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MISSION REPORT

following the FEMM mission to Bogotá, Colombia 19-23 June 2023

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Members of the mission:

Robert Biedroń	(S&D) (Leader of the mission)
Vera Tax	(S&D)
Karen Melchior	(Renew)
Andżelika Anna Możdżanowska	(ECR)
Isabella Tovaglieri	(ID)
Eugenia Rodríguez Palop	(The Left)

Introduction

In the framework of the draft programme for travel by committee ad hoc delegations outside the European Union for the first half of 2023, the Conference of Presidents, at its meeting of 24 November 2022, authorised the sending of an eight Member ad hoc delegation, including the FEMM Chair and with the AFET Gender standing rapporteur invited to participate in the mission, to Bogotá, Colombia, on the condition that the security situation on the ground prior to departure allowed for the mission to go ahead and that the instructions and risk mitigating measures of the Mission Security Assessment be respected.

The mission took place on 19-23 June 2023.

Context

The mission took place at a historic time for Colombia when for the first time in the country's history, a left-oriented president, Gustavo Petro Urrego was elected. The objective of the FEMM mission was dedicated to the success stories countering the backlash against women's rights and the progress made in the implementation of the gender perspective of the 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*, the world's first agreement to have a gender perspective as its core. Part of the programme was focused on the proposals of the government regarding the right to abortion, which had been de-penalised in February 2022 by a Constitutional Court decision which made Colombia the country with one of the most progressive legal framework in Latin America and worldwide. The visit also offered an opportunity to engage with the new political arena that includes many women rights defenders and hear the views of fellow parliamentarians, members of government and representatives of civil society as well as international organisations working in the area of women's rights and gender equality. Colombia has made significant progress towards gender equality in the face of considerable challenges caused by decades of armed conflict. However, peace has not been achieved in some parts of the country, human rights defenders, and especially women human rights defenders, are especially targeted.

Summary account of meetings

Monday, 19 June 2023, 19.00-19.30

Technical preparatory meeting of the FEMM Committee Delegation and H.E. Mr Gilles Bertrand, Head of EU Delegation to Bogotá, Colombia

Also present:

Mr Tito Contreras, Political Officer in Migration, Drugs and Gender Equality at the EU Delegation

Chair of the FEMM delegation Robert Biedroń updated the delegation on various practical aspects of the mission and **H.E. Mr Gilles Bertrand and Mr Tito Contreras** informed about last minute updates to the mission programme.

Tuesday, 20 June 2023, 8.30-9.30

**Briefing to the Members of the FEMM Committee Delegation by H.E. Mr Gilles Bertrand,
Head of EU Delegation to Bogotá, Colombia**

Also present:

Mr. Joerg Schreiber, Head of the Politics, Press and Information Section at the EU Delegation
Mr. Camilo Vargas, Officer in the Politics, Press and Information Section at the EU Delegation
Ms. Vanessa Viera, Press Officer at the EU Delegation
Mr. Tito Contreras, Political Officer in Migration, Drugs and Gender Equality at the EU Delegation
Mr. Andreas Bjorklund, Officer in the Politics, Press and Information Section at the EU Delegation
Ms. Laura Mantilla, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation
Mr. Alberto Menghini, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation
Ms. Sonia Tato, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation
Ms. Alexandra Nerisanu, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation
Ms. Luisa Fernanda Gallo, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation
Ms. María Iráizoz, Cooperation Officer at the EU Delegation

Members of the delegation in their introductory remarks presented the most recent initiatives of the European Parliament (EP) in the area of gender equality and women's rights, including Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, as well as the Pay Transparency and Women on Boards directives. In the context of Russia's unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine, the delegation expressed their concern over the proliferation of sexual violence against women in times of conflict, looking to draw some lessons learnt from Colombia's experience with decades of conflict and civil war.

