

3. Peace negotiations in America

- In America there were six negotiations during 2023, 13% of the world total.
- Peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the ELN continued amid significant obstacles, but with notable results, such as a ceasefire agreement and the ELN's commitment to put an end to kidnappings for ransom.
- For the first time in a peace process in Colombia, a woman was named the head of the government's negotiating delegation, with Vera Grabe leading the negotiations with the ELN.
- Alongside the direct talks between the governments of Venezuela and the United States, Caracas and the Unitary Platform reached two important agreements in Barbados in mid-October, facilitated by Norway.
- In Haiti, CARICOM led negotiations between the government and opposition political and social organisations to try to forge a more inclusive transition, organise new elections and address the political and security crisis.
- The presidents of Venezuela and Guyana met directly at the request of CARICOM, CELAC and the government of Brazil to address the escalation of the historical territorial dispute over the Essequibo region.

This chapter provides an analysis of the main peace processes and negotiations in America in 2023, both the general characteristics and trends of the negotiations and the development of each case on both continents throughout the year, including references to the gender, peace and security agenda. In addition, at the beginning of the chapter there is a map identifying the countries in America that hosted peace negotiations during 2023.

Table 3.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in America in 2023

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
Colombia (ELN)	Government, ELN	Guarantor countries (Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Norway, Mexico and Chile); permanent supporters (Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Colombia, Episcopal Conference of Colombia); supporting countries (Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain)
Colombia (EMC)	Government, Estado Mayor Central (EMC)	Permanent supporters (Episcopal Conference of Colombia, World Council of Churches, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Colombia, OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia), guarantor countries (Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Venezuela)
Colombia (FARC)	Government, Comunes	UN Verification Mission in Colombia, International Verification Component (Technical Secretariat of the Notables, University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute)
Haiti	Government, social and political opposition	CARICOM Eminent Persons Group
Venezuela	Government, social and political opposition	Norway, Russia, the Netherlands
Venezuela – Guyana	Venezuela, Guyana	CELAC, CARICOM, Brazil, United Nations, Cuba

3.1 Negotiations in 2023: regional trends

There were six negotiating processes in America in 2023, two more than in the previous year, as a peace process began with the armed group Estado Mayor Central (EMC) in Colombia and talks started between the governments of Venezuela and Guyana. These two new processes joined the four that were already active in 2022. Colombia thus became the scene of three

parallel negotiations, one with the ELN, another related to the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the extinct armed group FARC-EP and the new negotiations with EMC, an armed group that splintered off from the FARC-EP. In Venezuela, talks with the country's political and social opposition were joined by the dialogue initiated with the government of Guyana following the crisis triggered by a referendum on the annexation of the disputed region of Essequibo. Finally, the negotiating process between

Map 3.1. Peace negotiations in America in 2023



■ Countries with peace processes and negotiations in America in 2023

the interim Haitian government and different political parties and social organisations in the country remained active. As such, the peace processes in the Americas represented 13% of all negotiations worldwide.

The **actors** participating in the different peace processes included the **governments** of all the respective countries as one of the negotiating parties involved. Only two peace processes involved the participation of active **armed groups**, the ELN and EMC, both in Colombia. In the talks with EMC, the government's negotiating delegation was headed by Camilo González Posso and the EMC delegation was led by Óscar Ojeda, who replaced the initially appointed Andrey Avendaño. In the process to implement the 2016 Colombian peace agreement, the Colombian government negotiated with the political party Comunes, which emerged from the transformation of the armed group FARC-EP. Two of the negotiations took place between governments and the **political and social opposition**. In Haiti, the negotiations took place between the interim government headed by Ariel Henry and political and social opposition groups in a context of maximum institutional fragility, as no elections have been held in the country since 2016, there are no senators or members of the National Assembly in office, there is no still president since the assassination of Jovenel Moïse in July 2021

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and the terms of office of the prime minister, the interim government and many local authorities have expired. In Venezuela, talks between the government and the opposition that began in 2021 continued. Finally, there were also negotiations between the governments of Venezuela and Guyana to respond to the crisis produced by Venezuela's attempted annexation of the disputed region of Essequibo, administered by Guyana.

Third parties were involved in all the negotiations that took place in the Americas, providing support, facilitation, mediation and other roles. All the negotiations in the Americas were supported by more than one external actor to bring the parties closer together. Most of the actors were international. They sought to achieve rapprochement between the parties and encouraged attempts at dialogue to transform the conflicts in question. This participation came both from governments (Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Norway, Mexico, Chile, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Ireland, Russia and the Netherlands) and from international and regional organisations (the UN, OAS, CELAC and CARICOM). Some of these governments and organisations were involved in more than one process. The most active actors were the governments of Norway (involved in three processes: Colombia (ELN), Colombia (EMC) and Venezuela), Cuba and Brazil (involved in

the negotiations with the ELN and the talks between Venezuela and Guyana), Venezuela (participating in the negotiations with both the ELN and EMC) and the United Nations (which played different roles in the peace process with the ELN, the implementation of the 2016 Colombian peace agreement, the negotiating process with EMC and the talks between Venezuela and Guyana). Third-party involvement took place in different formats, such as by coordinating as guarantor countries (Colombia (ELN) and Colombia (EMC)), supporting countries (Colombia (ELN)), permanent supporting countries (Colombia (EMC)), an international verification component (Colombia (FARC)) and an CARICOM Eminent Persons Group (Haiti).

