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SUPPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (OHCHR) COLOMBIA

USAID supports the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) efforts to contribute towards peacebuilding and improving the situation of human rights in Colombia. Since December 2010, USAID has provided support in implementing the following strategic actions:

- 1. Monitoring the human rights situation in outlying regions.** Observation and analysis of the human rights situation in the regions allows OHCHR to provide evidence-based advice to government institutions so they can adjust human rights policies, as necessary, and take effective actions.
- 2. Supporting prioritized communities.** OHCHR identifies, addresses and monitors the specific human rights needs of groups disproportionately affected by the conflict or violence due to their ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, geographic location or other reason.
- 3. Promoting social dialogue.** In preparation for peace building, OHCHR promotes dialogue among social sectors and communities, government institutions and businesses.
- 4. Providing technical assistance to institutions and businesses.** OHCHR assists public institutions (including indigenous authorities) and private companies with integrating human rights standards into public policies, decision-making processes and business models.

Support is also provided for five thematic areas: i) Protection of human rights in situations of armed conflict, violence and peace building; ii) Access to justice and the fight against impunity; iii) Economic, social and cultural rights, with a focus on ethnic-territorial rights; iv) Enabling democratic space; and v) Equity, non-discrimination and respect for differences.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The program is national in scale, including support for the OHCHR Bogotá office, as well as regional field offices in Bucaramanga, Cali, Medellín, Neiva, Pasto, Villavicencio, Barranquilla and Quibdó. In preparation for peace, OHCHR is planning to expand coverage to areas critically affected by violence, including Tumaco, Buenaventura, Apartadó, Mocoa, Florencia, San Jose del Guaviare, Cucuta and Monteria.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Prosecuting intellectual authors of extrajudicial executions. The program has successfully supported the Attorney General's Office (AGO) in developing case evidence to prosecute intellectual authors of extrajudicial executions. Through a secure information system, OHCHR collected evidence, identified patterns and geographically mapped over 3,000 killings. This has contributed to an increase in the number of high-ranking officials being investigated, improvement in case evidence, and more effective management of the AGO's workload by accumulating cases with common patterns. It has also contributed to fulfilling the right to truth and justice of victims of extrajudicial execution and forced disappearance.
- Human rights violations investigated by civil justice. OHCHR supported the AGO's Unit of Human Rights to successfully challenge, through a *Tutela* writ, the judicial ruling that transferred cases of extrajudicial executions from civil courts to military courts. This was the first time that human rights prosecutors undertook such a strategic litigation effort and achieved a change in the judicial precedent stating that cases of human rights violations must be handled by the civil justice system. This precedent prevented new cases from being transferred to the military justice system, and set a basis for the constitutional review of the Military Jurisdiction Reform passed in Congress.
- USAID signs agreement to support the Attorney General's Office. Given the high-quality, results-oriented support provided through the OHCHR to the AGO, USAID/Colombia signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing an institutional relationship with the AGO to support efforts in other areas like electoral fraud and state capture, gender-based violence, prioritization strategies and transitional justice.
- Improving protection for human rights defenders and land claimants. OHCHR bridged the gap between the AGO and human rights platforms to create strategies for improved protection of human rights defenders. Also, OHCHR provided technical assistance to the AGO in designing an investigation strategy to prioritize cases of attacks on human rights defenders and land restitution claimants. Violence affecting indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, and land restitution claimants will be prioritized. With 34 defenders killed and 250 threatened in 2015 alone, human rights groups expect that serious investigations will not only target criminal structures and intellectual authors of homicides and threats, but will also prevent new cases from occurring.
- Promoting social dialogue in conflict-prone regions. OHCHR facilitated dialogue between government institutions and local communities in agrarian and indigenous protests and strikes in conflict-affected regions of Cauca, Catatumbo and Bajo Cauca. OHCHR also advised government institutions on legal human rights standards about the use of force in addressing social tensions.

OHCHR also promotes dialogue among indigenous communities, government institutions and mining companies in southern Cordoba and Bajo Cauca Antioqueño. This support includes integration of human rights responsibilities into business operation manuals.