



Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

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Internal displacement and peacebuilding in Colombia

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The advances in laws related to IDPs have not addressed the relationship between internal displacement and peacebuilding in Colombia.

A seminar held in Bogotá in November 2008 brought together representatives of the Colombian government, IDP associations, civil society organisations, donors, UN agencies and academic researchers to explore the relationship between Colombia's protracted IDP situation and transitional justice processes currently underway. It was organised by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Some of the themes which emerged in the discussions were:

Displacement and peacebuilding are connected. Sustainable peace in Colombia cannot be achieved unless and until the displacement of some three million displaced Colombians is brought to an end. Yet ending displacement depends on establishing peace and security in the country. Peacebuilding – even while people are still being displaced – is both a challenge and a necessity.

IDPs need to participate in the processes which affect their lives. Participants stressed the importance of developing and implementing mechanisms to ensure the involvement of IDPs not only in transitional justice and peacebuilding but also in decisions about humanitarian assistance and durable solutions. There are over 100 national associations of IDPs, of various kinds, but participants stressed the fact that these associations still face difficulties. For example, IDP associations are often urban-based while much of the displacement occurs in rural areas. The importance of securing the representation of women, both in

IDP associations and in consultative mechanisms, is particularly important yet remains a challenge. Additionally, a large number of IDP associations receive constant threats and several of their leaders have been murdered.

IDPs have been among the main victims of the conflict in Colombia and this should be recognised. It has often been very difficult for civilians to maintain their neutrality in a conflict where armed actors on all sides have systematically been urging them to participate in the hostilities. While IDPs are certainly not the only victims of the conflict, they have specific needs related to their loss of property, livelihoods and communities.

Relations between IDPs and other victims' groups have sometimes been strained. The longer displacement continues, the more conflict there will be between different victims' groups and the more conflict there will be over the amount of reparations. The sheer number of displaced people – between three and four million – also represents a significant technical challenge to developing a viable reparations system which is able to include IDPs.

Land is central both to achieving sustainable peace and to ending displacement but is a complicated issue in Colombia, given the intense concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few and the wide variety of relationships of people to the land. There have long been disputes over land in Colombia but the conflicts themselves are changing the patterns of land usage and productivity.



Finding durable solutions for IDPs is the most urgent (and most difficult) task facing the Colombian government. There is no consensus on what the durable solution should be and while most IDPs would like to return, many seem to have given up hope of doing so. Conditions in the countryside, particularly the lack of security, make large-scale returns impossible at the present time.

Progress on transitional justice both affects and is affected by durable solutions for IDPs. Yet, policies toward IDPs and for transitional justice are being implemented on parallel tracks. In some cases, IDPs are competing with other victims for attention. There is also resentment at the imbalance between resources available to perpetrators of crimes and to IDPs as victims. At the same time, there is fear that de-mobilised paramilitaries are joining new armed groups which in turn can displace people.

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The Embera people of northern Colombia suffer a very high rate of forced displacement that threatens their social and familial unity.