

# HUMAN RIGHTS COMPASS

USAID HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM Bogotá, Colombia

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Opening ceremony of the 47th Extraordinary Period of Sessions, Medellín, Colombia. Photo: USAID HRP

## Advancing Human Rights at the IACHR's Extraordinary Period of Sessions in Medellín

Over 3,000 Latin American human rights defenders gathered in Medellín to participate in the USAID Human Rights program supported 47th Extraordinary Period of Sessions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) from March 18-19. To open this key human rights initiative, President Santos welcomed the Court to Colombia and reiterated his government's commitment to the forthcoming week's Session objectives. Public sessions were conducted to hear three contentious cases involving Ecuador, Bolivia and Chile.

Seventy human rights lawyers, students, representatives from civil society organizations, public officials also took part in the USAID supported inter-disciplinary two-week "International System of Human Rights: History, Current Debates, and Future Perspectives" training course. With 60 of the 70 participants from Colombia, lively debates took place, facilitating them to reflect and exchange opinions and ideas on the State's role and responsibilities as well as discussing the proposed reforms of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

In addition, a special two-day seminar entitled "The Inter-American System of Human Rights: Trends and Complementarities" culminated the Session period which ran from March 21-22. With opening remarks from IACHR Diego Garcia-Sayán, Minister of Justice Ruth Stella Correa, and USAID/Colombia Director of Democracy and Human Rights Office, Todd Sloan, the seminar included five panels covering: national and international

response to IACHR's jurisprudence, the role of the judicial process regarding human rights violations, victims and reparations in Colombia, special protection groups, and Inter-American System of Human Rights protection mechanisms.

At this final event, there was no shortage of high-level officials participating on panels lending their weight and experience on these very critical and current issues. These panelists included the Minister of Justice, Presidents of the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court, Attorney General, IACHR judges, and IACHR President and Vice President. These two very busy weeks in Medellín clearly marked human rights defenders' commitment to maximize the IACHR's presence by broadening the discussion on human rights law.

At the end of the week, IACHR President Diego Garcia Sayán reflected on the importance of IACHR's presence in Medellín sharing with HRP that "... [this event] brings the Court together with people who can see for themselves that the Court is a serious institution with judges that reason and deliberate with sound judgment and a sense of responsibility." These two weeks with the IACHR in Medellín undoubtedly provided Colombia with the unique opportunity to move a broader and diverse dialogue of human rights forward in Colombia. •

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# International Women's Week Mobilizes a Call to Action in Tumaco

Commemorating International Women's Day this year took on a very different meaning for the women and girls of Tumaco. As a major crossroads of armed forces' activity, sexual violence, domestic violence and forced recruitment of girls are all too often the stark realities lived by Tumaco women and girls. With little recourse and high levels of impunity and underreporting on these issues, March 8, International Women's Day, became the perfect platform for a call to action by Tumaco's women victims. With USAID HRP III support, Tumaco women's rights defenders transformed this special day into a weeklong series of workshops, events, and important meetings focused on strengthening institutional capacity and response to violence against women.

From March 4-7 visits, dialogues, and meetings with national and local level public officials and agencies were arranged to shed light on the severe issues and gaps regarding service provision to women victims. Sixty-five counterpart officials from local and national agencies worked through the opening sessions to assess, discuss, and identify challenges in institutional mechanisms.



Tatiana Olarte, Gender and Vulnerable Populations Expert with school girls at the Government Services Fair in Tumaco.  
Photo: Attorney General's Office

However the most powerful sessions of the week had to be the focal groups involving women organizations and victims themselves allowing first hand exchanges and input from beneficiaries to responders. Among those present were representatives from: the Presidential Program for Human Rights, Victims' Unit, Personeria, Attorney General's Office, Ombudsman's Office, Legal Medicine, National Protection Unit, ICBF, and the Presidential Advisor on Women's Equity Office. While 60 members of Social Policy Committee and the Transitional Justice Committee offered recommendations, agreements and commitments to improve local level prevention and response to GBV.