Ambassador H.E. Mr Gilles Bertrand started his briefing giving an overview of the socio-political situation in Colombia, focusing on the state of play in terms of the armed conflict, the latest cease-fire agreement, absence of State presence in remote areas as well as government initiatives as a result of the scars left by decades of civil war. Colombia has made significant progress towards gender equality in the face of considerable challenges caused by six decades of armed conflict. He also described the new political arena of President Gustavo Petro that includes many women rights defenders. Finally, he gave an overview of the areas where the EU provides funding or implements programmes in Colombia, including tackling gender-based violence, implementing and evaluating the peace agreement of 2016, entrepreneurship and poverty reduction, as well as supporting civil society organisations.

Tuesday, 20 June 2023, 9.30-11.00

**Meeting with women and peacebuilding umbrella organisations on the formulation of a
National Action Plan 1325 - GPAZ / Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz / Coalición 1325**

Colombian umbrella organisations present:

Ms Luz Piedad Caicedo, Expert on UNSCR 1325 at Humanas
Ms Natalia Chávez, Coordinator of the Women, Peace and Security Programme at LIMPAL
Ms Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Director at CIASE
Ms Berenice Celeyta, Director at NOMADESC

After the introductory remarks of the Chair of the FEMM delegation highlighting the focus on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, adopted in October 2000, the representative of the Colombian umbrella organisations working in the area of peacebuilding shared their views.

Colombian umbrella organisations stressed that women have suffered disproportionately throughout the conflict. Violence, forced disappearances, extortion, forced recruitment and other issues that affected women are at the forefront of the negotiations on the National Action Plan. The organisations informed that the National Plan is currently being formulated in an unprecedented way, with the participation of women's, feminist and civil society organisations that monitor the UN Resolution 1325 with the support of the international community. In order to increase the participation of women and recognise their role in the prevention and resolution of the conflict, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction, focus was placed on three more general areas of horizontal impact. 1-peace with The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that recognizes the issues affecting women should be applied and implementation should speed up; 2-a horizontal cease fire and no more hostility against the population should be achieved with the other paramilitary groups, given that many affected are women and families; 3-gender aspects foreseen in various national level initiatives need to be respected and implemented. In terms of women's participation in government at national, regional and local levels, it was highlighted that 30% of candidates on lists are women, but parity will not be achieved unless gender equality actions are expedited. They called on the EU to support them in amplifying their voices to achieve resounding peace in Colombia in a way that recognises women's roles and involvement.

Members of the delegation responded to the interventions. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about the example that these umbrella organisations are setting worldwide in terms of the participation and accomplishments reached by women in peacebuilding, even though a lot of work remains to be done. Other Members talked about special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. As experienced in Europe, through the illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, rape is used as a weapon of war and needs to be tackled head-on in order to stop this horrific crime. Members also talked about the importance of increasing representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and local levels of government in order to make an impact in the mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.

Tuesday, 20 June 2023, 11.15-12.45

Meeting with the International Accompaniment Component (UN Women, Women's International Democratic Federation (FDIM), and Sweden + UN Verification Mission) on the monitoring of the Gender Perspective in the Implementation of the Colombian Peace Accord

Stakeholders present:

Ms Patricia Fernández Pacheco, Deputy Country Representative at UN Women

Ms Sofía Dohmen, Head of Cooperation, Sweden

Ms Elina Francesca Rivera, Cooperation Officer, Sweden

Ms Johanna Guerrero, Technical Secretariat at the International Democratic Federation (FDIM)

Ms Matilde Mora, Political spokeswoman at the International Democratic Federation (FDIM)

Stakeholders that are part of the **International Accompaniment Component** informed about their work that contributes to strengthening the guarantees for the fulfilment of the Peace Agreement. Their work is in full respect with Colombia's constitutional and legal order, and focuses on the human rights of the citizens. They maintain a dialogue with the Commission for Monitoring, Promoting and Verifying the Implementation of the Final Agreement and support the Technical Secretariat of the Verification Mechanism. The first public assessment of the monitoring of the implementation of the Final Agreement with a gender perspective was published by the International Accompaniment Component in November 2018. In spite of many challenges and shortcomings, the Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and FARC has become an international reference point and an example of best practices for the incorporation of a gender perspective in a peace process. Resolving peace after major conflicts could be a chance to promote transformation that contributes to development, quality of life, as well as equality. It is an opportunity to close the gender gap, ensure equal opportunities, and include gender equality within specific public policy measures. Challenges highlighted included: budget allocation for projects with a gender-based approach for the implementation of the Final Agreement; gender mainstreaming in the different points of the Final Agreement and continue to develop commitments with a gender perspective approach; guarantee the rights of indigenous women, women of African descent, and the LGBTIQ+ population, ensuring the intersectionality of the gender perspective in the ethnic indicators of the Framework Plan for Implementation; allow the generation of information disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, strengthening the implementation of differential actions.

