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On 28 May, academics from British universities met online for the ninth Embrace Dialogue Academia seminar, in partnership with UCL Institute of the Americas. The discussion centred on the possibilities of negotiations with the ELN.

The pandemic makes a peace process with the ELN unlikely in the short-term, as large-scale participation of civil society, a key condition for inclusive negotiations, is currently impossible. Possibilities for negotiations are further compounded by the deterioration in US-Cuba relations and the Venezuelan crisis, and the strained relationship between the High Commissioner for Peace, Miguel Ceballos, and the ELN delegation in Cuba. Yet meanwhile, the humanitarian situation since the end of the ELN's unilateral ceasefire is worsening in territories with ELN presence, requiring urgent attention, and the news of the arrival of US troops in Colombia to assist in counternarcotics strategies has caused fear of further militarisation and escalation of violence in these territories.

There are also opportunities in the current situation. Despite some media discourses which conflate the ELN simplistically with other criminal armed organisations, a broad consensus now exists that a separate peace accord is needed with the ELN for Colombia to end its armed conflict. In particular, the ELN's unilateral ceasefire, given the humanitarian alleviation it accorded, fostered increased support within the Catholic church for peace negotiations with the ELN. Former president Álvaro Uribe's public support to negotiations with the ELN is also positive, especially as the ELN has expressed desire for Uribe to be involved in future discussions.

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Overall, we stress the need for a peace process with the ELN, which needs to be part of a long-term state policy for peace, rather than a political issue of any given administration. Post-conflict reconstruction takes decades, requiring commitment from successive governments. In the current climate, we urge the Duque government and the ELN to focus on building localised humanitarian agreements, as requested by communities in Chocó and elsewhere, and in line with the overarching need during this pandemic to protect life above all else. We also call on the US government and other diplomatic missions and international agencies in Colombia to direct their support to implementing points one and four of the 2016 peace agreement on rural reform and illicit drugs, which include structural transformations to build sustainable peace, rather than privileging military counternarcotics efforts. Effective humanitarian agreements in regions with ELN presence could foster local civil society support, increase legitimacy of state institutions, and build virtuous cycles that could lead to a more favourable climate for longer-term negotiations in the future.

**Embrace Dialogue Academia (EDA) brings together academics working on different aspects of the Colombian peace process via itinerant dialogues to share knowledge and analysis, and work together for practical impact. Academics from University College London, the School of Advanced Studies, Royal Holloway (all University of London) and the Universities of Essex and Bristol participated in the ninth seminar.**

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this statement are product of a closed-door dialogue, and do not reflect the views of the institutions named.