fact a recount showed they had gained two Senate seats and one seat in the lower chamber. The same voting machines were reported to undercount votes for leftist parties. Investigations of missing votes led to estimates that the voting machines may have miscounted at least **5%** of the votes cast in the 2022 elections.



Hondurasgate:

The website Diario Red cited audio recordings dated March and April 2026, in which Juan Orlando Hernández, the former president of Honduras, and a convicted drug trafficker, is heard asking for funds to set up an office dedicated to misinformation to attack leftist leaders in Mexico, Colombia, and Honduras. Orlando Hernández was arrested and sentenced to 45 years in jail due to his role in trafficking 450 tons of cocaine to the United States, yet he was pardoned earlier this year by President Donald Trump, shocking even his Justice Department, which spent years pursuing this major drug trafficker.

The audio recordings led to statements by the presidents of Mexico and Colombia, Sheinbaum and Petro, who have been attacked by President Trump regarding drug trafficking in their respective countries. The recordings allege that Argentinian President Milei and unnamed U.S. Republican politicians were funding the effort to set up the misinformation campaign.

Colombian government responds to election threats:

Defense Minister Pedro Sánchez warned that misinformation was one of the greatest threats to the elections, and announced measures to ensure safe elections. The four areas of focus are increased security for the presidential candidates, security at voting locations, including sending members of the military to some regions of the country, electoral transparency, and strengthening cybersecurity. Rewards of 1 billion Colombian pesos (US\$274,000) were offered for information leading to the capture of anyone threatening violence against presidential candidates. 228,000 military members will be deployed to the regions most under threat, including 38 municipalities in 17 departments (out of 32 departments), (departments are similar to provinces), with 126,000 guarding voting centers.

In addition, the different parties appoint election “witnesses” and election “jurors” whose function is similar to that of poll watchers in the United States. The Pacto Histórico party deployed 3,000 lawyers nationwide, to oversee the elections. The results of the May 31 round of elections were accepted by the two top candidates, and most observers, including observers from the European Union, declared the elections “calm” and “transparent.” U.S. Presidents before Trump never endorsed candidates in other countries’ elections. On June 2, President Trump endorsed the extreme right-wing candidate.

2

DEFENDING THE DEFENDERS

Letter demanding action on growing violence in Cauca

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH CAUCA AND VALLE DEL CAUCA, DEMANDING GUARANTEES FOR LIFE AND PEACE

Bogotá, D.C., April 29, 2026. We, the social organizations, human rights defenders, and defenders of nature participating in the seminar-workshop: “Agreement on the Roadmap for Changing the Prevention and Protection Model,” held on April 28, 29, and 30 in the city of Bogotá, express our profound solidarity with the communities of the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca in light of the events of April 24 to 27, which left 21 people dead and more than 40 injured. This is in addition to what occurred during the same period in the rest of the country; these events constitute serious human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law, compounding the violence and social and armed conflict affecting other territories and their communities.

We categorically reject actions that threaten the life, integrity, and dignity of communities, as well as the work of leaders and their organizations to defend human and environmental rights in these territories.

We urge the Colombian State to immediately and effectively adopt all measures necessary to safeguard lives; guarantee protection for communities; prevent further human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law; and investigate and punish those responsible for what has occurred, in compliance with its constitutional and statutory obligations.

We express particular concern that these events are occurring in an electoral context, aggravating risks not only to democracy but also to social leaders, communities, and the civilian population in general. In this scenario, we demand urgent actions to guarantee the free and safe participation of those of us gathered in our territories, to prevent further violations.

We urge the government to strengthen preventive measures as a matter of principle, not merely as a consequence of further threats. In doing so, we call for dialogue, a political solution to the armed conflict, a multilateral ceasefire, and the establishment of humanitarian agreements that ensure the protection of life as a right, not a privilege.

We demand that the national government immediately designate a national body or authority tasked with making contacts and engaging in talks with the various armed groups, regardless of their political nature, funding, or whether they show a willingness to achieve peace, to adopt agreements and establish humanitarian corridors that safeguard the lives and safety of civilians and communities, as well as we urge the various armed groups to declare their willingness to immediately assume commitments and agreements to respect the basic norms of international humanitarian law, agreements on humanitarian routes and corridors, and the immunity of civilians, and to refrain from harming civilians during hostilities and the conduct of actions in the context of the armed conflict.

We demand that non-state armed actors in the territory show unqualified respect for the civilian population, for the life and safety of each individual, as well as for international humanitarian law; and commit to refraining from actions that harm communities. Likewise, we ask the Attorney General’s Office, in accordance with its constitutional mandate, to carry out investigative actions aimed at pursuing the corresponding prosecutions and sanctions against those responsible for these serious acts promptly, rigorously, and impartially, thereby guaranteeing the victims’ rights to truth, justice, and guarantees of non-repetition.

Life is a right, not a privilege!