Members of the delegation drew parallels between the challenges faced in Colombia in this context and those in the EU at policy and institutional levels that include strengthening gender budgeting, promoting gender mainstreaming, as well as improving data collection. They offered their support for the continued work on gender equality in Colombia through the development of peace, and called for the urgency of challenges such as respecting the rights of LGBTIQ+ population and of all women including those of indigenous or African decent to be fully addressed.

Tuesday, 20 June 2023, 14.30-15.30

Meeting with former officer of the Colombian National Navy Juanita Millán, Member of the Gender Subcommittee and the Technical Subcommittee for Ending the Conflict

Former Navy Officer Juanita Millán stressed that this is a critical time in Colombia in terms of continuing the implementation of peace related commitments. She was a negotiator for the peace accord and the cease-fire, as the only woman on the side of the government, on the side of FARC there were 3 women negotiators. She highlighted how the disarmament brought up many gender points but it took two years of negotiations until gender aspects were included, which was a very sensitive job. She gave an example of gender aspects that were significant, stating that FARC was 30% women, but in addition, many former fighters became pregnant and had babies, there were 400-500 babies in the first 6 months of the implementation, but the negotiating team had not foreseen anything in terms of prenatal support, etc.. She also clarified that those that negotiated the terms are also in charge of implementation in Colombia. In terms of implementation, gender indicators started to fall down in priority, perhaps because the text is so complicated. Inclusion documents were supposed to be ready in 6 months but it took 1.5

years. She mentioned that there cannot be a better peace agreement, but it's complex, and implementation should be better.

Regarding her work on the Gender Subcommittee during the negotiations, she informed that there were logistical difficulties, and many involved in the peace agreement overall did not believe in the gender work. For example, the issue of sexual violence was difficult, but after sexual violence was explained as an prevalent issue and that it is needed to be included in the ceasefire, it was taken forward also in other agreements, but it was a struggle at every step.

Members of the delegation talked about the most recent initiatives of the EP in the area of gender equality and women's rights, including Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which are the leading initiatives that also address sexual violence. The Chair of the delegation noted that women pay the highest price in conflicts and called on the urgency to stop the practice of using rape as a weapon of war. He also stressed the experience in Europe with the illegal war in Ukraine and the millions of women and children that had to flee the war zone.

Tuesday, 20 June 2023, 16.00-17.30

Meeting with organisations working on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues and assistance in cases of Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE)

Stakeholders present:

Marta Royo – Director, Profamilia
Maria Vivas - Director, Oriéntame para Decidir
Eugenia López - Regional Director, International Planned Parenthood Federation
Laura Gil, MD – Co-Founder, Grupo Médico por el Derecho a Decidir
Laura Castro - Coordinator, Mesa por la Vida
Catalina Martínez – Regional Director, Centro de Derechos Reproductivos
Sandra Mazo – Director, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir
Carolina Melo – Legal Adviser, Jacarandas
Susana Mejía – Director, Red Nacional de Mujeres

Organisations working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues and assistance in cases of Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE) presented their work. Abortion was decriminalised during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy in Colombia, by a historic Constitutional Court Decision in 2022. SRHR organisations gave some background to the decision, mentioning that the 24 weeks limit was a scientific and human rights decision, not a political one. They also mentioned that approximately 1% of abortions take place after 20 weeks, and they are mainly women from disadvantaged backgrounds, poor and from rural areas, that have been victims of sexual violence, and unfortunately they consult abortion services at a later stage given their psychological and physical trauma. At the same time, many challenges persist in Colombia for women in need of abortion. For example, unsafe abortions continue to function because these have not been closed yet, since women continue to find it difficult to access safe abortion services, especially in the rural areas. It was also mentioned that objection to perform abortion based on conscience is possible in Colombia, but that some hospitals do this as a collective, which they are not allowed based on the court decision. SRHR organisations also stressed that Colombia is a secular state and there is a separation of church from state, and the state needs to guarantee the citizens' rights and not allow church interference with the

democratic tradition.

