



The Participation and Inclusion of Women in the Implementation of the Colombian Peace Agreement

Thursday 20 September 2018, at 8.30am – 4pm, Engel Hall, Merikasarmi, Helsinki

It is widely acknowledged that women's inclusion in peace processes is an important factor in their success, and in the sustainability of a negotiated peace. Academic studies and reports on women's engagement in armed conflict and participation in peacebuilding have broadened the understanding of the role women play during the conflict – and the role they should play in peace negotiations, in implementation of peace accords, and in longer-term peace building.

Even though there is more recognition of the importance of women's participation, in practice resistance to it is still common and many obstacles remain ahead. The number of women in peace processes continues to be small, and often their influence is limited. Moreover, the focus on women's participation in peace processes has largely concentrated on the negotiation phase, and the (small) number of women that participate in formal negotiations. What is it that women can bring not only to the negotiation table but also to the implementation of a peace accord and to longer-term peacebuilding in a post-accord context – the challenges they face and possibilities they can open – has received less attention.

The Colombian peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas resulted in a peace accord signed in September 2016 that was historically inclusive. It is the most gender sensitive accord signed in the world to date. It is also the most inclusive, as it includes a recognition of different peacebuilding needs by age, race, sexuality, and other systems of inequalities, which it calls a 'differential approach'.

The negotiation process brought together many parts of society, including women from different ethnic and political backgrounds. Women's movements played a leading role in building a critical mass of support for the peace negotiations and were the most influential in the founding of the gender sub-commission that participated in the drafting of the accord. The accord was put to a popular vote in a referendum in October 2016 and very barely failed. This put the inclusive aspects of the peace process at risk, but in the renegotiation of the accord, the language on the gender and differential approaches became, in fact, clearer and more precise.

Peace negotiations continue, with the ELN, a smaller guerrilla group first in Ecuador and then in Cuba. The ELN signed their first ever ceasefire in September 2017 as part of these negotiations with the state. Women's organizations, and social movements more generally, continue to play a key role in these negotiations. The role of grass roots organizations in contributing to the agenda of the negotiations has been emphasized by the ELN. Negotiations have been broken but the process has continued and parties continue negotiating.

The renegotiated peace accord signed by the Government and the FARC is now in its implementation phase. The inclusivity that was achieved in the negotiations in Havana should be transferred to the implementation phase and be at the centre of longer-term peacebuilding. How can women and their voice continue to be included? How does gender justice continue to be part of the national agenda? What are the special concerns of the government and the FARC? What is the role of development agencies and other external actors in supporting the inclusion of women in this ongoing process?

The objectives of this seminar are to 1) deepen the understanding and lessons learnt of the inclusion of women in Colombian peace negotiations and the signing of a gender sensitive peace accord, and 2) explore the challenges and opportunities of inclusive approach in the implementation of the peace accord and long-term peacebuilding in Colombia.

The seminar is organised in co-operation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and it brings together experts, policy makers and civil society representatives.

