



The armed conflict in Colombia's peripheral areas: a human rights perspective

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Abstract: The armed conflict in Colombia requires community-based responses as well as context-specific, intersectional and state-supported strategies to effectively protect human rights in marginalized territories.

The [armed conflict](#) in Colombia emerged in 1964 as a social and political phenomenon that has [affected](#) many people through the years, especially in the peripheral, rural areas of the country where vulnerable communities are located. Using an intersectional approach, it is worth examining how gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status interact to deepen inequalities and shape experiences of the armed conflict. From a critical political economy perspective, it is also worth exploring the role of capitalism and patriarchy as structural drivers of violence.

Colombia's armed conflict constitutes a persistent situation within the broader [Latin American context](#). However, particular attention should be paid to the country's peripheral regions where the intensity of the conflict has escalated [since 2025](#). These areas are characterised by high levels of poverty and significant structural inequalities between urban centres and rural peripheries. Notably, the limited presence of the state and the near absence of institutional connectivity have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities.

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Within this context, numerous communities are subjected to various forms of abuse which remain largely unaddressed by the Colombian government, reflecting its limited capacity to effectively respond to complex social challenges. Vulnerable groups—including economically marginalised people, peasant communities, and Afro-descendant and Indigenous [women](#)—are disproportionately affected by the dynamics of the armed conflict in Colombia. Many reside in isolated peripheral zones with restricted access to essential public services, such as potable water systems. In particular, their economic, social and cultural rights are affected, because of the internal armed conflict and the absence of state institutions in these territories, which has created conditions for the expansion of illegal armed groups.

Such a situation reflects the urgent need to reinforce the protection and respect of human rights in contexts of armed conflict, also developing a critical perspective on the role of existing normative frameworks in responding to Colombia's current political emergency. In particular, there is a need to explore further how international, regional and national frameworks enshrining human rights can function as transformative tools when informed by gender-sensitive and political economy perspectives. These approaches are essential for foregrounding the conditions faced by poor, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant women in Colombia's peripheral zones, while also emphasising the analytical value of intersectionality as a comprehensive framework to understand differentiated impacts.

From a critical political economy standpoint, capitalism offers a compelling lens through which to analyse the **structural dynamics** underpinning the armed conflict in Colombia. In fact, entrenched inequalities and capitalist dynamics have [contributed](#) to the persistence and intensification of the conflict. In particular, systems of economic exploitation and accumulation have [intersected](#) with gendered forms of violence, thereby disproportionately affecting women—especially those from Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Within this problematic framework, it becomes difficult to conceptualise human rights protection independently from broader political struggles against patriarchy and capitalist structures; both function as systemic drivers of inequality and rights violations.

Maintaining a critical perspective is essential for ensuring the effective protection and promotion of peoples' human rights in the peripheral zones that remain mostly affected by the dynamic of the armed conflict in Colombia. In particular, **intersectionality** emerges as a central analytical tool for better understanding and supporting the affected communities. Territorial settings possess their own internal logics and social dynamics, which must be taken into account in any meaningful intervention. In the context of the Colombian conflict, intersectionality reframes the discussion by demonstrating how overlapping identities—such as poverty, ethnicity, and gender—compound the impact of human rights violations and mental health challenges. Moreover, intersectionality sheds light on the

cultural and subjective dimensions of harm, revealing how structural violence continuously shapes individual and collective experiences.

Recognising this complex panorama allows for a more nuanced understanding of how human rights can be realised and operationalised in practice. It also raises questions about the **adequacy of national normative frameworks** in addressing the lived realities of affected communities, particularly Indigenous and Afro-descendant women. In particular, through Law 51 of 1981, Colombia ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in February 2019 presented its ninth periodic [report](#); the CEDAW Committee expressed the country's progress in relation to the 2016 [Final Agreement](#) for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace; however, it [addressed](#) 'an alarming increase in the number of threats, acts of violence and murders of women who are social leaders, human rights advocates, members of the most vulnerable groups (i.e., indigenous, Afro-Colombian and LGBTI communities)'; it also underscored the judicial branch's restricted operational capacity, especially in rural zones, and the high degree of impunity in cases of femicide and sexual violence.

In addition, the [findings](#) on Colombia published in 2025 by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) highlight a lack of access to primary health care and persisted differences between rural and urban areas in the access to the health system, with high rates of mental health problems in Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, peasant and conflict-affected communities. These aspects require effective reforms to avoid discrimination and secure more investment in health services for Indigenous people and Afro-Colombians.

It must be also noticed that the armed conflict has generated a forced displacement of affected communities to escape from related violence and poverty. In 2004, in the [case T-025](#), the Constitutional Court of Colombia acknowledged the disproportionate impact of violations stemming from the conflict on displaced persons, declaring an unconstitutional state of affairs in this regard. Until 2020 the Court issued orders in follow-up cases, analysing the intersectional barriers affecting different groups within the displaced population, who, because of their identities, suffer a disproportionate harm in comparison to the general displaced population: for instance, women, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Colombians, persons with disabilities, children, and human rights defenders. However, the implementation of these orders has been severely lacking, and today there is an [unconstitutional state of affairs](#) in Colombia.

Despite these challenges, [alternative forms](#) of response have emerged at the community level in Colombia. In many cases, affected groups have taken [proactive roles](#) in addressing the consequences of the armed conflict by developing strategies aimed at protecting their cultural integrity and mental well-being. These forms of resistance often involve grassroots organization, civil society participation, and community-based political engagement. Central to

these efforts is the capacity to articulate collective demands and to build alliances that advance a shared objective: the defence and protection of human rights.

Finally, a key challenge lies in strengthening the affected communities' capacity to advocate for their rights. This requires fostering intercultural dialogue and adopting protection frameworks that are responsive to the [specific needs](#) of these communities in peripheral areas. Accordingly, their human rights must be considered within their socio-political contexts to fully grasp their implications, as interpretations may vary significantly depending on analytical [perspectives](#) and situated [experiences](#). In this difficult process, the state plays a crucial and irreplaceable role; its active engagement is necessary to ensure sustainable and equitable solutions in Colombia.