SRHR organisations also spoke about the importance of sexual education in schools as prevention measures. They reported that there has been a fear at the political level to include sexual education in schools, even though it is a crucial aspect of human life in the context of how we relate to our bodies and other persons. They highlighted that through sexual education it is also needed to deconstruct toxic masculinity, which is at the heart of gender-based violence. Lastly, SRHR organisations also mentioned that public opinion shows that there is support to remove abortion from the criminal code completely. They are working on achieving this, and also on changing attitudes on transgender and binary people to have a free choice over their bodies.

Members of the delegation talked about the significance of the lack of access to safe, affordable, timely and respectful abortion care, and the stigma associated with abortion, which pose risks to women's physical and mental well-being. They spoke about the important example set by Colombia in this area, and mentioned the backlash on women's rights across Europe, especially in SRHR.

Wednesday, 21 June 2023, 8.00-9.00

Meeting with the EU Gender Taskforce

The EU Gender Taskforce in Colombia includes representation from Italy, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Czechia, Sweden, Romania, Poland and France. Member States present at the meeting talked about different programmes implemented by their countries, including work with civil society across different areas such as agriculture/crop substitution and women in rural areas, and programmes for young migrant women. In the case of Sweden, work on the International Accompaniment Component was mentioned as well as programmes focused on women participation in politics.

Members of the delegation presented the most recent initiatives in the EP in the area of gender equality and women's rights, such as Women on boards and Pay transparency directives, as well as an ongoing work on Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. They expressed their concerns about the backlash against women's rights, violence against women, including cybercrime and structured violence.

Wednesday, 21 June 2023, 9.45-10.45

Meeting with members of the Colombian Congressional Women's Caucus

In presence:

Senator María José Pizarro – President of the Legal Commission of Congress for Women's Equity

Chamber Representative Marelen Castillo

Chamber Representative Karen Manrique

Chamber Representative Carmen Felisa Ramírez

Chamber Representative Ana Rogelia Monsalve

Chamber Representative Gloria Liliana Rodríguez

Chamber Representative Erika Sánchez
Chamber Representative Delcy Isaza
Chamber Representative Elizabeth Jai Pang

Senator María José Pizarro talked about the difficult situation of the COVID-19 pandemic that saw thousands of reports of gender-based violence, and sexual abuse of children. She mentioned that gender-based violence cannot just be legislated away, especially in view of the increase during and following the pandemic, the whole society needs to be involved, and in times of crisis, actions must be taken right away. She also talked about women in politics and mentioned that the number of elected congresswomen has improved, but is still a long way from 50-50. She was positive about the upcoming local elections, where more and more women are participating. In this context however, she stressed the increasing violence against women in politics. With an increased number of women running in elections, an exponential level of violence and threats of extreme violence has been observed. At local and regional level violence against political women is extremely high and reported to be getting worst, the farthest from the capital the worst the level and type of violence on a daily basis. She highlighted a new framework soon to be in place to protect women in politics, this new law is still to be signed by the president. She spoke about the different initiatives her committee has worked on, in order to protect and help women in Colombia that face various obstacles, including an unprecedented law on gender-based violence. She also mentioned that her committee has been asking for a dedicated ministry of and for women for a long time, and the formation of a ministry of equality was a good success. Lastly, the Senator spoke about the need for a complete ceasefire in Colombia. She is currently negotiating a ceasefire and mentioned that it is the first time that as many women as men are at the table. She ended with the message women are guardians of the peace, and they have also suffered the most consequences of the conflict.

The Chair of the delegation talked about ongoing work of the EP on Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. He also spoke about the work of the FEMM Committee on Women on boards and Pay transparency directives and their importance in supporting the professional life of women. He stressed that the backlash against women's rights, violence against women, including cybercrime has included also violence against women in politics, especially in the digital sphere.

