

**STATEMENT BY THE COLOMBIAN RURAL WOMEN'S PLATFORM FOR POLICY ADVOCACY AND OXFAM  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT BY COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT JUAN MANUEL SANTOS  
TO THE UNITED STATES TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP**

As President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia visits the United States to meet with President Donald Trump, the Colombian Rural Women's Platform for Policy Advocacy and Oxfam urge the United States to continue supporting the efforts of the government of Colombia to achieve peace.

We value the economic and political contributions the United States has made to the peace process in Colombia, and we urge the United States to continue to actively support this peace process while taking into account the contributions and concerns of civil society.

We believe the peace accord reached between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is an opportunity to change the history of inequality and exclusion in Colombia's rural areas. Rural women in Colombia – small farmers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian women – have a vital role to play in implementation of the agreements. In the midst of conflict, under very adverse conditions, women have been building and advancing efforts to achieve peace at the local level, in their territories. And now, former combatants who are returning to civilian life will resettle in their communities and towns. Rural women will continue to play a fundamental role in building alternatives to achieve peace.

In the midst of hope generated by the adoption of a peace accord, we want to express serious concern over the increase in murders and attacks against community leaders, as well as over the failure to effectively implement certain agreements. In particular, there is a risk that the process of implementation fails to adopt the regulations needed to achieve progress toward solving the structural causes that gave rise to the armed conflict, particularly with regard to access to land and improved living conditions for rural populations.

Recognizing the importance of improving the situation in rural areas to achieve peace in Colombia, the first chapter of the peace accord between the government and the FARC focuses on comprehensive rural development, with access to land being a central aspect. Yet we are concerned that the initial draft of a proposed decree recently, circulated by Colombia's national government to address territorial planning, included repeal of Law 160 of 1994. This agrarian reform law, in effect for over two decades, was intended to facilitate the progressive access to land by small-scale farmers, enabling allocation of state land to agrarian reform beneficiaries and establishing measures to avoid land grabbing and further concentration in the distribution of land holdings.

The initial draft decree, which was revised following strong public criticism from diverse actors, also raises concerns because it reveals deficiencies in the process of implementation of key issues in the peace accord. Some processes for moving forward legislation to implement the peace accord have not enabled broad participation by rural communities, as drafts have not been shared with adequate time to enable an inclusive debate.

Rural women – small farmers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian women – have insisted on the importance of ensuring a gender focus when adopting regulations and advancing implementation of the peace accord, as women suffer the worst conditions of poverty, inequality and exclusion. It is thus essential to ensure the participation of women in debates and decision-making with regard to chapter 1

of the agreement on comprehensive rural reform and chapter 4 with regard to illicit crop substitution. Particularly in these areas, rural women have concrete proposals to contribute to peace building.

Also of serious concern is the increase in murders and threats against civil society leaders, which is becoming a significant obstacle to achieving peace in the country. According to a report by the alliance *Somos Defensores*, 87.5 percent of murders of civil society leaders in 2016 occurred in rural areas. The increase in murders of women defenders, particularly rural women who are defending their rights to territory and to a healthy environment, has been alarming. From the signing of the peace accord on December 1, 2016 until the end of April this year, 34 human rights defenders were murdered in Colombia; ten of them were women, seven of whom were from rural areas.

The murders and attacks against human rights defenders are alarming not only because they target those who are subject to special protections, but because they undermine efforts to rebuild the social fabric that is necessary to sustain peace and because they impede the ability to ensure protection of environmental and territorial rights.

We therefore urge the US government to continue to provide substantial financial assistance as well as political support for full and effective implementation of the peace accord in Colombia and, in particular, to support actions and strategies that:

- Protect the life and integrity of human rights defenders, especially in rural areas;
- Strengthen the participation and inclusion of rural women in setting priorities at the local level that recognize women's contribution to building peace in their territories;
- Ensure participation of civil society, and especially of rural women, in establishing regulations and furthering implementation of the peace accord, particularly with regard to comprehensive rural development and access to land, as well as to illicit crop substitution.

We believe the United States shares our hope for peace in Colombia. Strong and ongoing support from the US government, which takes our concerns into account, is essential to convert this hope into reality.