The **negotiating agendas** were varied, reflecting both the specific characteristics of each process and the type of actors and specific demands of each. In the cases of Colombia (FARC and ELN), the agendas had a continuous nature. The process with the FARC was focused on implementation of all the stipulations included in the 2016 peace agreement and the different rounds of negotiations with the ELN concentrated on the aspects agreed upon in the agenda established in 2022, including the central points of a ceasefire and civil society involvement. These issues were also decisive in separate negotiations with the other active armed group, EMC, which included environmental issues in their negotiating agenda. Such issues have gradually been incorporated into peacebuilding agendas in Colombia. The ceasefire agreements were central to the negotiating processes with both the ELN and EMC. These agreements then led to the establishment of mechanisms to verify compliance. The negotiating processes aimed at resolving internal political crises in Haiti and Venezuela were linked to their respective transitions and notably to elections, considered key to the advancement of said political transitions, as well as to mechanisms and procedures on which the parties had to reach an agreement. The talks between Venezuela and Guyana were focused on establishing confidence-building, communicating and easing tension to address the territorial dispute between both countries after Venezuela held a referendum on annexing the Essequibo region, which is under the sovereignty and administration of Guyana and claimed by Venezuela.

The negotiating processes progressed unevenly in the different scenarios and several of them went through moments of enormous difficulty in terms of their continuity. However, they were all still active at the end of the year despite the obstacles. Though they all remained active at the end of 2023 in Colombia and important progress had been made, major crises broke out during the course of the year that put the previous progress at risk. The negotiating process with the ELN

Third parties were involved in all the negotiations that took place in America, providing support, facilitation, mediation and other roles

Women were involved in most negotiating processes in America and even held positions of leadership

underwent its most trying moment in October as a result of the kidnapping of the father of international football player Luis Díaz, which threatened to derail the process. However, his release redirected the talks and by the end of the year important agreements had been reached in a climate favoured by the ceasefire in force since August. The process with EMC also faced major problems that were also overcome. Although the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC progressed more slowly than expected, mechanisms paralysed during the administration of President Iván Duque were reactivated and new institutions were created to implement the agreement, such as the Final Agreement Implementation Unit. The Haitian negotiating process underwent significant difficulties, as the parties maintained their distant positions. However, there were some attempts to improve mutual understanding, such as the appointment of an CARICOM Eminent Persons Group to try to facilitate dialogue between the government and the opposition. Some progress was made in Venezuela, but the negotiating process experienced several incidences of significant tension and disagreement between the parties. The greatest progress took place with the signing of the Partial Agreement on the Promotion of Political Rights and Electoral Guarantees for All in Barbados in October, though the primary elections held by the opposition shortly thereafter sparked a major crisis. At the end of the year, an exchange of prisoners between Venezuela and the United States promoted rapprochement between them and had the potential to facilitate the implementation of the Barbados agreement. Finally, the talks between Venezuela and Guyana de-escalated the crisis and the bellicose rhetoric and the parties agreed to continue the dialogue.

Challenges remained in consolidating women's participation in peace negotiations as part of the **women, peace and security agenda**, although women were involved in most negotiating processes in the Americas and even held positions of leadership. However, the greatest challenge was in forming negotiating agendas with a gender focus and in including issues linked to the rights of women and the LGBTIQ+ population, as well as the demands of women's organisations. Several women played a significant role in different peace processes. In the negotiations between the government of Colombia and the ELN, a woman was appointed the chief negotiator of a delegation for the first time when Vera Grabe became the head of the government's team. The negotiating delegations of both parties were practically equal, with seven women out of a total of 15 negotiators in the government's team and three out of eight in the ELN's team. Also significant was the appointment of Senator Mirlande Manigat as president of the High Transition Council of Haiti,

tasked with promoting national dialogue and advising the prime minister on promoting and managing the transition in the country. Women were also represented and participated in both parties' delegations in the negotiations between the government of Colombia and EMC. In the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement between Colombia and the FARC, the Special Women's Instance for the for the Implementation of the Gender Based Approach remained active, which was defined by the agreement itself. Some references to the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda established by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 were included in the ceasefire agreement with EMC and the United Nations continued to promote its implementation in both Colombia and Haiti with the active involvement of women's organisations. The participation of LGBTIQ+ organisations was also noted in efforts to involve civil society in the negotiations with the ELN and references were made to the inclusion of diversity in the agreement with EMC.

Finally, alongside the negotiating processes analysed in this chapter, the Colombian government took different approaches to armed groups linked to drug trafficking and paramilitary activity as part of the Total Peace policy, a public peacebuilding policy involving all active armed actors in the country. These groups included the Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, the Conquering Self-Defence Forces of the Sierra Nevada, the Shottas and Spartanos in Buenaventura, the Combos of Medellín and the Aburrá Valley and the Mexicanos, Locos Yam and RPS-Cartel del Norte in Quibdó.

3.2 Case study analysis

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

Haiti	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and social opposition
Third parties	CARICOM Eminent Persons Group
Relevant agreements	--
Summary:	
In recent years, especially after former President Jean Bertrand Aristide left the country in February 2004 and the subsequent deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH), there have been several attempts at consultation and dialogue between various political and social sectors to cope with the institutional fragility, political-social polarisation and economic and security crisis facing the country. Yet none of these initiatives, most of which agreements or have led to permanent or stable spaces or mechanisms for negotiation. Though President Jovenel Moïse's mandate has been controversial since its inception after he was accused of electoral fraud in the 2015 election, his attempts to create a national dialogue in 2019 came in response to the deepening crisis in mid-2018 and the outbreak of protests and episodes of violence in 2019.	