Victims made sure that these meetings were not left to just dialogue and reflection. Their championing resulted

in several commitments and agreements strengthening institutional coordination to improve response mechanisms such as assistance paths for protection of sexual violence victims and community leaders. Among them, the Attorney General's Office assigned a special female prosecutor to manage the Response and Investigation Center against Family Violence, which previously did not exist. Prior to this week, the intake of women victims' reports were conducted by a male officer, often posing a significant barrier to justice for many. Now, a female police officer has been selected who will be trained by the Attorney General's office to handle such cases.



Institutional and local counterparts meet on Day 1 of Women's Day  
Photo: USAID HRP Tumaco

Closing out the week, over 700 community members participated in the Government Services Fair showcasing available services for women on a range of topics including sexual violence, forced recruitment, and others highlighted throughout the week. This International Women's Day, Tumaco women and girls did not miss the opportunity to invite others to take a long hard look at the harsh realities they live day in and day out. Their empowered statement to change their community became a shared commitment for women's rights to be recognized, respected and enforced while setting an example for the many communities enduring similar injustices throughout Colombia. •

Mariela Meza Vallecilla- Afro-Colombian and Gender Coordinator, Tumaco Mayor's Office "This successful week was well organized and included the participation of agencies needed to help improve the services local institutions provide regarding GBV and efforts to promote women's rights. Commitments made during Women's Week have already materialized such as the female prosecutor dedicated to GBV cases and the Family Commissioner's Office's outreach initiatives with communities to raise awareness about the services they offer."

# Developing Collective Protection Measures for Afro-Colombian Communities

As of February 2013, the National Protection Unit (NPU) started addressing the precarious security situation the members of the prominent Afro-Colombian network, AFRODES face on a daily basis. With the support of the USAID Human Rights Program, the test piloting of a new collective risk assessment tool is well underway and represents a new and innovative strategy to address risks at the community level. The well documented targeting and violent acts committed against Afro-Colombian leaders and organizations by armed groups urged the NPU to re-examine risk assessment tools. While the NPU widely implements individual-based risk evaluation tools as required by the Colombian Constitution, communities and other groups such as AFRODES have continuously pushed for collective protection measures.



UNHCR's Andrés Celis and NPU members leading the pilot program in Buenaventura.  
Photo: Marino Cordoba, AFRODES.

By 2012 AFRODES strongly advocated the Colombian government to take action claiming that individual risks endured by their community leaders due to the nature of their work often affect the community. Further, as part of their culture, Afro-Colombians see themselves as individuals whom are members of communities, rather than simply individual citizens. Therefore, the impact security has on an individual also has collective repercussions. In addition, the Constitutional Court through Auto 266 of 2009 had similarly recognized the need for an evaluation tool to assess collective, group or community risks.

Gears were put in motion by early 2013. AFRODES, supported through a grant by HRP, was prepared to take a UNHCR and NPU-developed collective risk assessment tool to the communities and implement it firsthand. Six test pilots are being implemented in priority cities include Tumaco, Cartagena, Quibdó, Buenaventura, Cali, and Soacha. The test pilots run from February through

end of April and work directly with 180 leaders from AFRODES as well as NPU and UNHCR officials. These groups will contribute to refining the collective risk assessment tool by tailoring it to the Afro-Colombian context and communities as well as identifying information sources related to AFRODES.



AFRODES member participating in Buenaventura pilot program.  
Photo: Marino Cordoba, AFRODES

Concluding these rounds of pilots, AFRODES will host a special comprehensive meeting which will be held in Bogotá at the end of April. At this meeting, AFRODES representatives will come together with the NPU and UNHCR to compile and compare key findings across the regions. Based on this assessment, next steps will be identified and more importantly, contribute to the construction of collective risk assessment tools and protection measures.