Wednesday, 21 June 2023, 15.00-16.00

Meeting with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection on Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE)

Vice-Minister of Public Health, Dr. Jaime Urrego spoke about Colombia's Constitutional Court Decision C-055 of 2022, decriminalising abortion during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, and gave some background to this historic ruling. He started by highlighting that Colombia is still in a difficult post-conflict situation and that the President is focused on complete peace, and on rebuilding the country. He mentioned that the focus on abortion in the country comes from the civil society struggle by women in Colombia. They applied organised pressure widely through the "Movimiento Causa Justa". Therefore, this court decision comes from a wider social movement. Colombia has a strong civil society that in his view, resulted from the limits of democracy and the years of conflict, which left many displaced, disappeared, murdered, massacred. A major part of the conflict has been endured by women, which opened the space

for the social struggles to have some support from the constitution itself. The Vice-Minister stressed that the court decision was implemented in Bogotá much quicker than other parts of the country, which had to deal with increased stigma of abortion. He confirmed what SRHR organisation mentioned in a previous meeting, that the decision of limiting abortion to 24 months was chosen based on medical and scientific agreement, and that doctors can apply the conscience clause, but institutional objection is not allowed. Another element of the court ruling is that teenagers, even those below the age of 15, that get pregnant as a result of violence, do not need parental approval. Lastly, regarding indigenous women whose rights are less protected, The Vice-Minister mentioned another ruling at a lower level court that allowed abortion only with a male's approval. This went again to a higher court for ruling, which put SRHR and backlash against women's rights back to the forefront. The ministry is looking to take a position on this but some interpretations maintain that this lower court ruling only applies to indigenous people.

Members of the delegation stressed that the backlash against women's rights, violence against women and SRHR is unfortunately also present in Europe. The topic of lack of access to safe, affordable, timely and respectful abortion care continues to be a very sensitive one in Europe, in spite of human rights and women's rights progress in the past years. The delegation stressed the importance of the work being done in Colombia on making abortion safe and legal. The delegation was positive about how work in the area of SRHR brought closely together civil society and the judiciary to make such a positive impact in women's lives.

Wednesday, 21 June 2023, 16.30-17.30

Meeting with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) on the rights of women and girls from a gender sensitive transitional justice perspective

In presence:

Magistrate Roberto Carlos Vidal, President

Magistrate Julieta Lemaitre

Magistrate Oscar Parra

Magistrate Alexandra Sandoval

Magistrate Roberto Carlos Vidal gave some background to the role of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) “Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz”, which is the Colombian transitional justice mechanism through which FARC members, members of the Public Force and third parties who have participated in the Colombian armed conflict are investigated and put on trial for their crimes during the conflict. The objectives of JEP are to satisfy the victims' right to justice and offer truth to Colombian society, especially as the bodies of many disappeared victims of the conflict remain unfound. It aims to protect the rights of the victims, to contribute to the achievement of a stable and lasting peace, and adopt decisions regarding those who participated directly or indirectly in internal armed conflict. To achieve its aims, the JEP is relying primarily on the collective reports submitted by civil society organizations on behalf of the victims. In addition, it also conducts its own investigations, although the number of reports from victims are in much greater number than capacity of JEP to act fast of these reports. The JEP has prioritized macro-cases in order to more effectively proceed with its work. They mentioned that although their proposal was initially to contemplate lines of investigation on sexual violence in several of the macro-cases, in the end, in July 2022 they announced that it would initiate the "macro-case" (11) on gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive violence. After

the EP FEMM mission, in September 2023, this macro-case was officially opened.

Members of the delegation highlighted the most recent initiatives of the EP in the area of gender equality and women's rights, focusing on the directive Combating violence against women and domestic violence and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. In the context of Russia's unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine, the delegation expressed their concern over the proliferation of sexual violence against women in times of conflict. They stressed the need to end impunity through justice systems and legal frameworks in order to get justice for the victims and their families, but also as an important preventative measure. At the same time, they warned against granting amnesty to perpetrators of sexual violence and the need to open the macro-case on sexual violence.

