Dag Nylander and Tove Gravdal:

*Out of the jungle. About the peace process in Colombia*

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# Preface

by Tove Gravdal

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, Norway has put great resources into international peace diplomacy. The results are difficult to measure, and one must be careful not to exaggerate the importance of Norwegian efforts. But in Colombia, Norway's presence was decisive for the government and the Farc guerrilla group entering into a historic peace agreement in 2016, after five years of negotiations in the Cuban capital Havana. Norway and Cuba were the guarantors of the process, which meant that they were always present at the negotiating table. Dag Nylander led the Norwegian work right from the early, trust-building phase until the intense final sprint, after a first peace agreement was rejected in a referendum. He participated in an existential and political drama full of unexpected and challenging events. The gallery of people was large, and the stumbling blocks were many in this exceptionally demanding peace process. But the Farc and Colombia's government reached a historic agreement, which has had an impact on the lives of millions of victims of the longest civil war of our time. It also laid the foundation for important changes in Colombia.

Dag and I have tried to put together the many pieces of the drama he participated in. We cannot include everything, because the process is too extensive and complicated, but we recount the peace negotiations from 2010 to 2016, seen from Norway's unique vantage point. The book's most important resource material is the notes Dag took along the way, in addition to conversations with 46 people who participated in the negotiations or were directly affected by them. Dag and I have conducted most of the conversations together, and some separately. We have used a number of open sources, the most important of which has been a ten-volume work on the peace process, published by Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace, which contains all key documents and events. We have not used the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' archive – where there is a treasure trove for researchers who want to scrutinize Norwegian peace diplomacy. The book was written by us together, but the first-person voice of the story, apart from the foreword, belongs to Dag. He was present on the inside of the most contentious peace process so far in our century, and this book is his recount of what happened.

Without the green light and active support from the Norwegian government, regardless of political colour, Dag could not have pursued peace diplomacy in Colombia. But without Dag, Norway would probably not have received the assignment as a guarantor country together with Cuba. It is not easy to describe how to achieve such trust, or how it was carried out, but our interlocutors in Colombia emphasized the importance of acting seriously, precisely, methodically and professionally. An important aim of this book is to document how Norwegian peace diplomacy takes place in practice.

The peace agreement between Colombia's government and Farc has been hailed from the UN's rostrum and regarded as a benchmark for all peace processes in the world. Norway, Cuba, Venezuela, the USA and the UN played different roles as supporting wheels in the peace process, where the Colombian government, the guerrilla group Farc and the many victims of the civil war were the main actors. All the roles were filled by individuals, and the hope is that the reader will be inspired by seeing what individuals can accomplish. It requires courage and perseverance to create peace, as well as the ability and willingness to make the right choices when the prerequisites are there. A certain attraction to adventure is also an asset, which this thriller from the Colombian jungle demonstrates.

Oslo, 15 January 2023

# Chapter 10 Crimes and Punishment

Leyner Palacios sensed trouble when a paramilitary force approached his village in the municipality of Bojayá in April 2002. Farc soldiers were nearby; now he feared that fighting would break out between the armed groups and that civilian lives would be lost. Palacios, who worked for the local church, went up the Atrato River to the provincial capital of Quibdó and asked the bishop and the local authorities for help. To no avail. The paramilitaries set up camp in the village of Bellavista, where Palacios lived with his wife and 12-year-old daughter. Palacios met the paramilitary commander in front of the village church and urged him to withdraw his men in order to prevent the civilian population from falling into the line of fire. As they spoke, fighting began in the neighboring village. The commander disappeared, and shortly afterwards he was killed in Farc's hail of bullets. In the early morning of May 1, fighting began in Bellavista.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Bullets rained down on the houses in the village throughout the day. Palacios and his family tried to shelter behind mattresses. But as the fighting drew closer, they fled out of the house, into the river, back up onto the land, towards the church. Many people had already taken refuge there, and Palacios took his family to a convent. They felt safer there, as the walls were made of cement, not planks like at home. The square in front of the church was filled with paramilitaries, and Palacios went there with a small group of local leaders to plead with them to back off. The armed men responded by shooting at them. Palacios ran back to the monastery and began to write down what he had witnessed. If everyone was killed, at least there would be some record of what had happened.