As part of a serious institutional and security crisis, **CARICOM led negotiations between the interim government of Ariel Henry and a series of political parties and civil society organisations to try to forge a more inclusive transition, organise new elections and deal with the growing deterioration of the security situation.**

According to the United Nations, criminal gangs controlled approximately 80% of the capital (and the remaining 20% potentially suffered from their activity) and the number of homicides doubled compared to last year. In addition, the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a multinational security support mission (MSS) led by Kenya and renewed the mandate of the BINUH and strengthened its capabilities. At the institutional level, no elections have been held in Haiti since 2016, there are no senators or members of the National Assembly in office, there is no president since the assassination of Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 and the terms of office of the prime minister, the interim government and many of the local authorities have ended. Faced with this situation, in the first few months of the year, the interim government of Ariel Henry tried to deploy the National Consensus for an Inclusive Transition and Transparent Elections, known as the 21 December Agreement, signed on 21 December 2022 by the government and dozens of political parties and social groups. However, this agreement did not include many other political groups and civil society organisations critical of the government.

In an attempt to begin implementing the aforementioned agreement, the High Transition Council (CST) was created in January. Presided over by senator and former First Lady Mirlande Manigat, who represents the political parties, and including one civil society representative and another representative of the private sector, the High Transition Council aims to advise the prime minister on managing the transition, organising new elections and reforming the Constitution. However, **given the government's unsuccessful attempts to establish a dialogue with groups that had not signed the 21 December Agreement, in mid-June the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) organised a meeting in Kingston (Jamaica) with the main Haitian political and social actors, including Ariel Henry and his government, but not the CST, as well as representatives of the international community.** At this meeting, several actions were discussed to reach an agreement to allow new elections to be held, like the expansion of the CST, the formation of a national unity government, the establishment of a new provisional electoral council and the promulgation of constitutional reform. However, the starting positions between the different actors were very distant. While some groups viewed the resignation of the prime minister and his government and the creation of a transitional government as urgent and necessary, Ariel Henry made it clear in Kingston that he was willing to listen to and talk with the opposition, but had no intention of signing a new agreement to replace the one of 21 December. The United Nations announced its support for the 21 December Agreement and said that

it should be the basis for any negotiations to resolve the country's crisis.

Despite the lack of agreements at the Kingston summit, Henry was committed to continuing dialogue in Haiti in the following months. CARICOM appointed an Eminent Persons Group (EPG, composed of the former prime ministers of Jamaica, Bruce Golding; the Bahamas, Perry Christie; and Saint Lucia, Kenneth Anthony, to try to facilitate talks between the groups that did and did not sign the 21 December Agreement. Along these lines, in early July, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken visited Haiti a few days apart, urging the main political parties and social groups to make concessions to restore democratic institutions in the country given the serious crisis gripping it. Shortly thereafter, in mid-July, the CARICOM EPG facilitated the first meeting in Haiti. No agreements were reached, but some progress was made in the composition, framework and agenda of the negotiations. In the second half of the year, **between July and December, the EPG travelled to Haiti several times and facilitated five rounds of negotiations.** In September, the EPG publicly warned that the negotiating parties' tone and positions had hardened. For example, those who signed the Montana Agreement, which was signed on 30 August 2021 by nearly a thousand political and social organisations, demanded the immediate resignation of Henry and his government in 2023 as a condition to continue participating in the negotiations, while the party of Claude Joseph, the former prime minister and former acting president following the assassination of Moïse, and one of Henry's main political rivals, declared that he was pulling out of the national dialogue and joining the social protests demanding Henry's resignation. Shortly thereafter, the president of the CST, Mirlande Manigat, warned about the lack of progress in the implementation of the 21 December Agreement and in the negotiations between the government and the opposition on organising new elections. Despite all this, after a visit to the country in mid-December to facilitate the fifth round of negotiations between the parties, the EPG released a statement that was more positive and hopeful regarding the talks.

Gender, peace and security

Senator Mirlande Manigat was appointed president of the High Transition Council (CST), a body provided for in the 21 December Agreement, which came into operation in early February 2023. According to the interim government, this structure aims to promote the national dialogue in the search for a consensus on the main lines of action for the transition period, particularly in matters of public security, the Constitution and elections, economic reforms, justice and the rule of law and social and food security. A law professor and former presidential candidate in 2010 (she won in the first round and lost in the second to

Michel Martelly) and leader of the Rally of Progressive National Democrats (RDNP), Manigat has occasionally been critical of Henry's government. Although the CST did not participate in the Kingston summit organised by CARICOM in June, it did play an important role in the negotiations that took place in Haiti in the second half of the year.

According to the United Nations Secretary-General's report on BINUH released in October, efforts were first made to launch a national action plan to implement Resolution 1325 (2000) in 2023 with the establishment of peace and mediation committees in the departments of Ouest, Centre and Artibonite. BINUH and UN Women engaged women's organisations and networks to enhance peacebuilding and mediation efforts and to boost participation in public policy development to reduce community violence. In July, UN Women held 12 consultative meetings on reducing community violence in the departments of Ouest, Artibonite and Centre, which were attended by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Rights, political leaders and women's organisations. During the meetings, the participants agreed to establish three networks of women mediators and peacebuilders.

South America

Colombia (ELN)	
Negotiating actors	Government, ELN
Third parties	Guarantor countries (Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Norway, Mexico and Chile); permanent supporters (Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Colombia, Episcopal Conference of Colombia); supporting countries (Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain)
Relevant agreements	"Heaven's Door" Agreement (1988)

Summary:

Since the ELN emerged in 1964, various negotiating processes have tried to bring peace to the country. The first negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN date from 1991 (Caracas and Tlaxcala). In 1998, both parties signed a peace agreement in Madrid that envisaged holding a national convention. That same year, the "Puerta del Cielo" agreement between the ELN and civil society activists was signed in Mainz, Germany, focused on humanitarian aspects. In 1999, the Colombian government and the ELN resumed meetings in Cuba, which ended in June 2000. The government of Álvaro Uribe resumed peace negotiations with the ELN in Cuba between 2005 and 2007, though no results were achieved. At the end of 2012, the ELN showed its willingness to open new negotiations with President Juan Manuel Santos, appointing a negotiating commission, and exploratory meetings were held. Formal peace negotiations began in 2017, which broke off in 2019 after a serious attack by the ELN in Bogotá. In 2022, after the appointment of Gustavo Petro as president, dialogue with the ELN was restarted.

