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HUMAN RIGHTS COMPASS

USAID HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

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Top left: USAID Mission Director, Peter Natiello, in panel discussion; Bottom left: Antioquia governor, Sergio Fajardo; Ituango mayor, Jaime Elías Montoya; and USAID Mission Director, Peter Natiello sign peace pact.

Right: Ituango human rights display
Photo Credits: USAID's HRP III

First Human Rights School Opens In Antioquia

While Antioquia is reportedly Colombia's most war-torn department, it is also one that is rising from its ashes with a stronger foundation rooted in a respect for human rights following a unique collaboration between USAID's HRP III and Antioquia's governor's office. On March 4, USAID senior officials including Mission Director Peter Natiello and HRP III Chief of Party Kelly Brooks joined Antioquia's governor Sergio Fajardo and partners from *Empresas Publicas de Medellín (EPM)*, *Fundación Universidad Católica del Norte*, and *Universidad Católica de Oriente* to officially announce the opening of Antioquia's first Human Rights and Civic Responsibility School at a ceremony in Ituango, Antioquia. As a municipality of Antioquia tainted by memories of the infamous massacre of El Aro in 1997 as well as a number of other gross human rights violations, Ituango community members participating in the event wholly embraced and upheld the symbolism of the School's inauguration with special affection and appreciation.

After almost two years of strategic planning, pedagogical meetings, curriculum development, and identification of partners for the School's sustainability, this first-of-its kind human rights school is now a reality. To welcome this new institution, the morning was filled with beautiful expressions from community members of hope, peace, and respect for human rights in the form of art, dance, poetry, and symbolic gestures of signing pacts for peace. Before hundreds of community members from Ituango including

students, indigenous communities, parents, teachers, *campesinos*, and public officials, Antioquia's governor Fajardo thanked USAID for its innovative thinking and commitment stating, "...today's celebration and public opening is the outcome of a collaboration of people who believe in dignity and human rights."

The School, which will operate in 19 municipalities throughout Antioquia, will implement HRP III-designed curricula, human rights-focused research, participatory-designed exercises, and virtual pedagogical tools to advance human rights and civic education for public officials and other stakeholders in the field of human rights. HRP III support not only provided for the design of the School, but also awarded a grant to educational institutional partner *Fundación Universitaria Católica del Norte* in November 2014 as part of the School's sustainable financial strategy. The Human Rights and Civic Responsibility School will train at least 250 public officials and community leaders on issues concerning civic and peace education to contribute to creating a society with greater awareness of human rights, ethics, and civic responsibilities as well as participation in democratic processes. It is hoped that in the coming years, the School will expand to other municipalities in Antioquia and serve as a model for other departments. •

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An International Hand in the Fight against Impunity



Left: Prioritization workshop with regional prosecutors Right: Workshop in Chocó with US Deputy District Attorney Teresa Santana
Photo Credit: USAID's HRP III

As Colombia takes an earnest look at designing a new chapter for its future in which a nearly six-decade conflict will be put to rest, Colombian leadership has been forced to take a hard look at its own gaps, challenges, and shortcomings to prepare for a post-conflict phase. With impunity rates as high as 98% for some of the most egregious violations, the areas of prosecution and investigation have unquestionably become a government top priority to be tackled head on. Over the past year and upon the Colombian Attorney General's Office's (AGO) request, USAID's HRP III joined its efforts in fighting impunity to bring justice to the millions of victims of human rights violations.

With the passing of Directive 001 in 2012, the AGO took swift decisions to make necessary internal changes with respect to addressing enormous backlogs and bottlenecks that have exacerbated impunity rates. The AGO instructed its national and regional prosecution offices to immediately develop and implement prioritization plans, or strategies and criteria, to map and aggregate cases by respective offices so as to advance cases more efficiently. HRP III expert consultants worked hand in hand with the AGO through workshops to reach this goal. To ease the implementation process, HRP III brought in international expertise to share experiences and perspectives of models that work.

US Deputy District Attorney for San Diego County in California, Teresa Santana, spent a week with AGO officials in Bogotá, Quibdó, Chocó, and Medellín, Antioquia. In that one week, Ms. Santana engaged and facilitated open and frank discussions with AGO prosecutors and technical staff. As those responsible for leading case prioritization, they were given the opportunity to ask questions and ruminate on proven prioritization techniques and methods that were explained to them in detail.