In the morning of May 2, they heard a loud explosion. Palacios went outside and saw a cloud of smoke rising from the church, where the roof had been torn away. Around the building lay torn heads and mutilated bodies, while the wounded dragged themselves along the ground in an attempt to save their lives. The fighting raged on; Palacios realized they had to escape. He and his family ran past the paramilitaries and into a house where a grenade had hit. More people joined them, they waved white flags, but were still shot at by both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries on their way down to the river. A mother was carrying her murdered child in her arms; they had to persuade her to put it down. Palacios ran back to the church, he tried to rescue the wounded, but had to give up and retreated back to the river. In a canoe they managed to reach the village on the other side. There, the Farc was in control. Palacios wanted to go back to help the survivors, but the guerrilla commander refused. The church had been hit at 10.45 am, and for hours afterwards the wounded lay helpless under a scorching sun that was later replaced by pouring rain. It was only the next day that the fighting subsided and Palacios was able to return to Bellavista. Body parts and corpses lay strewn. The traces of blood showed that many had sought refuge in the monastery and in the village infirmary. They might have been saved if they had received help. Palacios and other survivors collected remains and placed them in a mass grave.

79 people were killed in Bellavista, or 86, if you count the way African Colombians in Chocó province usually do, by including the fetuses in the womb. Palacios knew all of them, 28 were members of his own family. They were victims of a homemade grenade fired by the Farc against the paramilitaries, but which instead struck the church, hitting those who had taken refuge there. The Bojayá massacre was the single deadliest incident in Colombia's civil war, in which all the victims were civilians. Many of them were children.

Twelve years later, Farc leaders listened quietly and attentively as Leyner Palacios recounted the dramatic events at the negotiating table in Havana. In a large conference room, selected victims of Colombia's civil war sat side by side, with the Farc delegates on the right and the government delegation on the left. Opposite the victims, I sat with Cuban Rodolfo Benítez and representatives from the United Nations, the Catholic Church and the National University of Bogotá. The three institutions had selected 60 representatives of war victims. In the fall of 2014, they traveled to Havana in five groups of 12 people to witness how the armed conflict had affected them, their families and their communities.

For the first time in any peace process the victims of war were able to meet the parties face-to-face at the negotiating table. Already in the secret phase in 2012, the parties realized that somehow victims had to have a direct impact on the negotiations. The idea of inviting victims' representatives to Havana gradually evolved until it became concrete in 2014. The selection process was extremely challenging and the trade-offs were many. Who could be considered a victim of the conflict? Farc's killings and kidnappings were well known, but what about the many abuses committed by the military under the guise of fighting a terrorist organization? Should they also include victims of the displacements, robberies and executions caused by paramilitaries? It is well known from conflicts around the world that the history is written by those who monopolize the role of the victim. A just settlement of Colombia's armed conflict could not happen without including the crimes committed by all parties. But it was an almost impossible task to give over nine million victims a representative face at the negotiating table in Havana.[[2]](#endnote-2) When I was asked if Norway could take responsibility for selecting the victims, I immediately said no. Instead, I advised the parties to ask external actors to carry out the demanding selection process. The government and Farc should not choose the victims themselves, and they agreed that they should not influence who was selected.

When Iván Márquez learned about how the selection of victims was carried out in Bogotá, he came to me and expressed his concerns. The parties had strong opinions about who should represent the victims, and did what they could to ensure that the selection would support their version of history. The Farc wanted more victims of state and paramilitary abuses, while the government wanted more victims of guerrilla crimes. Both put pressure on the UN, the church and the university. Idun in Bogotá and I in Havana did our utmost to assist the UN, who led the complex work of making the victim delegations representative and acceptable to both parties. It was difficult for the UN chief, Fabrizio Hochschild, to please both the government side and Farc, no matter what choices he made. If Norway had taken on the task, we would have lost trust in both camps. Farc complained loudly about Hochschild, and in the government delegation, General Mora was at least as critical. In a meeting with Hochschild, he sarcastically referred to the Chilean as the UN viceroy in Colombia and expressed deep disagreement with the method he had used to select the victims.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Throughout the summer of 2014, the painstaking work of drawing up fair and representative victim lists continued. One week before the first group was due to arrive in Havana, it was still uncertain whether they would actually travel. The protocol for the trip was not yet in place, and Farc claimed that the government side through the media gave the impression that the delegation would consist only of victims of guerrilla abuses.

