

## [VIDEO TRANSCRIPT] Insights from Colombia: The UN Verification Mission and Efforts to Protect Civilians

**Julie Gregory:** Stimson's Protecting Civilians and Human Security Program is carrying out research on how the full range of UN peace operations can help advance the protection of civilians around the world. And so we chose Colombia as one of our case studies because the UN Verification Mission has been widely held up as a success story.

**Elias Yousif:** Colombia's peace process is quite unique. The conflict there was one of the longest running in the world. But in 2016, there was an agreement between the FARC guerrilla movement and the government.

**Julie Gregory:** The UN Verification Mission is mandated to support the government's efforts to implement the 2016 peace agreement, which really focuses on reintegrating former combatants into society and making sure that civilians are safe and secure in their daily lives. That is primarily a civilian-led mission.

The whole reason we wanted to be on the ground in Colombia was that so we could meet face-to-face with a variety of different actors that included UN mission personnel, UN agencies, government officials.

We also met with a variety of different civil society actors, including former combatants, Indigenous community leaders, and Afro-Colombians who are widely marginalized across the country.

**Elias Yousif:** Visiting a place like Buenaventura where there is certain active conflict going on can be very challenging, but what surprised me in this context was how rich daily life still was. It spoke to the dichotomy between the very real security threats that civilians face, but also the continuation of daily life.

**Julie Gregory:** Hearing what were quite often personal, sometimes traumatic, stories of how women are being impacted by the gang violence in Buenaventura really gave us an insight in a very personal way to what daily life is like for these people. This is not an academic exercise. These people live through these hardships every day.

**Elias Yousif:** One of the moments that really struck me and reminded me why we do this kind of work was an interview we had with a former combatant. I think it's very easy to be callous about former guerrilla fighters, especially as a Colombian who grew up with certain narratives about the conflict, but listening to his story and the reason he has been so committed to the peace process, both for himself, for his children, for the community as well, and the way in which it has been healing for him, I think paralleled the way that it's healing for the country as well.

There was a lot of unanimity on the positive role that the Mission has had generally including in the protection space. At the moment, we are experiencing a surge in violence and in many ways deteriorating security situations. If these are especially good circumstances for a UN mission and you're still facing the practical challenges that they're facing, it really speaks to the broader global barriers to achieving or succeeding in these sorts of missions.

**Julie Gregory:** It's also important that the UN Security Council and the larger international community consider how UN peace operations, who don't already have this in their mandate, can still do work that's supporting the overall goal of not only international peace and security, but the safety of civilians who are trapped in conflict.