

The EU takes further steps in favour of peace in Colombia

On the occasion of **EU-CELAC Summit** taking place on 10 and 11 June in Brussels, the EU has re-iterated its strong political support to the Havana peace talks initiated in October 2012 between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The EU is committed to support the implementation of a future peace agreement. It is working towards the establishment of an **EU Trust Fund** in support of the Colombian post-conflict phase, which can be operational by the start of the implementation of the agreement. The Trust Fund will pool financial contributions from the European budget, EU Member States, and possibly also other donors.

In the meantime, High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini announced that the EU will devote EUR 5 million to support the work of the Ministry for Post-Conflict, Security and Human Rights as well as the implementation of the agreement on joint demining concluded last March between the Colombian government and the FARC, a milestone in the ongoing Havana negotiations.

The EU will further strengthen its long-term support to help alleviate suffering and poverty in the regions most affected by the internal conflict. In the margins of the EU-CELAC Summit, Commissioner Mimica announced a new EUR 21 million programme that aims to support Colombia in overcoming the social and economic disadvantage of marginalised and conflict-affected regions. The programme will support local sustainable development in remote areas where there is little or no state presence. It is expected to foster income generation opportunities for almost 2,000 peasant families and improved livelihoods for around 3,000 indigenous and Afro-Colombian families living in protected natural areas of the Amazon and the Pacific and Caribbean coastal regions, which are affected by social and environmental conflicts.

The EU has a unique experience on which it can build to continue accompanying Colombia in its efforts to shape a more peaceful, just and inclusive society. As the end of the internal conflict is becoming a realistic perspective, the EU will continue to stand by Colombia as it takes up this challenge.

Background:

All these initiatives build upon two decades of EU engagement in Colombia in support of peace. In 50 years of conflict, it is estimated that over 220,000 Colombians have lost their lives and millions have been forcibly displaced. The conflict has also caused multiple human rights violations such as abductions, forced disappearances, sexual violence, torture and forced recruitment of child soldiers.

Colombia is the world's second most mine-affected country after Afghanistan, and landmines have killed or injured more than 11,000 people over the past 15 years. Landmine contamination prevents local communities from living a normal life such as reaching schools, healthcare or the local market. Helping clear landmines in some of the most affected regions is a way to make the benefits for peace more tangible to the Colombian people;

Since its creation in 1994, the EU's Humanitarian Office ECHO has been providing humanitarian assistance to the conflict's many victims, in particular internally displaced persons, communities affected by violence and Colombian refugees in neighbouring countries, primarily Ecuador and Venezuela. ECHO works in partnership with non-governmental organisations, Red Cross and UN Agencies operating in conflict areas – most of which with little or no effective presence of the Colombian State. EU humanitarian funding to the conflict's victims since 1994 amounts to more than EUR 200 million.

The EU has also sought to address the root causes of the internal conflict and foster reconciliation and peacebuilding in the rural communities most affected by the conflict. Peacebuilding has been the backbone of the EU's cooperation with Colombia under the Development Cooperation Instrument over the last decade, with EUR 150 million allocated in the period 2002-2013.

In 2002 the EU started promoting the so-called 'Peace Laboratories', a novel approach based on local development initiatives with the participation of all relevant actors that aims at creating livelihood opportunities as alternatives to illegal activities. First tested in a region in the centre of the country, the peace laboratories were later extended throughout the territory, building on the lessons from the first experiences. More than 200 municipalities and 300,000 persons have already benefitted directly from these initiatives. The Peace Laboratories are now widely recognised as one of the key early stage contributions to reduce the intensity of the conflict and are viewed by the Colombian institutions in charge of preparing the post-conflict phase as a point of reference. In the coming years, the EU will consolidate these achievements and widen their geographical scope.

Support to the victims of the conflict is another area where the EU has been active. Land restitution and the return of displaced persons to their land are and will remain among the most complex challenges in the peace process. The EU has been supporting efforts to implement the 2012 landmark law on victims and land restitution.

A key dimension of the EU's approach to peacebuilding in Colombia is the central role given to civil society in project implementation, especially in those areas where the State is too weak to provide basic services to citizens. Civil society is also a central actor in the EU-sponsored initiatives strengthening the protection of human rights in Colombia. The EU is supporting projects related to the situation of women in the internal conflict, the forced recruitment of children by armed groups, the threats and challenges faced by human rights defenders or the specific needs of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.