The last obstacles were eventually overcome and on August 15, 2014, the first twelve victims left for Havana. Leyner Palacios was part of this group, which received a lot of attention in the Colombian and international media. Bojayá was still a troubled area, with guerrillas and criminal armed groups fighting for control of smuggling routes and performed various shady operations in the jungles of Chocó. Palacios was already a well-known local civil society leader, and traveling to Havana made him visible in the national media as well. This made him even more of a target for assassins than he already was. The 2002 massacre had taught him that he could not count on the state for protection. If the military had taken their warnings seriously and deployed soldiers, the attack in Bellavista could have been averted. He had also observed, when government forces finally arrived in Bojayá four days after the massacre, that the military and the paramilitaries were cooperating. It was indeed the Farc's grenade that killed the most people in Bojayá, but Palacios believed that the army and the paramilitaries were partly to blame for the crime they had been subjected to.

Palacios waited until the last minute before he told his wife and daughter that he was going to Havana, he called them just before he got on the plane. They cried and begged him not to go. Palacios was also worried, but he was reassured by the reception at the airport, where Cuban and Norwegian representatives welcomed the victims and led them to the Farc and government delegates. He was amazed that they greeted him respectfully. He had never before been treated with respect by either Farc or government representatives. However, he was concerned when Farc's Pablo Catatumbo said he wanted to talk to him in private. What did the Farc want with him? Palacios said no.

Luz Marina Bernal was also part of the first group of victims. Six years had passed since her mentally retarded son had been killed by the military, as one of the many *falsos positivos*, those picked up on the streets, abducted and killed and then dressed up as guerrilla soldiers to embellish the army's statistics. A year had passed since six people had been convicted of the murder. Bernal felt the weight of all Colombian victims of violence on her shoulders when she arrived in Havana. The thought of those who had never been heard, who had been tortured and killed, gave her the courage to tell her story in front of the government and Farc. Bernal knew she was part of something historic.

On that August day in 2014, the parties in Havana heard heartbreaking stories from Palacios, Bernal and the ten other victims. One of the women was the widow of a Cauca parliamentarian who was kidnapped by Farc and executed after five years in captivity. One was the father of a young student who had been suspected of belonging to a Farc militia and killed by the police. One saw her brother, a parliamentarian, kidnapped and killed by Farc before her mother and another brother were stopped by the guerrillas and executed three years later. One belonged to the Wayúu indigenous group and had barely survived a massacre in which the paramilitaries had killed five women in her family. One was the father of one of 32 youngsters who disappeared and were later found killed by a paramilitary group. One was the sister of a woman who was forced into a car and disappeared without trace for three years until an officer revealed where her body was buried. A former municipal councillor testified how he had been forced to relocate because of threats from Farc. One was the son of a prominent Communist Party politician who was executed in 1989. One had been subjected to sexualized violence, forced displacement and persecution by armed groups because she fought for women's rights. One was the mother of a policeman who was murdered on post by Farc before she herself was displaced from her home.

Everyone in the room was deeply moved by the victims' stories. I looked over at both delegations. Hardy warriors sat crying. This was a turning point in the negotiations, the closest we had come so far to a point of no return. It became clear that the parties were not negotiating on behalf of themselves, but on behalf of the victims, both the nine million victims that the conflict had affected so far, and future victims. The responsibility for ending the war rested heavily on Márquez and de la Calle. The victims' stories also reminded me of the gravity of leading the Norwegian effort to help this peace process reach an agreement. During the lunch break, Leyner Palacios was seated with Farc's Iván Márquez and Colombia's former police chief Óscar Naranjo from the government delegation. He heard the two talk about the war, how their forces had fought each other, and how they would now resolve the conflict and stop killing each other. It was a watershed meal for Palacios; he began to believe that the parties really wanted to make peace in Colombia. He decided to accept Farc's repeated requests to talk to him. The guerrillas had a question: The Farc leadership wanted to apologize to the people of Bojayá for the 2002 massacre. How would the community respond?

Palacios brought the request with him from Havana to Bellavista, where he went from house to house asking what they thought about accepting an apology from Farc. The war was still raging, and the Farc had carried out an attack near Bojayá just weeks before. Still, nine out of ten said they were ready to listen to the guerrillas. But on certain conditions: The Farc had to stop collecting taxes from residents, clear landmines and end forced recruitment. In September, Palacios traveled back to Havana to deliver the response from the people of Boyajá. The Farc immediately accepted the terms. When Palacios returned from Havana for the second time, the villagers told him that something was happening: Mines were being cleared, and Farc's local commanders had been ordered to stop taxing and forced recruitments. Hope was kindled in the violence-torn community, and over the next few months Palacios took on the role of a commissioner for reconciliation, in Bojayá and the rest of Chocó province, and to the Farc in Havana. He became one of the main defenders of the peace process.

