

# Reflections on the Security Council visit to Colombia

## **Briefing by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Security Council visit to Colombia**

Thank you very much, Mr President. Let me continue where you left off with Day Two of the visit to the Security Council.

So on the 13th of July, the Council traveled to Caldono in Cauca, an area just been highly affected by conflict over the last five or more decades. Our first meeting there was with community leaders from Caldono and the surrounding region. Those leaders represented diverse stakeholders, including local indigenous authorities and civil guards, women's groups, Afro-Colombian groups, human rights defenders, cooperatives of rural workers and the Church. These stakeholders expressed their concerns regarding several challenges which were hindering their work: a lack of channel for democratic participation at the local level; slow pace of implementation of the transitional justice and crop substitution aspects of the peace agreement; polarization of the national political discourse; and killings and threats against community leaders and human rights defenders. And on this last point, I'd like to note with concern that one woman community leader decided not to attend the meeting with the Security Council due to threats that she had received the night before. And I think all of us would hope that no further threats are made against her or against her colleagues who were able to attend the meeting with us.

This meeting was an important opportunity for Council members to hear firsthand from those whose daily work focuses on building peace at the local level in Colombia. The discussion with them brought to life many of the challenges outlined in the Secretary-General's report. We commend their ongoing commitment to their work.

From Caldona, the Council travelled to the Santa Rosa territorial area for training and reincorporation, where we met government representatives, including Foreign Minister Holmes Trujillo, who we see here today, and Presidential Adviser Archilla, local authorities and ex-combatant residents. We also toured a productive project where ex-combatants and community members were growing tree tomatoes for sale in local and external markets. And we heard about other such projects. In meeting, our open meeting, the government representatives outlined the efforts the government has been taking to roll out the development plan with a territorial focus in Cauca in concert with local indigenous authorities. We also heard about government-led reintegration programmes in the surrounding area.

Regional and local government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to peace. Local indigenous authorities called on the national government to

accelerate implementation of the peace agreement and expressed their concern about the killings of community leaders and overall insecurity in the region. FARC leaders and former combatants called for the consolidation of peace, the acceleration of implementation of the peace agreement and increased efforts to ensure political reintegration – especially ahead of local elections in October – alongside an increased state presence in areas previously occupied by the FARC-EP, where other illegal armed groups now threatened to increase their activity.

The visit to the tree tomato productive project allowed the Council to see how agriculture plays a central role in the reintegration of former combatants and to hear from them about their collective efforts and commitment to reintegrate into civilian life. The former combatants were proud of the results their project has shown over the six months since it began and were now looking to expand past the local market and sell directly to national and international supermarkets and distribution channels. Members of the Security Council showed their appreciation for the quality of the tree tomato product in their personal consumption, and without wishing to name names, I would simply suggest to those stakeholders that if they are looking for an external export market, they might start with Russia. This visit to the field was an important complement to our day in Bogota, and we are grateful to the verification mission, the government, the FARC, the former combatants, the community leaders and all other stakeholders who were involved in the organisation of the visit and the discussions we held. And we welcome very much the commitment of all whom we met to building and sustaining peace in Colombia.

Thank you, Mr President.

**Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Security Council visit to Colombia**

Thank you, Mr President and for the second time today, welcome.

We have just spoken in the previous session about our visit, but I think it was truly invaluable for all of us to see for ourselves the situation. And I believe, we have all returned with stronger understanding as a result. And lastly, may I thank Carlos Ruiz Massieu for his briefing to the Council and through him to his colleagues on the ground and all the hard work they are doing.

We share the Secretary-General's report's assessment that now is a critical moment for the peace process in Colombia, because almost three years on Mr President, the Colombian Peace Accords continue to set a positive example to the rest of the world. And in that light, we welcome the commitment of President Duque and his government to the peace process, which he reaffirmed, and members of his government reaffirmed, repeatedly during the Security Council's visit last week. We particularly welcomed President Duque's request in consultation with FARC members that the Security Council should extend the United Nations Verification Mission's mandate by one year. We look forward to

giving this request due consideration with our Council colleagues in the coming months.

We are pleased to see that the Truth Commission, the Commission for the Disappeared, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace have all started their work. And we also welcome the government's efforts to clearly set out a plan for ending threats and attacks against community leaders, social leaders and human rights defenders.

So Mr President, we will continue to work with the Colombian Government as it builds on these successes to ensure a lasting peace in the country. And we see three key areas of focus for this work:

First, it is clearly crucial that rural reform efforts be accelerated as this is one of the interlocking sets of commitments of the Peace Agreement. This goes hand in hand with rural development. The Government has drawn up many promising plans for development over the past year and has approved a number of projects. But the Government itself says that the time has now come for concrete action. And while we recognize the significant political hurdles the Government faces, we fully support President Duque's efforts to build consensus. We hope that progress on the Development Plans with a Territorial Focus, land ownership and registration processes, and crop substitution initiatives can help Colombia build confidence in its commitment to peace. Now, we know it will not happen overnight, but we know too, that the government is committed to results soon, which we think is essential for the ongoing peace process implementation.

Secondly, the Colombian government should give full political and financial support to the institutions which work for peace. We welcome the signing of the law governing the Special Jurisdiction for Peace as well as the beginning of work by the Commissions for Truth and the Disappeared. I think it's fair to say, Mr President, we had an inspiring meeting with representatives of those three bodies. They face a huge task, but they are hugely impressive people. But to inspire confidence among the Colombian people, these institutions must be well resourced and given public support by the Government.

Thirdly, the intimidation and killing of social leaders, community leaders, and human rights defenders continues to damage confidence in the perceived commitment of the government to the Peace Agreement. Now, I think we all recognise the difficulties and complexities after our visit in particular seen situation on the ground. But we believe the Colombian government must continue its efforts to enforce the rule of law in rural areas, to prevent attacks against community leaders, and bring those responsible to justice. In many regions of Colombia, insecurity is increasing the risk that citizens might lose faith in the state's ability to provide safety. The risk is not only to this, but to future peace processes.

Let me take this opportunity again to commend our SRSG and the Verification Mission for their valuable work, where they have a crucial role in supporting the government in its work to build a lasting and sustaining peace. And again, let me welcome the Government's plans, activities, commitment, and

achievements to date.

Mr President, we said many times on our visit how important it is that there is an inclusive Colombian peace process supported by all sections of Colombian society. The Colombian peace process is a bright spot on this Council's agenda and a shining example to the world. And I thank all Colombians for their determination to ensure a sustained peace.

Thank you, Mr President