Peace negotiations took place between the government of Colombia and the armed group ELN throughout 2023. The negotiations were held in five cycles of talks, which followed the first that took place in Caracas between November and December 2022, with which the negotiations officially started and several initial commitments were made. The second cycle took place between 13 February and 10 March in Mexico. There, the parties agreed on a six-point agenda: the participation of civil society in peacebuilding; democracy for peace; transformations for peace; victims; an end to the armed conflict; and a general plan for implementing the agreements, revalidating the agenda agreed upon during the negotiations with the Santos administration. The most notable thing about the second cycle was that the parties agreed to analyse the country's "economic model". This was an important new development compared to previous peace negotiations, in which economic issues had been a red line for the Colombian state. Under the heading of democracy for peace, the parties also agreed to address the situation of people detained during social protests. The third cycle took place in Havana (Cuba) between 2 May and 19 June, when several important agreements were made. Firstly, the parties agreed to establish a National Participation Committee made up of 30 organisations whose work was to begin in July and defined by the parties as "the heart" of the process, since the issue of society's participation had always formed part of the guerrilla group's top demands. Secondly, **a bilateral ceasefire was agreed for a period of six months that began on 3 August**. A Monitoring and Verification Mechanism was also established, made up of delegates from the Episcopal Conference and members of the Public Force and the guerrilla group. Its spokesperson is the United Nations Mission. The verification mechanism was to be in force until 29 January 2024. After the ceasefire agreement, a series of protocols were defined for its implementation.

In August, the fourth cycle of negotiations was held in Venezuela, the first after the ceasefire began, which dealt with issues related to the establishment of a political framework that would allow for humanitarian actions linked to the ceasefire, as well as the creation of humanitarian zones in areas affected by the armed conflict. Thus, it was agreed to establish two "critical zones", as they are called in the agreement, in Bajo Calima and San Juan, with not only humanitarian actions but also socioeconomic ones. In addition, an agreement was reached on the situation of ELN prisoners, as well as the continuation of the design of the civil society participation process, with five committees in charge of preparing 25 regional peace processes. After the fourth cycle, in October, a negotiating session was held in Colombia for the first time, at the headquarters of the UN Verification Mission in Bogota, with the 19

Major progress was made in the negotiations between Colombia and the ELN, such as the ceasefire and the ELN's commitment to put an end to kidnappings

delegates participating. The meeting was focused on monitoring aspects of the negotiations, such as the National Participation Committee, the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism of the ceasefire and others. However, the peace process underwent a serious crisis in October when the ELN kidnapped the parents of international football player Luis Díaz. His mother was released a few hours later, but his father was kidnapped for 12 days, raising tension in the negotiations. However, the release of Luis Manuel Díaz in November allowed the negotiations in Mexico to resume in their fifth cycle, leading to several agreements, such as one ending kidnappings for extortion (retention for economic purposes, according to the ELN) and another on continuing work to create the conditions to prolong the ceasefire. Another enormously important development was the formation of eight critical zones (parts of the country affected by violence and subject to specific actions defined by the parties), humanitarian actions and a commission of the roundtable to coordinate the plans for taking care of and socially transforming the zones. After the conclusion of the fifth cycle of negotiations, the parties agreed to resume dialogue in the sixth cycle, which was scheduled to begin in Cuna in January 2024. During the fifth cycle of talks, Vera Grabe was appointed head of the government negotiating delegation, replacing Otty Patiño, who was appointed High Commissioner for Peace after Danilo Rueda stepped down.

Gender, peace and security

Women remained actively involved in the two negotiating delegations. For the first time, a woman was appointed as chief negotiator of a delegation when Vera Grabe became head of the government delegation. Proportionally, the 15-member government delegation included seven women and the eight-member ELN delegation included three women. However, no specific mechanism was defined to address the gender approach in the talks. The delegations reiterated their commitment to the gender approach and the "effective participation" of women, as they noted in the joint statement issued on 8 March. Meanwhile, the National Participation Committee was formed as a result of an agreement between the parties, with representatives of both negotiating delegations and civil society. Twenty-nine of its 81 members were women and various women's and LGBTIQ+ organisations were involved, such as Plataforma LGBTI por la Paz, Colombia Diversa, Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Juntanza de Mujeres y Paz, Madres Comunitarias, Colempresarias and Red de Mujeres del Caribe Colombiano. In addition, several women represented environmental, indigenous, black, *raizal*, *palenquera*, peasant and human rights organisations, among others.

Colombia (EMC)	
Negotiating actors	Government, Estado Mayor Central (EMC)
Third parties	Permanent supporters (Episcopal Conference of Colombia, World Council of Churches, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Colombia, OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia), guarantor countries (Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Venezuela)
Relevant agreements	Ceasefire agreement (2023)

Summary:

Estado Mayor Central emerged as an armed group made up of members of the FARC led by Iván Mordisco and Gentil Duarte, who abandoned the peace process before the Colombian government and the FARC signed the 2016 peace agreement and were joined by other dissident groups that left the FARC after it was signed. The group expanded with the recruitment of new members with no previous ties to the FARC. After the inauguration of Colombian President Gustavo Petro in 2022, the beginning of Total Peace was announced, a public policy that aims to build peace in the country by involving all active armed actors. As part of Total Peace, a negotiating process began with the EMC in 2023.

