

Killing continues in Colombia as FARC disarms

By Carlota Duran
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After 52 years, the oldest world's guerrilla group has laid down its arms. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos last week signed an amnesty covering 3,252 members of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the last of three such decrees covering a total of 6,005 guerrillas. Another 1,400, many of whom are in prison, are being sent before judges to secure amnesty.

The decrees follow the appearance by Santos, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission for Colombia, Jean Arnault, and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño, also known as Timochenko, at a ceremonial surrender of weapons in Mesetas, Colombia on June 27.

At the event, the UN inspectors verified a container filled with rifles as a symbolic act, leading to a collection and counting of all FARC weapons.

"Rodrigo Londoño, 'Timochenko'," shouted to the guerrillas at the Mesetas Camp: "Goodbye, weapons! Goodbye, war!"

The guerrillas have moved to temporary demobilization camps, established also as "Gun Drop Zones," where they have been slowly handing over their guns, reaching 7,132 according to the latest report. For security reasons some weapons will remain in the camps until August 1, but for the most part, the UN inspectors said, disarmament is essentially complete.

According to media reports, the collected weapons are being packed for shipment out of Colombia and, in some cases, will be melted down and used to build monuments.

President Juan Manuel Santos said in an interview on July 1, 2017: "The disarmament of the members of the FARC registered in the country zones is complete. The recovery of weapons in the hideouts is underway. We

hope that the United Nations, supported by the police, will have an inventory of these weapons on the first of September."

However, two weeks after the widely publicized event in Mesetas, the United Nations Mission accused Colombia's government of "undermining the country's peace process by failing to release imprisoned FARC members and protect disarmed guerrillas as promised in a peace deal with the country's oldest and largest rebel group."

In a press release, the UN Mission said the government should "act responsibly and swiftly to put an end to a situation that weakens peace building." The statement continued: "The detention of members of the FARC-EP in prisons six months after the congressional approval of the Amnesty Law and two weeks after the disarmament of individuals undermines the reintegration process and the consolidation of peace."

In fact, more than 1,400 imprisoned FARC members went on hunger strike, claiming their freedom as promised in the peace deal signed on November 24, 2016 and ratified by Congress in an amnesty law a few days later.

In addition, the Santos government has failed to send in troops to take control of territory abandoned by the FARC, creating insecurity and leading to the assassination of more than 50 social leaders, six demobilized FARC rebels and nine family members of former guerrillas.

As the UN noted "the insecurity of FARC members in the demobilization zones, illustrated by the cases of threats and assassination against them and their family members" weakens the prospects of peace in Colombia. Santos, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the deal with the FARC, has been criticized for failing to comply with the peace agreement.

The unfolding of this process threatens to escalate the violence on the part of already dangerous and violent right-wing paramilitary gangs like the “Urabeños,” “Rastrojos,” “Aguilas Negras” and others, as well as the so-called “Bacrim” (Bandas Criminales—Criminal Gangs) or Colombia’s organized crime, which are ready to move into the vacuum left by the FARC’s demobilization. In many cases, this involves seizing territory where the FARC collected “taxes” from farmers cultivating coca and drug traffickers, with the right-wing paramilitaries intending to do the same.

According to the World Bank data, Colombia is the most unequal country in Latin America after Guatemala.

“In Colombia, the top 10 percent of the richest people earn at least four times more than the bottom 40 percent,” according to the bank. “Additionally, 77.6 percent of land in the country is owned by only 13.7 percent of the country’s inhabitants.”

From their origins in 1964, the FARC made agrarian reform the very core of its political program. It embraced the conceptions of peasant-based revolution propounded by Maoism and Castroism, even as Colombia was becoming an increasingly urban society, with today less than a fifth of the population left in the agricultural sector.

While the peace deal signed between the guerrilla movement and the government includes an agrarian reform provision, the measures envisioned will do nothing to resolve the historic problem of latifundia and the grinding oppression of the peasants and rural poor. Under the control of the Santos government, the so-called “reform” will be used to open up large areas formerly contested by the FARC to exploitation by foreign mining companies and agribusiness.

The FARC has begun the process of transforming itself into a political party in alliance with the Stalinist Colombia Communist Party (Partido Comunista Colombiano-PCC).

The PCC and the FARC announced earlier this month that they would seek to create a political alliance ahead of the country’s 2018 elections. The decision was revealed at the opening of the 22nd Congress of the PCC, which was attended by several FARC members. One of the leaders of the PCC declared: “The PCC and the FARC are “all anxious for the development ... of the new party or political movement.”

There are precedents in Colombia for such a development. The M-19 (19th of April Movement) Castroite guerrilla group disarmed itself at the end of the 1980s, with its members receiving small business loans from the government and its leaders becoming bourgeois politicians, one of whom, Gustavo Petro, is the current mayor of Bogota.

The FARC itself sought to turn to bourgeois politics in the 1980s, integrating itself into a political party known as Union Patriótica (UP). While the party enjoyed some initial success it was subjected to a ruthless campaign of assassinations, with some 3,000 of its candidates and campaign workers killed by right-wing paramilitaries operating with the support of the military.

Since then, the FARC has seen its numbers decimated and has suffered a considerable loss in popularity with its activities associated more in the mind of the public with the drug trade, kidnappings and extortion than any revolutionary agenda.

While its disarming appears to signal an end to the role played by the FARC in the 52-year-long civil war that claimed the lives of over 265,000 Colombians and displaced some 6 million more, there is no reason to believe that the peace deal will end the endemic violence, the majority of which has always been the work of the army and the paramilitary right.

Meanwhile, the FARC and the PCC will field a party that will serve as a “left” cover for the Santos government as it prepares intensified attacks on the living conditions of the Colombian workers. Facing continued weak oil prices and under pressure from Wall Street investors for further “adjustments,” Finance Minister Mauricio Cardenas has vowed to slash \$1.65 billion from next year’s budget.

In the final analysis, the peace deal will do nothing to lessen intense social inequality, endemic state repression, lack of democracy and rampant corruption in a country that constitutes one of the closest allies of the US imperialism in Latin America.

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