In Colombia, it is not uncommon for one prosecutor to have several hundred open cases at a time. An organizational shift in thinking and institutional culture is required to fully embrace new plans for efficient results. Prosecutors at the national and regional levels got a firsthand look at how American prosecutors delegate supervisory responsibilities,

implement mechanisms to divide workloads, and gained insight on the value placed by their American counterparts on tackling some of the hardest cases such as murder and organized crime. According to Ms. Santana, American prosecutors work in team settings where information sharing is encouraged and critical to advancing investigations towards trial. In contrast, as shared by participating prosecutors, a contributing factor to backlogs is the more individual-focused approach commonly used by Colombian prosecutors in handling and closing cases. Given their heavy caseloads, Colombian prosecutors also tend to take on the less complicated cases simply to meet target goals. The contrast in these sorts of nuances that emerged through the week's meetings fostered serious reflection regarding the implementation of prioritization plans.

The best practices and lessons learned presented shed valuable light particularly for the regional offices where the prevalence of organized crime and gender-based violence cases is high. The AGO's Deputy Director for public policy, Gina Carbacas Macia, lauded the HRP III-supported visit stating, "Ms. Santana's visit focused on an exchange of prosecutorial and investigation best practices as well as sharing innovative workload management techniques with Colombia's AGO. This visit supports the efforts that the AGO has invested to modernize itself in order to be at the regional vanguard on issues of criminal investigation, the fight against organized crime, and access to justice."

As Ms. Santana positively pointed out, Colombia's judicial system nonetheless has reached remarkable milestones in only ten years of working under this new penal accusatory system. In contrast, prosecutors in the United States continue to perfect their almost 300-year-old system. In developing these plans and preparing for yet another challenging dynamic of a post-conflict phase, Colombian prosecutors are moving in the right direction and with international support during such historically crucial times. •



Community march for women's rights in Quibdó, Chocó
Photo Credit: USAID's HRP III

Voices and Action to End Violence against Women in Colombia

Throughout the month of March, raised voices and banners resounded throughout Colombia rousing citizens to join in the fight to bring an end to violence against women. In commemoration of International Women's Day (March 8) and with USAID's HRP III support, Colombians filled the streets of their communities and participated in activities shedding light on a phenomenon which sharply cuts across political, social, cultural and economic lines. According to national figures, violence against women in Colombia has increased significantly in the past ten years, while equality for women remains ever elusive.

To this end, HRP III joined Colombian women leaders, mothers, sisters, and daughters in rallying a month filled with events that honored women and that underscored the long road ahead to ending violence and exclusion. HRP III's technical support and presence reached as far as the largely Afro-Colombian communities of Chocó to the heart of conflict-battered municipalities of Antioquia's Bajo Cauca region and well into Colombia's northern coastal department of La Guajira, to name a few. In the form of marches, artistic expressions, community pacts, forums, and other celebrations, women drove home empowering messages to continue their fight forward in demanding their rights.

On March 8 in Quibdó, Chocó, messages calling for the respect of women's rights were vibrantly expressed. Observers along the palm tree-lined main streets of Quibdó watched as throngs of women's rights supporters, including youth, marched with banners and posters advocating for everything from improved educational rights, workers' rights, justice, and peace for women and all Colombians. One banner read, "Women unite! To raise awareness for our rights!" While another exclaimed, "Let us be the voices for the voiceless." Similarly, supported by HRP III together with Quibdó's gender secretary and international partner Global Communities, a film festival was organized to promote women's rights and introduce prevention and response tools regarding gender-based violence to Quibdó's public.

In Antioquia's Bajo Cauca region and where HRP III's support has consistently maintained a focus on raising awareness of human rights, the second annual women's forum for the defense and liberty of women's rights was held in the community. Through cooperation with Caucasia's educational sector, the Family Commissary, *Asociación de Mujeres del Bajo Cauca Antioqueño* and USAID's Access to Justice program, information was disseminated on women's rights while engaging community participants in conversations addressing social and cultural norms surrounding women's roles in society. Video screenings on the history and significance of International Women's Day opened the day's event in which local women's groups, women victims and high school students participated in group discussions on women's rights issues. The event culminated with participants making personal and community-based commitments to reduce violence and address women's equality issues in Caucasia.