Peace negotiations officially began between the government of Colombia and the armed group Estado Mayor Central (EMC), which originated as a dissident splinter group of the now-extinct FARC, after both parties agreed to begin them in September. The negotiations were framed as part of the Total Peace policy promoted by the Colombian government of Gustavo Petro. In March, the government had announced the start of peace negotiations alongside Attorney General Francisco Barbosa’s revocation of arrest warrants for 19 guerrilla fighters led by Néstor Gregorio Vera Fernández, also known as “Iván Mordisco”. This revocation indicated that there would be rapprochements aimed at peace negotiations. In a joint event, Minister of the Environment Susana Muhamad, High Commissioner for Peace Danilo Rueda and Norway’s Minister of Climate and Environment at the time, Espen Barth Eide, announced that environmental issues would have a prominent place on the agenda of the negotiations with the EMC. However, the talks entered a crisis when the EMC massacred four indigenous youth in May, which led to the end of the ceasefire that had been announced in late 2022. After a meeting in the department of Norte de Santander, on 16 October the parties issued a joint statement announcing a bilateral ceasefire in force between 17 October and 15 January 2024. The Mechanism of Oversight, Monitoring and Verification (MVMV) was created to monitor and follow up on compliance with the ceasefire. It was made up of representatives of the government, the EMC, the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process. In addition, aspects related to the agenda and schedule of the negotiations were announced. The beginning of the ceasefire scheduled for October was threatened by disagreements between the

parties, though finally, on the day scheduled for its start, they agreed to cease attacks between them and delay the official start of the bilateral ceasefire and the formal start of the negotiating process, which took place days later. In early November, the EMC suspended the talks again, which were finally resumed in mid-November. In December, a second cycle of talks took place in the department of Cauca, with the armed group committing not to carry out kidnappings and the government pledging to denounce collaboration between members of the Public Force with illegal armed groups. The ceasefire verification mechanism was also set up. The parties also committed to listening to the communities of Cauca, Arauca, Antioquia, Putumayo and Caquetá. After concluding the second cycle, the parties agreed that the process would continue in January 2024 in Bogota. Rapprochement continued with the Second Marquetalia armed group, which also emerged as a dissident splinter group of the FARC, though no formal negotiating process was consolidated.

Gender, peace and security

There were different notable aspects to the gender, peace and security agenda as part of the negotiations. First, both negotiating parties and third parties included women in the delegations participating in the talks. Geny Calvo Olomos and Luz Dary Landázuri participated in the government’s delegation, two women out of a total of 10 delegates. Fernanda Briceño was involved in the EMC’s delegation, one woman out of a total of seven delegates. The permanent supporters included one woman, Edelma Gómez, in the OAS mission. Alongside women’s direct involvement as negotiators, the “Agreement for respecting the civilian population and the implementation of the bilateral, temporary ceasefire of a national nature with territorial impact between the national government of the Republic of Colombia and the Estado Mayor Central of the FARC-EP” reached by both parties, included an allusion to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 as a framework of reference for the negotiations. Furthermore, within the guiding principles of the talks, population, territorial, environmental, gender, ethnic, participation and inclusion of diversity approaches were included.

Colombia (FARC)	
Negotiating actors	Government, Comunes
Third parties	UN Verification Mission in Colombia, International Verification Component (Technical Secretariat of the Notables, University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute)
Relevant agreements	The Havana peace agreement (2016)

Summary:

Since the founding of the first guerrilla groups in 1964,

there have been several negotiation attempts. In the early 1990s several small groups were demobilized, but not the FARC and the ELN, which are the two most important. In 1998, President Pastrana authorized the demilitarization of a large region of Colombia, around the area of San Vicente del Caguán, in order to conduct negotiations with the FARC which lasted until 2002 and were unsuccessful. In 2012, and after several months of secret negotiations in Cuba, new talks began with the FARC in Cuba based on a specific agenda and including citizen participation mechanisms. After four years of negotiations, a historic peace agreement for the Colombian people was signed in late 2016.

The implementation of the peace agreement reached in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the now-extinct FARC-EP continued in 2023. It was the first year of implementation by the new administration headed by Gustavo Petro and led to some institutional changes, such as the creation of the Final Agreement Implementation Unit. In addition, some of the bodies established by the agreement that had been paralysed during the government of Iván Duque were reactivated, such as the Commission for Monitoring, Promoting and Verifying the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVI) and the National Commission for Security Guarantees (CNGS) and international support. In its reports on the status of implementation, the Kroc Institute¹ described some progress made in the implementation of the agreement, though it also identified many remaining challenges to making the agreement fully effective, especially with regard to the lack of progress in the implementation of ethnic and gender approaches. The provisions relating to comprehensive rural reform were those with the lowest degree of implementation.