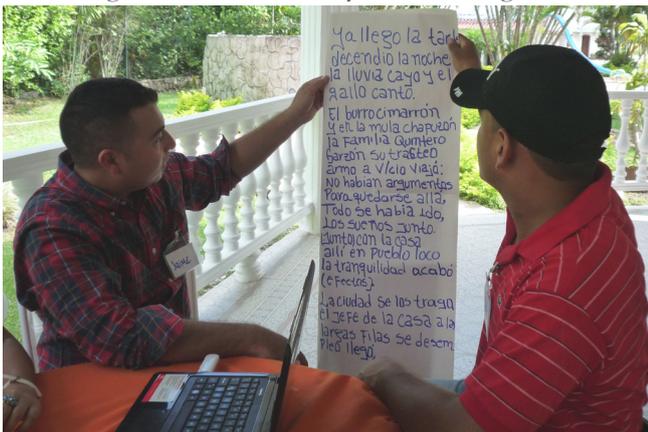
With this new initiative and collected information, NPU can move forward in officially adapting the original law that created the NPU which limited its scope to only providing individual protection measures. A reform of this law would allow the NPU to include procedures and the appropriate tools regarding collective protection measures.●

Marino Cordoba, Director of AFRODES affirmed, “the most important aspect of the pilots is the fact that the NPU is listening to the Afro-Colombian leaders, building trust between the community and the government through dialogue and coming up with proposals of collective protection together.”

## On the Air with Human Rights

"I was born in the Sierra. I live in the Sierra. I am nourished by the Sierra, and that doesn't mean I'm a guerilla nor a drug trafficker and much less an ignorant person. I deserve humane treatment and I'm just like you. I'm just like you (In chorus). We are all human rights defenders!" This script read by a young Wayuu indigenous member on a thirty-second radio spot is one of over 50 short radio messages and skits that will air on local, regional and some even on national airwaves across Colombia.

As products of four regional communications workshops supported by the USAID Human Rights Program, these radio spots were developed to tackle some of Colombia's most sensitive human rights issues over the airwaves. Freedom of expression, LGBT rights, violence against women and girls, land restitution, natural resources and conflict offer only a glimpse of the diverse selection of human rights issues covered by these messages.



Preparing a radio spot script in Meta  
Photo: Caracola

As part of a concerted effort to train radio media outlets on promoting and prioritizing human rights, local journalists, community radio staff, social organizations, and public institutions participated in these four workshops. The latest of these were held in Popayán and Tumaco in February where representatives from indigenous populations, youth and other local human rights organizations were included.

Training journalists and media outlets to effectively message human rights issues becomes a powerful advocacy tool to not only promote respect for human rights but also to better protect the dangerous work of human rights defenders. In this way, these radio spots gather collective voices and stories on human rights issues developed by human rights defender themselves to reach a public and populations who so often live in the shadows of fear and violence. •

## Safeguarding Journalists and Freedom of Press in Colombia

According to Fundación Para La Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), Colombia's leading NGO dedicated to promoting freedom of press and working on protection of journalists at-risk, Colombia is one of the most violent countries in the world for journalists. In 2012, FLIP reported 125 violations against 153 journalists including obstruction to their job, threats, illegal arrests, inhumane or degrading treatment and assaults. They also report that the departments facing the highest risk are Antioquia, Cauca, Santander, Valle and Sucre.

In light of this, FLIP with the support of the USAID HRP III organized a 3-day workshop in Bogotá on February 7 recognizing National Day of the Journalist. USAID Mission Director, Peter Natiello, opened the event underscoring the critical role journalists play in raising the profile on issues such as human rights, land restitution, and victims' rights in the current Colombian context. The 30 renowned Colombian journalists in attendance worked to improve journalists' coverage of human rights at the regional level. Parallel to this, the Victim's Unit announced strides made to establish a landmark collective reparation process acknowledging the gravity implicated with this line of work. In support of this, USAID HRP is working with the Victim's Unit to explore means to advance these efforts.



Peter Natiello (center), USAID Mission Director, at FLIP workshop opening, Bogotá  
Photo: FLIP

Betty Martinez, a reporter from La Guajira expressed the importance of this workshop in improving her coverage of human rights reporting, stating "...[it]helped us to learn how to protect information on our computers with practical recommendations and tools we weren't aware of. Also, it was a new wakeup call on how we were using language when taking notes on human rights and how to interview victims. It is necessary that these sorts of issues be worked on directly with regional level journalists." •