

# *A new hope for peace in Colombia*

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By María Josefina Arce

Colombia has taken a new step towards the much needed and longed-for peace. The government of President Gustavo Petro and the rebel National Liberation Army agreed in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, to reactivate the talks.

In November, in rotating venues and with Venezuela, Cuba and Norway as guarantors, the dialogue will be resumed, in which both parties agreed that the participation of society is essential, for which reason they committed themselves to seek the necessary mechanisms to make its presence effective.

There is a will to bring the process to a successful conclusion in order to make stability possible throughout the country, heal wounds and advance in the progress of every Colombian.

Since he became president last August, Petro had insisted on making this rapprochement with the National Liberation Army a reality. During his electoral campaign he had made it clear that the achievement of total peace would be a priority of his government.

And on that path he has worked to build mutual trust. Petro suspended arrest and extradition warrants against ELN negotiators, while the insurgent group released several detainees.

Let us recall that the dialogue with the ELN, promoted by the now former president Juan Manuel Santos, was broken by Iván Duque, his successor in the Casa de Nariño. Even Duque never during his term of office showed the least interest in implementing the peace agreement that had been reached in Havana in 2016 between the Santos government and the once guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army.

Duque's four years in office were marked by spiraling violence. Massacres and assassinations of social leaders, human rights defenders and former combatants became a daily occurrence in Colombia, despite the fact that the agreement reached in the Cuban capital contained the necessary mechanisms to prevent such criminal actions.

The Duque government never guaranteed the security of those who laid down their arms in compliance with the peace agreement. More than 300 former guerrillas were murdered in the last four years.

Other points of the agreement were not implemented, such as the Integral Rural Reform, of utmost importance if we take into account that Colombia is the most unequal country in Latin America in terms of access to land, and this was one of the triggers of the armed conflict, along with other inequities.

With Petro's arrival to the presidency, a new path has been opened towards the materialization of a real and complete peace, hindered by the previous government. Now there is hope for Colombia, which longs for peace with social justice.

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