In Totoró, Cauca, an indigenous woman from the Totoró human rights defenders network was sincerely grateful to have participated in the municipality's event in which community members gathered to sign a 2015 declaration for the elimination of violence against women followed by a women's march. Regarding the community gesture of solidarity she stated, "I can only hope that these types of events become regular and institutionalized in the future... Today, we learned from the *personero* that five women from our community reported sexual assaults since the beginning of the year. This is a concern for all of us."

The wide variety and number of initiatives undertaken during March gave an extra push to what women's rights advocates carry forward yearlong. Although gaps and challenges continue to exist for women's equality in Colombia, the community voices and spirits raised throughout the month ensured that this is a fight where women's rights and issues will not continue to be silenced or brushed aside. They proved indeed that in Colombia, there is a voice for the voiceless. •



HRP III regional advisor, Sandra Pinzón, speaks at Chaparral, Tolima workshop on post-conflict issues.
Photo Credit: USAID's HRP III

Communities Preparing for Peace

Over the course of the past two and a half years, the peace dialogues taking place in Havana, Cuba have moved Colombians closer to a future where conflict with the FARC no longer exists. While this suspended moment in history has conjured a wide variety of emotions and reflections on what peace would look like for Colombia's more than 48 million citizens, what is certain is that transitioning out of a nearly six-decade conflict marred by violence will not come easy. Moreover, just as conflict dynamics have transformed so much over the decades, so have the geographical shifts of violence diversified and caused a profound impact throughout the regions.

Given an overall weak State presence particularly in areas impacted by the conflict, regional and local governments stand at greater risk of recurrent violence or instability. The key transitional justice concepts of truth, justice, and reparations have provided the parameters of the peace talk goals; however, translating those into willingness and concrete actions will require resources, technical capacities, and participation of all stakeholders.

In a forward-thinking approach, USAID's HRP III, along with civil society organizations and local leadership, spurred initiatives to bring the notion of preparing for peace to the forefront of Colombian consciousness starting at the community level. To this end, HRP III supported the Antioquia governor's office initiative *Preparémonos para la Paz* in meeting with conflict-impacted communities to broach issues surrounding an imminent post-conflict phase including measuring institutional capacity; building historical memory, truth and reconciliation; developing a culture of democracy; ensuring economic and environmental sustainability; clearing anti-personnel mines; and reintegrating ex-combatants, among others. These efforts resulted in the participatory development of 38 peacebuilding proposals for targeted communities.

According to reflections made by the director of *Preparémonos para la Paz*, Iván Marulanda, with regard to his vision on preparing for peace in Antioquia, he shares, "Peace-

building in Antioquia is about learning to live differently- without violence. It means coexisting with respect for differences and it requires eliminating violence in our everyday life: in schools, in soccer, in homes, at parties, from conversations, in businesses, and in politics. The peace accords will bring an end to political violence in Colombia; the guerrillas will leave their weapons behind and reintegrate into communities while contributing to society. We are convinced that peace will be developed in the regions, in the communities, and in the heart of its people."

The department of Meta has also been a target of HRP III efforts to strengthen institutional capacities in making preparations for peace. With HRP III support to Meta's peace, human rights and victims' secretary office, departmental public policies on human rights and guidelines for an agenda mindful of a post-conflict phase were developed. HRP III has also lent its technical expertise throughout its priority regions fostering multiple forums and dialogue among key stakeholders, including citizens and public officials in several areas including municipalities of Tolima. Following these advocacy efforts, Tolima's government is re-establishing the department's Peace Council which has been defunct for 20 years.

Similarly, looking ahead this year, HRP III has teamed up with a leading Afro-Colombian advocacy NGO *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* to empower their voices and ensure that Afro-Colombian leaders are on the same page with regard to participating at the Havana peace dialogues later this year. As one of the most underrepresented and disproportionately affected communities, HRP III's collaborative work will ensure that Afro-Colombian communities make the most of this unique and historic opportunity to present their perspectives regarding foreseen challenges in a post-conflict phase. Community consultations will take place to develop a clear and focused agenda to be presented at the Havana peace dialogues. With every day closer to a real prospect for peace, the real work of peace building has only begun. •