Notably, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights appointed former Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonia Urrejola as an international human rights expert charged with identifying and verifying obstacles to the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, particularly those publicly announced by Colombia’s Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) in March 2023. Urrejola identified seven main obstacles in the implementation process: 1) the unfavourable political context in the wake of the agreement, with misgivings about the institutions that emerged from the agreement and the abuse of judicial prosecution, which shook public confidence in the agreement and in the transitional justice processes; 2) the continuum of violence in the areas where the FARC have demobilised, which has led to the population to continue to suffer from the impacts of that violence; 3) violations of the right to life and personal integrity of the signatories and those undergoing reincorporation (as of December 2023, 404 people who had signed the agreement had been murdered, including 49 indigenous people, 57 Afro-Colombians and 11 women); 4) violations of the

right to legal security of the people appearing, since not everyone who signed the agreement are aware of the status of their amnesty process; 5) breakdowns in inter-institutional coordination between the different organisations responsible for applying the agreement, with Urrejola declaring that it was necessary to establish “a single, high-level state body that leads the implementation of the agreement, establishes dialogue between the different public policies of transitional justice and ensures institutional and interjurisdictional coordination”; 6) the legacy of the Commission for Clarifying the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, for which it is considered essential to grant sufficient resources and capacities to the Committee to Follow-up and Monitor the Recommendations of the Truth Commission and to spread the recommendations across the country; and 7) delays in implementing the ethnic chapter and gender provisions, whose implementation is happening much slower than the agreement as a whole.

Gender, peace and security

The implementation of the agreement’s gender focus continued to progress slowly. According to the Kroc Institute, by the end of 2022, 18% of the provisions related to this approach had not begun to be implemented, 52% were in a minimum state of implementation, 18% were in an intermediate state and only 12% had been fully implemented. The Special Women’s Instance for the for the Implementation of the Gender Based Approach continued its work monitoring the implementation and submitted recommendations to improve it to the UN Security Council. Furthermore, in September the Special Jurisdiction for Peace announced it was filing a macro case on gender violence during the armed conflict, which will be subdivided into three processes. One will address violence against the civilian population by the FARC, another will investigate violence by the Public Force and the third will deal with violence within both the Public Force and the FARC. The filing of this macro case had been demanded by women’s civil society organisations.

Venezuela	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and social opposition
Third parties	Norway, Russia, the Netherlands
Relevant agreements	--
Summary:	Faced with the worsening political and social crisis that Venezuela experienced after the death in 2013 of President Hugo Chávez, the leader of the so-called Bolivarian

1 Echavarría Álvarez, Josefina, et al. *Seis años de implementación del Acuerdo Final: retos y oportunidades en el nuevo ciclo político*. Notre Dame, IN and Bogotá, Colombia: Matriz de Acuerdos de Paz/ Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies/Keough School of Global Affairs, 2023. Echavarría Álvarez, Josefina, et al. *Informe trimestral: estado efectivo de la implementación del Acuerdo Final, July – September 2023*. Notre Dame, IN: Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies/Keough School of Global Affairs, 2023.

Revolution, his successor Nicolás Maduro's narrow victory in the presidential election of April 2013 and the protests staged in the early months of 2014, which caused the death of around 40 people, in March 2014 the government said it was willing to accept talks with the opposition facilitated by UNASUR or the Vatican, but categorically rejected any mediation by the OAS. Shortly after Pope Francis called for dialogue and a group of UNASUR foreign ministers visited Venezuela and held many meetings, preliminary talks began between Caracas and the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) in April 2014, to which the Secretary of State of the Vatican, the former Apostolic Nuncio to Venezuela, as well as the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, were invited as witnesses in good faith. Although the talks were interrupted in May 2014 due to developments in the political situation, both UNASUR and the Vatican continued to facilitate through Apostolic Nuncio Aldo Giordano. In May 2016, shortly after a visit to Venezuela by the former leaders of Spain (Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero), Panama (Martín Torrijos) and the Dominican Republic (Leonel Fernández) at the request of UNASUR, the Venezuelan government and opposition met in the Dominican Republic with the three aforementioned ex-leaders and UNASUR representatives. After a meeting between Maduro and Pope Francis in October, both parties met again in Venezuela under the auspices of the Pope's new special envoy, Emil Paul Tscherrig. In late 2017, both sides decided to resume the talks in the Dominican Republic starting in December, accompanied by several countries chosen by both parties (Chile, Mexico and Paraguay by the opposition and Nicaragua, Bolivia and San Vicente and the Grenadines by the government). Although some agreements were reached during the several rounds of negotiations that took place between December 2017 and February 2018, Maduro's unilateral call for a presidential election for 2018 brought them to a standstill and caused the withdrawal of several of the accompanying countries designated by the opposition to facilitate them.

Alongside the bilateral and direct talks held between the governments of Venezuela and the United States in Doha, mainly concerning sanctions and energy issues, **the Norwegian government continued to facilitate several informal meetings during the year between Caracas and the Unitary Platform, which led to the signing of two agreements in Barbados in mid-October, the most important of them on the electoral conditions of the 2024 presidential election.** In the first half of the year, the parties held various exploratory meetings, but the government of Venezuela formally rejected any resumption of negotiations until the opposition fulfilled its commitment made in November 2022 to apply pressure to unblock Venezuela's frozen assets abroad to finance a fund managed by the United Nations to pay for social programmes for health, education, food and electrical infrastructure. In addition to the aforementioned informal meetings between the parties and the continued and direct dialogue between Washington and the Unitary Platform, two diplomatic initiatives led respectively by Colombia and France stood out in the first half of the year. In mid-July, during the Third Summit of Leaders of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), French President Emmanuel Macron called a meeting between the head of the negotiating panel of the Unitary Platform, Gerardo

Blyde, and Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, in which the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, also participated, as well as Argentine President Alberto Fernández, Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Colombian President Gustavo Petro. According to statements made by some of the leaders present, the parties reached no significant agreements, but there was a positive exchange of opinions about the main points on the agenda, such as the conditions for the presidential election.