Thursday, 22 June 2023, 9.00-11.00

Meeting with organisations working on prevention, assistance and monitoring of gender-based violence cases

In presence:

Linda Cabrera –Director, Sisma Mujer

Marcela Sánchez – Director, Colombia Diversa

Sisma Mujer representative addressed the issue of gender-based violence, and the dire situation on the ground regarding violence against women. The first responses of authorities in cases of gender-based violence are weak, even though a law was passed last August to strengthen the response, this has not happened yet and this remains a concern. The need for systemic changes in the army and police in terms of strengthening their response to gender-based violence is more important than ever. Isolated areas in the country are marked red in terms of gender-based violence. Sisma Mujer representative also spoke about the importance of women's political participation. Women can be catalysts for change but reforms such as 50-50 representation did not pass, except for decision-making bodies.

Colombia Diversa representative also addressed the issue of gender-based violence, stressing that 5 years after the JEP started its work, victims of sexual violence and gender-based violence (macro 11) will be launched, but nothing of substance has happened. There are discriminatory effects of this delay, and rapidly adopting actions is needed so that these effects do not become more severe. Despite the advances brought by the current government, the levels of gender-based violence overall has stayed the same. Challenges faced in the transitional justice system are not just in terms of gender-based violence on the ground but also the lack of sufficient attention inside the system. Prejudice has been used as a tool to exercise this violence. In terms of the search units of the authorities looking for the disappeared, around 15% of victims are not looked for, often women, in the context of femicide, forced marriage, forced labour. In spite of the profile of the victims, the search units do not have a gender focus, and this needs to urgently change. Colombia Diversa representative also spoke about prejudice-based violence against LGBTIQ+, which is not dealt with in a constructive way in the justice system including in JEP. In terms of forced disappearances, there are serious omissions of LGBTIQ+ people as victims and called on the EP delegation to recognise and give the message to the Colombian authorities that the alliance between the search units and LGBTIQ+ organisations to work together to find the victims is urgently needed. Lastly, the issue of LGBTIQ+ migrants was brought to light as a cross-border issue that involves the Andean community, Ecuador, etc.. These migrants are in

a precarious situation, and they are pushed to register under the legal status of migrants and not refugees, then they have fewer rights.

Members of the delegation presented their remarks which included the most recent initiatives of the EP in the area of gender equality and women's rights. In the context of Russia's unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine, the delegation expressed their concern over the proliferation of sexual violence against women in times of conflict. The delegation stressed that justice for women and LGBTIQ+ people can be a major contribution to a democracy based on equality and justice, and expectations are high that Colombia can achieve this level of justice and equality. If so, Colombia's experience of judiciary, law enforcement and civil society working effectively together can be a roadmap that other countries will be able to follow, but access to justice needs to improve. The delegation confirmed their support for the ongoing work of the two organisations.

Thursday, 22 June 2023, 11.30-12.30

Meeting with organisations working for victims, disappeared persons and human rights defenders

In presence:

Yanette Bautista, Director, Nydia Erika Bautista Foundation

Julia Figueroa – Director, Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Luís Carlos Pérez (CCALCP)

Luz Carlina Hincapié – Adviser, Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz IMP

Organisations working for victims, disappeared persons and human rights defenders gave some background to what the term 'disappeared person' means in Colombia in the context of such a long-lasting conflict. Impunity is rampant, impunity in terms of disappeared persons is in 95% of cases, therefore justice cannot be said is effectively working. Searching for people is a citizens-driven action and demanding the rights of those who have disappeared. In the case of the Nydia Erika Bautista Foundation, the woman that the foundation is named after, was tortured, raped and disappeared by the army. At least 16 officers were involved, 2 brigades and none have yet been brought to justice. If you look for a disappeared then you face huge obstacles such as violence, threats of violence, retaliation, etc. There are permanent threats to women rights defenders. The disappeared are seen as collateral damage and not as victims of the conflict. They called for a macro case focused on all gender-based violence and another focused on enforced disappearance. They also explained to us the proposal for a Comprehensive Law for the Protection of the Rights of Women Searching for Disappeared Persons, a law that recognizes the role of these women, their contribution to the truth and the costs that their search processes have implied in their lives.