3

STATUS OF THE PEACE PROCESSES

A

Excerpts and summary of Gustavo Duncan's prologue to the book "El fracaso de la paz total" ("The Failure of Total Peace"), by Eduardo Pizarro



*Editorial note: What follows is a summary of the prologue to Eduardo Pizarro's new book *El fracaso de la paz total*. Pizarro, a sociologist and political analyst, has summarized his family and political background noting, "I'm the son of a vice-admiral, brother of two assassinated guerrilla members; my sister was a member of the M-19 and my other brothers and I were communists."*

Gustavo Duncan is a professor at the Universidad EAFIT (Medellín), where he teaches history of the conflict and Colombian political context.

Duncan writes "...today, a few months before the end of Petro's government, the failure of the policy of total peace is undeniable."

Pizarro's latest book on war and peace in Colombia analyzes the peace policy of President Petro's government, and previous attempts to achieve peace. Pizarro emphasizes that, "the war is different after the signing of agreements signed in Havana," (the 2016 Peace Accords). One of his arguments is that the conflict has transitioned from insurgent and counterinsurgent forces, more typical of the Cold War, to a situation of violence among warlords and organized crime groups.

Pizarro cites the failure, by the current government and previous administrations, to properly handle mid-level commanders of the illegal armed groups. As he notes, these individuals "possess precise knowledge of the terrain... as well as of the mechanisms for recruiting new members, the arms trafficking networks, and the sources of financing—whether through coca cultivation or illegal mining." This situation led these groups to organize their own armed factions; moreover, in practice, they wield power and consequently influence key community decisions. What the author terms the "recycling of violence" appears to be a response to an authority other than the State.

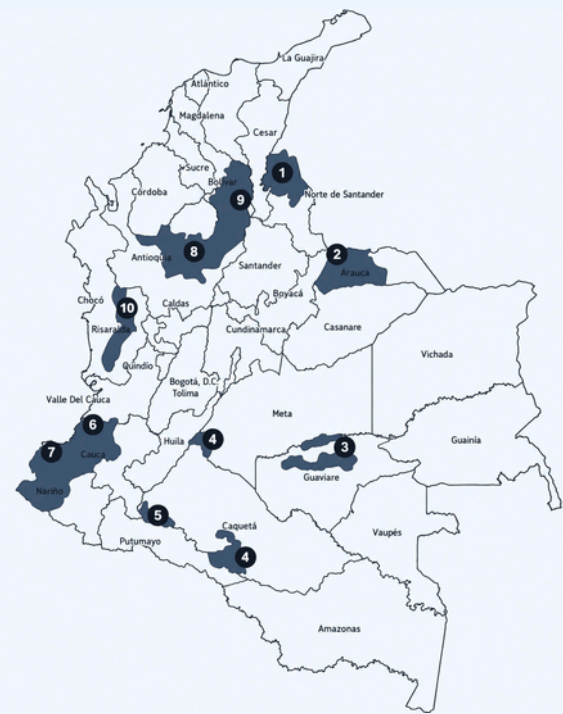
Pizarro outlines several proposals that have emerged to enhance the effectiveness of the public security forces to respond to the needs of rural communities—such as the creation of a Rural National Guard. This initiative, he argues, would enable the State to establish a more effective presence in these territories. He acknowledges progress made in areas such as troop strength, the provision of public services, and infrastructure. However, Duncan asserts that "The problem is not weakness, but rather dysfunctionality... the mechanisms for security, justice, and the economic development of excluded and marginalized communities are not functional. Meanwhile, armed groups... have developed highly effective institutional practices."

Furthermore, Duncan notes, in this “new war” while the State has military superiority, the irregular armed groups have superiority when it comes to surveillance of the population.

Duncan argues that if a peace process goes forward, then the State, to prevent renewed recycling of the violence, must place greater emphasis on the surveillance of certain territories. In particular, it is necessary that “the State learn to govern the population of peripheral territories.” Pizarro, despite being very critical of the “total peace” policy, highlights Colombia’s significant strides in terms of reducing lethal violence. In Duncan’s words: “The war continues, but with far fewer casualties. Colombia went from a homicide rate of 84 per 100,000 population in 1991 to a rate of 26 [per 100,000] in 2023.” He notes that the State has played a central role in this process.

Looking toward the future, Duncan notes: “These are peace negotiations—not merely in the sense of ending a war, but rather regarding the need to demobilize organizations that levy taxes, administer justice, and organize community life, all while renouncing uncontrollable levels of violence.” Referring to the major missteps of the Petro administration, Duncan points to “the President’s highly erratic conduct and the lackluster support he occasionally demonstrates toward the various negotiations.”

More constructive, according to Duncan, was Peace Commissioner Otty Patiño’s focus on advancing some of the negotiations to the point that the next administration, whoever may lead it, feels bound to continue the process. “Sufficient progress has indeed been made that it would be irresponsible not to continue.” The author of the prologue recommends the book “not only to readers interested in staying informed about the country’s political situation, but also to researchers specializing in the Colombian conflict, peacebuilding, and the strengthening of state institutions in the face of threats from armed groups.”