Previously, in late April, **the Colombian government had organised an international conference on Venezuela in Colombia that involved representatives of 20 countries and enjoyed the prior support of the government of Venezuela, the Unitary Platform and the US government.**

The conference was aimed at getting the parties to agree on the conditions for talks between Caracas and the opposition to resume. It ended with a statement describing the three objectives to be achieved: the establishment of an electoral timetable to hold free and transparent elections with full guarantees for all Venezuelan actors; the gradual lifting of sanctions on the Venezuelan government as the agreed promises are fulfilled; and the resumption of talks in Mexico accompanied by activation of the aforementioned fund for social investment in Venezuela. Though the conference did not yield significant progress or signify the resumption of dialogue between the government and the opposition, President Petro promised to maintain contact with the parties and to convene a new meeting (with a format and date to be determined) to specify and follow up on the commitments made at the summit. Some analysts said that the Bogota summit also denoted a certain regional depolarisation in Latin America with respect to the Venezuela crisis, as the arrival to power of some more progressive governments (such as in Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Peru and Mexico) had resulted in more conciliatory policies towards the Venezuelan government. Along the same lines, Washington was also showing a more pragmatic position towards Caracas. Several analysts pointed out that the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Washington's need to find alternative oil suppliers to Moscow contributed decisively to the rapprochement of positions between both governments. As such, the governments of the United States and Venezuela held direct meetings in Doha at various times during the year (and previously in 2022). In June, for example, the president of the National Assembly and the government's chief negotiator with the opposition, Jorge Rodríguez, met with a direct representative of Joe Biden bilaterally and without intermediaries. In these meetings, which intensified in September and October, the lifting of economic sanctions (about 600, according to Caracas) was mainly addressed, especially those related to the energy and oil sectors, though they were conditional on the government making progress on electoral conditions, human rights and the release of detained persons, among other issues.

The most important progress of the year took place in mid-October, when the Venezuelan government and the Unitary Platform signed an agreement in Barbados called the Partial Agreement on the Promotion of Political Rights and Electoral Guarantees for All, in which both parties pledged to hold the presidential election in the second half of 2024; to promote a set of electoral guarantees before the National Electoral Council; to respect each actor's right to choose their own candidates according to their internal mechanisms and with respect for the Constitution; to update the electoral register; to perform audits of all political actors under international observation; to request the invitation of electoral observation missions from international bodies like the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Interamerican Union of Electoral Bodies and the Carter Center; to reject any form of political violence or foreign interference; and to create a monitoring and verification mechanism of the dialogue and negotiating process, though the details were not made public. The meeting in Barbados was the fifth between the parties since the negotiating process began in Mexico in August 2021, with Norway facilitating them and Russia and the Netherlands acting as supporting countries. Caracas and the Unitary Platform also signed a second agreement during the meeting called the Partial Agreement for the Guarantee of the Vital Interests of the Nation that ratified Venezuela's historical, sovereign and inalienable rights over the Essequibo region and rejected the Guyanese government's awarding of concessions to explore and exploit energy in marine areas pending delimitation between both countries. The day after both agreements were signed in Barbados, the US government issued a statement announcing that it was lifting some sanctions (temporary authorisation of transactions in the oil and gas sector in Venezuela, or elimination of the ban on secondary trading of Venezuelan sovereign bonds, for example) and urged Caracas to begin the release of all people detained for political reasons and to readmit all candidates for the presidential election before 30 November.

Despite the importance of such agreements, a few days later the dialogue was interrupted and tension between the parties increased significantly. On 22 October, the opposition carried out its primary election to choose the person who will run in the 2024 presidential election. **According to the opposition, around 2.4 million people participated in the process, in which María Corina Machado, disqualified from running for public office for 15 years, won 93% of the votes.** However, the government thought that the process had been fraudulent and in late October the Supreme Court invalidated the results of the primaries. Furthermore, the government's chief negotiator argued that the election violated the agreement signed in Barbados, asking the government of Norway to hold an emergency meeting and activate the mechanism to verify the commitments made. The US warned about the possibility of reimposing the

sanctions lifted a few days earlier if the aforementioned disqualifications were not withdrawn before 30 November. In mid-November, the EU extended its sanctions on Venezuela and the government announced its intention not to invite the EU to observe the elections. On 30 November, the government and the Unitary Platform signed another agreement by which any candidate had until 15 December to submit an appeal (or precautionary protection measures) to the Supreme Court of Justice against the disqualification, as it is the court with the power to make a final decision on the matter.

Finally, on 20 December, a prisoner exchange agreement between the governments of Venezuela and the United States became effective, which included the release and delivery to Venezuela of Alex Saab, a Colombian businessman who is a close collaborator of Caracas (and the front man of Nicolás Maduro, according to some sources) and had been arrested in Cape Verde in 2020 and extradited to the US on charges of money laundering, among other issues. In the last two years, Caracas had unsuccessfully requested his release, arguing that he was part of its delegation in the negotiating process with the Unitary Platform. The government of Venezuela released 10 people with US citizenship and more than 20 with Venezuelan citizenship, some of whom were linked to the opposition and María Corina Machado. According to some media outlets, the deal consolidates the agreement in Barbados and facilitates the necessary steps to hold the presidential election in 2024.

Gender, peace and security

Although there is no evidence that the negotiations between the government and the Unitary Platform are addressing issues specifically linked to the political participation of women or have integrated a gender approach, three women are involved in the government's negotiating delegation (Génesis Garvett, Gabriela Jiménez and Camila Fabri de Saab) and two are participating in the Unitary Platform's negotiating team (Mariela Magallanes and Claudia Nikken). Two other women who are not part of the negotiating panels were significantly important in the strategic direction of the negotiations. For the government, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez held a direct meeting with the head of the negotiating panel of the Unitary Platform. For the opposition, María Corina Machado, plays an important role in the negotiations facilitated by the government of Norway as the big winner of the opposition primaries. Furthermore, in December, Machado declared that although the Unitary Platform is not involved in the parallel negotiations between the governments of Venezuela and the United States, the opposition has been involved in such conversations to ensure consistency and complementarity between both negotiating tracks.