Members of the delegation made their introductory remarks and spoke about the work of the EP in the area of gender equality and women's rights, especially in terms of gender-based violence. The delegation also expressed their concern over the proliferation of sexual violence against women in times of conflict, as also experienced in the context of Russia's unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine. The delegation expressed appreciation over the work done by the organisations present and offered their support.

Thursday, 22 June 2023, 12.30-14.00

Working Lunch with organisations working to promote greater political participation of women in decision-making bodies

In presence:

Alejandra Barrios, Director - Electoral Observation Mission (MOE)

Johana Trujillo, Gender Officer - Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)

Organisations working to promote greater political participation of women in decision-making bodies spoke about the importance of women's political participation, which is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women. Political accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, but it cannot stop there. What is required are gender-sensitive governance reforms that will make all elected officials more effective at promoting gender equality in public policy and ensuring their implementation. The organisations working in this area also spoke about the increased threats of violence and violence women politicians are facing and the urgent need to address this.

Members of the delegation presented their remarks. The delegation mentioned that at the European Parliament, for the current legislative term, 39.3% are women. Even though this is the best proportion that the EP has ever had, it is not yet 50-50. The delegation also mentioned that three presidents of the European Parliament have been women, the first one in 1979, the legendary Simone Veil that established the FEMM Committee, and including the current President Roberta Metsola. As far as the representation of women in the European Parliament goes, it is above the world average for national parliaments and also above the EU average for national parliaments. Therefore, a lot of work still needs to be done in this area. The delegation confirmed the worrying trend of violence against women politicians, which is experienced also in Europe, and also by the members of the delegation.

Thursday, 22 June 2023, 14.30-15.30

High-level meeting with Colombia's Vice-President and Minister of Equality Francia Márquez, accompanied by Mrs. Clemencia Carabalí – Presidential Advisor for Women's Equity

Vice-President and Minister of Equality Francia Márquez welcomed the cooperation between EU and Colombia and stressed support for the peace process. She presented her plans for transformation of the country for social justice, human dignity, combatting social oppression and exclusion. Her office coordinates inter-institutional and inter-sectoral policies for equality and equity - for women, indigenous people, descendants, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ population. The policies focus also on actions for access to drinking water, combatting gender-based violence. The national development plan includes also actions on setting up the national care service, policies to ensure equal pay for women, support to families and access to healthcare. In Colombia, women support families. **Vice-President Márquez** explained further the progress made by the government in the implementation of the UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the efforts to increase political participation of women. **Members of the delegation** presented their remarks and focused on the implementation of the peace process, assistance to victims of gender-based violence in conflict, and restorative justice.

They highlighted the support of Colombia for the Pride March. Members stressed the importance of access to education for girls and women. Discussion focused also on the vital role of human rights defenders.

Thursday, 22 June 2023, 15.45-16.15

Meeting with Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Francisco Coy

Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Francisco Coy presented the work of Colombia with regard to the implementation of feminist foreign policy. In the debate, both sides explored possibilities of cooperation between Colombia and the EU in international fora.

Conclusion

EU and Colombia have converging priorities, concerns and challenges in the area of gender equality and women's rights. Gender-based violence, including sexual violence and using rape as a weapon of war/conflict, as well as violence against elected women and women politicians are key issues at the forefront of civil society and government responses and interventions. The delegation expressed a firm solidarity with and support for women and girls in Colombia affected by gender-based violence. In terms of the current backlash against gender equality overall - against women, the LGBTIQ+ community and other groups in situation of vulnerability - that is taking place internationally including across the EU and Colombia, there is a shared experience in many cases. However, in terms of SRHR, the civil society and women's rights defenders-led "Movimiento Causa Justa" was successful in bringing significant changes at the policy level, with the historic Constitutional Court Decision in 2022 decriminalizing abortion during the first 24 weeks. Although practical and social barriers still restrict its access, it is clear that the experience of Colombia in terms of SRHR can be a successful way forward for other countries, including EU Member States. The expertise Colombia acquired on peacebuilding processes was also discussed in the context of how it can be of considerable value in relation to the unjustified war of aggression in Ukraine.