COLOMBIA’S CONFLICT ZONES

1. Norte de santander (Catatumbo)	6. Cauca (Cañón del Micay-norte)
2. Arauca (Sarare-Puerto Rondon)	7. Nariño(Pacífico nariñense)
3. Guaviare (Trocha ganadera-Rio Inirida)	8. Antioquia (Norte - Nordeste)
4. Caqueta (El pato balsillas- Bajo caguan)	9. Bolivar(Serrania san Lucas- Region sur)
5. Putumayo(Bajo putumayo)	10. Choco- (Atrato San Juan)

FIP,2026

4

ACTIONS TO SUPPORT PEACE AND JUSTICE IN COLOMBIA

A

Denouncing threats against public media and requesting urgent intervention

Letter addressed to the Attorney General of the Nation, Luz Adriana Camargo

Submitted by Colombia Human Rights Network, comprising the Colombia Human Rights Committee of Washington, D.C. and Colombia Grassroots Support of New Jersey

Some Facts:

On March 6, 2024, a journalist from Radio Televisión Nacional de Colombia (RTVC), the country's public media system, was assaulted in Plaza de Bolívar while performing his duties;

On May 15, 2024, a citizen threatened a contractor at the entrance to RTVC, stating his intent to "plant a bomb" and "shut them up";

In November 2024, inside a commercial airplane, a person directed harsh insults, accusations, and the same hate speech found on social media at RTVC manager Hollman Morris—who was accompanied by his son—accusing him of crimes he did not commit;

On May 17, 2025, RTVC Noticias journalist Sandra Chindoy was threatened on social media;

On Friday, April 10, 2026, at approximately 7:45 a.m., a violent and deliberate hate attack was carried out against RTVC's facilities located on Avenida Calle 26 in Bogotá. The attack was carried out by a man who, acting out of hatred, destroyed banners bearing the organization's institutional logos, values, and principles, as well as messages promoting peace, nonviolence, and the diversity that characterizes the members, communities, journalists, and audiences of the public media system.

We demand:

In light of the constitutional and statutory role of the Office of the Attorney General as the authority responsible for criminal investigation and prosecution, we respectfully request:

That the corresponding criminal investigations be initiated immediately to clarify the reported facts and identify those allegedly responsible.

That urgent protective measures be adopted in coordination with the competent authorities, in order to safeguard the lives and physical integrity of the workers, managers, and their families.

That an assessment be made as to whether the events described could constitute crimes such as threats, harassment, unlawful coercion, or other related offenses, in the Colombian legal system.

That respect for and protection of the exercise of freedom of the press and expression be guaranteed, as these are fundamental pillars of the rule of law.

NOTE: In April 2026 RTVC changed its name back to Inravisión, the original name of the public broadcasting system of Colombia from 1963 to 2004.

B Attack on Casa de la Mujer headquarters in Bogotá.

Letter addressed to the Attorney General of the Nation, Luz Adriana Camacho
Submitted by the Colombia Human Rights Network, comprising the Colombia Human Rights Committee (Washington, D.C.) and Colombia Grassroots Support (New Jersey).

Some Facts:

On the morning of May 11, 2026, the Casa de la Mujer headquarters was once again broken into. Unknown individuals forced their way in and stole recently purchased desktop computers, laptops, and three phones belonging to the organization. Additionally, they searched the physical files and went through drawers and workspaces where information regarding support for women and communities is stored.

This is not merely a theft. This new attack constitutes a direct assault on a feminist and human rights organization that for 44 years has worked tirelessly for the lives, dignity, and rights of women in Colombia, denouncing violence and defending democracy against any actor—private or public, legal or illegal. Attacking our headquarters is an attempt to sow fear, silence voices, and undermine collective processes built through decades of effort, commitment, and resistance.

We demand:

We demand that the authorities conduct a prompt, rigorous, and transparent investigation to identify and punish both the perpetrators and the masterminds behind these acts, as well as to recover the information stolen on both occasions, bearing in mind that the first theft occurred on February 16 of this year.

Finally, we ask to be kept informed of the actions taken within the scope of your authority.

Links to three recent reports on Human Rights in Colombia.

(1) Somos Defensores – April 14, 2026 , Annual Report for 2025:

Promesas Rotas/Broken Promises: 2025 brought some of the highest levels of internal displacement and confinements since 2013, and the worst year under President Petro.

Human rights organizations and the UN document the violence, and what failures led to the increase in violence. <https://somosdefensores.org/informe-anual-2025-i-promesas-rotas/>

(2) Amnesty International Colombia 2025 Report:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/colombia/report-colombia/>

(3) US State Department Colombia Report:

The U.S. State Department has not issued a report on Human Rights in Colombia since the report on 2024, issued in August 2025:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/colombia/report-colombia/>

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