Venezuela – Guyana	
Negotiating actors	Government, political and social opposition
Third parties	CELAC, CARICOM, Brazil, United Nations, Cuba
Relevant agreements	Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela

Summary:

Essequibo is a territory formally controlled and administered by Guyana, but whose sovereignty is historically disputed by Venezuela. Covering almost 160,000 km² and rich in minerals and other natural resources, this territory was part of the Captaincy General of Venezuela and was integrated into the new state of Venezuela once it obtained independence from the Spanish Crown in the 19th century. The British Empire later colonised the region, establishing British Guiana, now Guyana. Given the lack of agreement on defining the border between the British Empire and Venezuela, an Arbitration Award issued in Paris in 1899 handed the disputed territory to the British Empire. This decision was not recognised by Venezuela, which argued that there had been bias and cartographic manipulation during the judicial process. In the early 1960s, the United Nations decided to admit Venezuela's territorial claim, opening the door to the 1966 Geneva Agreement between Venezuela and the United Kingdom (in consultation with the government of Guyana, which gained independence from the United Kingdom that same year). Under this agreement, the parties undertook to resolve the dispute through friendly negotiations. Although Venezuela viewed the Geneva Agreement as annulling the Paris Award, it also maintained the status quo of the territory (administered by Guyana) until the final resolution of the dispute. In 2018, Guyana raised the resolution of the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but Venezuela does not recognise its jurisdiction or competence to resolve the dispute, alleging that the Geneva Agreement is the only valid mechanism to deal with it. In 2020, the ICJ declared itself competent to resolve and hand down a ruling on the merits of the issue. It ratified its position in 2023, but at the same time it did not prohibit (as Guyana had requested) the referendum on Essequibo organised by Caracas in December 2023 shortly after the government of Guyana granted several companies concessions to explore for hydrocarbon deposits in waters disputed with Venezuela.

As a result of the diplomatic crisis and the military escalation caused by the referendum in Venezuela on the annexation of the disputed region of Essequibo (under the sovereignty and administration of Guyana), much diplomatic effort was made by regional bodies and governments in the last quarter of the year, which in part led to a summit between the presidents of Guyana and Venezuela in mid-December. This summit was held in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and was co-organised mainly by the governments of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which holds the pro tempore presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and of Dominica, which holds the presidency of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and by Brazilian President Lula da Silva, represented at the summit by his personal envoy Celso Amorim. The

prime ministers of the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago also attended, as members of CARICOM, as did the foreign ministers of Colombia and Honduras in their capacity as the CELAC Troika. The summit was observed by the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Chief of Staff of the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General.

During the summit, Nicolás Maduro and Irfaan Ali signed the Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela in which they committed not to threaten each other or use force mutually; to refrain, in word or deed, from escalating the conflict; and to cooperate to avoid incidents on the ground that could lead to tension between them and, in the event that it occurs, to communicate immediately with each other, as well as with CARICOM, CELAC and the president of Brazil. Maduro and Ali also pledged to establish a joint commission of the ministers of foreign affairs and officials of the two governments to address mutually agreed issues; to continue the dialogue on the dispute, to meet again in Brazil in the next three months, or at another agreed time; and to maintain the prime ministers of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica and the president of Brazil as main interlocutors of the dialogue, and the UN Secretary-General as an observer. Finally, both leaders agreed that any dispute between the two countries will be resolved in accordance with international law, including the Geneva Agreement of 17 February 1966, but at the same time Guyana made it clear that it was committed to the process and procedures of the International Court of Justice to resolve the border controversy, while Venezuela expressed its lack of consent and recognition of the International Court of Justice and its jurisdiction in the dispute.

In the days following the summit, there were no military incidents, the sabre-rattling rhetoric of recent weeks was toned down and both leaders appealed to the peaceful coexistence of the two countries, urged dialogue and repeated their commitment that Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be a zone of peace. However, both Maduro and Ali remained firm in their positions. For example, Ali said that the status of Essequibo is not the subject of discussion, negotiation or deliberation, and that the territorial dispute between both countries must be resolved exclusively by the International Court of Justice. Furthermore, he declared that his country had every right to exploit resources, issue licenses and grant concessions in its sovereign territory. Ali also blasted the permits granted by Maduro to Venezuelan oil companies for the exploration and exploitation of oil, gas and minerals in Essequibo.

Although the summit in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was perhaps the most important public event in the

process of resolving the dispute between Guyana and Venezuela, during the year it emerged that there had been informal discussions promoted by regional actors in the previous months. For example, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel declared that his government had been facilitating contacts and discussions at the highest level between the parties at least since September. In the days before the summit, the UN Security Council held an emergency session behind closed doors on which no agreements were reached. On 1 January 2024, Guyana joined the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member. Along the same lines, after a MERCOSUR summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador

and Peru signed a joint declaration expressing “their deep concern with the increase in tension” between Venezuela and Guyana and urged both parties to talk and seek a peaceful solution to the controversy. According to some media outlets, during the meeting Lula da Silva proposed that CELAC facilitate the dialogue between both countries. Previously, Lula had tried unsuccessfully to get UNASUR, inactive for some years, to play some kind of role in the search for solutions. Finally, both CARICOM and the OAS issued statements critical of the decisions of the Venezuelan government, calling for territorial integrity and resolution of the disputes in accordance with international law and by the International Court of Justice.