

LONDON | MAY 16, 2019

On 16 May 2019, academics from British and Colombian universities met in the Latin American and Caribbean Centre of the London School of Economics and Political Science in the third meeting of Embrace Dialogue Academia, to discuss the current state of the peace process in Colombia. The discussion highlighted a central preoccupation: **that the Democratic Centre political party is suffocating Colombia's chances for peace.**

The peace process is in crisis. The assassinations of social leaders and demobilised FARC members are unacceptable, and the government's response is simply to blame drug-trafficking. For those of us who have studied the history of Colombia, the current moment echoes the patterns of political violence against the Patriotic Union party in the 1980s, and we worry violence may increase around the coming local elections. **An emergent space for civil society peacebuilding had opened in the last decade in the context of the peace process, but is now closing again.** Transformations of the structures of drug-trafficking and criminality is fuelling violence in the regions, and the Duque administration has rejected the comprehensive approaches to tackling the drug issue created by the Peace Accord, prioritising fumigation and forced eradication. Together with poor economic support for the reincorporation of FARC ex-combatants, and lack-lustre implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Reform, **this means that a peace economy has not been able to take root in place of the war economy.**

An adverse international context, with Donald Trump in the White House, the swing to the right in Latin America, and the crisis in Venezuela, is facilitating the Democratic Centre's clear intent to re-polarise the country and undermine the peace process. **The official statements by party members and President Duque in reaction to the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are blatant attempts to reinforce an anti-peace emotional mindset and divide the country over an objective which should unite it: reconciliation after a long history of conflict.**

Embrace Dialogue Academia (EDA) brings together academics working on different aspects of the peace process in Colombia, via itinerant dialogues to share knowledge and analysis, and working together to enable practical impact. Academics from the University of London (University College London, the School of Advanced Studies, Queen Mary, the London School of Economics and Political Science and SOAS), the Universities of Bristol and Oxford, and the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira participated in the third seminar.

There is much worth defending. Implementation of some aspects of the Peace Accord continue, but conditions for implementation are increasingly negative. **We have high hopes for the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Truth Commission and the Unit for Searching for Disappeared People.** The members of these state institutions are working under great pressure to defend the most innovative transitional justice system in the world, and we note that they have taken the concept of “territorial peace” seriously in their institutional designs, including working with the Colombian diaspora. Amid multiple difficulties, courageous people and organisations across Colombia continue to organise and work for peace, but this is increasingly risky. The movement Defendamos la paz indicates the possibility of building a national political pact between the left, the centre and the right for peace.

The international community needs to open its eyes to this situation, and take stronger measures to call on the Democratic Centre party and the Duque administration to honour the commitments made by the Colombian state not only to the FARC and Colombian society, and enshrined by Colombian Constitutional law, but also to the world. **As British academics, we call on the British government on the occasion of the proposal of an Early Day Motion in the UK Parliament on peace in Colombia (EDM 2232) and the Foreign Affairs Committee’s Global Britain and South America Inquiry, to condemn the Democratic Centre’s suffocation of the peace process, and provide support to the transitional justice system, including their work with the Colombian diaspora in the United Kingdom.** We also encourage Colombians around the world to promote spaces of dialogue, to put peace on the agenda of ordinary Colombians, educating them about the peace process and broadening an informed debate, and counteracting the challenging efforts to undermine the peace process and polarize public opinion.

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