**Supporters of peace**

Prior to the victims' groups' travel to Havana in autumn 2014, the UN, the Church and the National University had organized regional meetings with victims in several Colombian cities. Before departure, the designated victims met in a hotel in Bogotá to get to know each other, and in Havana they were offered the opportunity to talk to a psychologist or priest. The victims were to be shielded from the media, and the hearings where they told their stories were closed. However, each group agreed on a statement that was shared with journalists after the hearing. In some cases, victims' groups continued to meet in Bogotá after the trip to Havana.

It was almost too good to be true: Victims met across political divides, listened to each other, shared horrific experiences and included the suffering of the other in the story of Colombia's national trauma. Ximena Ochoa was one such case, coming from a traditional cattle-herding family in the Huila region, where the Farc for many years had imposed taxes and kidnapped those who refused to pay. Ochoa's mother had been a hostage of the Farc, and during one of the regional victims' meetings she advocated that only those affected by the guerrillas' crimes should travel to Havana. Before leaving, however, Ochoa got to know Camilo Umaña Hernández, a young lawyer who was 12 years old when his father was killed by paramilitary agents on the orders of state actors. Ochoa had some difficulty walking, so Umaña supported her, not knowing that she believed he was not eligible to be a victim. But after getting to know Umaña, she changed her mind and recognized that there were victims of state abuses and that they too needed to be heard.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Umaña and Ochoa both belonged the third group of victims, who met with the parties in Havana on October 2, 2014. They traveled with a former police officer who had been held hostage by the Farc for twelve years until he was freed in a military operation in 2010. The Farc delegation strongly disapproved of his presence. The guerrilla leaders believed that soldiers and police officers could not be considered victims – they were prisoners of war, just like Farc's own soldiers who had been captured by the enemy on the battlefield. He had also been treated well, according to Farc. However, his family had no idea if he was alive or his whereabouts for much of his captivity.

The twelve victims were nervous about meeting the parties in Havana. But in preparation, they agreed to begin the ceremony by singing a traditional song. One of the women was from the Pacific coast and she taught them a song that African-Colombians used to sing when someone had died. The twelve victims met the parties at the negotiating table singing – it calmed their nerves.

Umaña had prepared himself thoroughly and handed out a copy of his testimony to everyone in the room before he spoke. His father, Eduardo Umaña, had been one of Colombia's most high-profile human rights activists in the 1990s. As a lawyer, he defended political prisoners, trade union leaders and people seeking missing family members. He gained much insight into how the military cooperated with the paramilitaries, and he knew that this knowledge put his life at risk. Nevertheless, he refused to have bodyguards – he did not want protection from state security authorities, who were behind abuses against clients he was defending. One Saturday in April 1998, three men entered his office, shot and killed the lawyer. After some investigation, the Attorney General informed the slain man's father, a well-known sociology professor, that a state agency was behind it, so no one could be prosecuted. Several years later, a paramilitary leader stated that his men had carried out the murder on the orders of military intelligence. No perpetrators have ever been found or punished.

As he told his story, Umaña noticed General Mora of the government delegation looking at him skeptically over his glasses. When he got to the point where he accused the Colombian state for being responsible for his father's death, Mora threw his glasses on the table and looked elsewhere.

The stories of the 60 victims provoked strong reactions on both sides of the table in Havana. Sometimes people were so sickened by the gruesome details that they had to leave the room. One woman testified how the paramilitaries had beheaded her sisters and then used their heads as footballs. She herself had been pregnant and had been raped by the murderers. Another put his prosthetic leg on the table as he outlined how dangerous it was to move around in mined landscapes. A former governor described how he was kidnapped by Farc while on a mission for the UN and then released eight years later. He was not out for revenge, the former governor, whose name was Alan Jara, stressed. Nor was he overly concerned that those responsible should go to jail. He just wanted to make sure that no one would ever again experience what he did.

Jara and Umaña were important supporters of the peace process, as were most of the victims. But some were skeptical, and one of them told Umaña that she felt used, that the victims' visit was a legitimization of a contentious peace process. “Of course we are being used. But we have been used so many times to wage war. So it is okay to be instruments of peace”, Umaña replied.

The attendance of the victims left a deep impression on both delegations in Havana, especially on the Farc. Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, justified his murder of a pawnbroker by claiming that he had acted in the best interests of his fellow human beings. Similarly, the Farc had defended its crimes by pointing out that they were necessary evils on the road to a just society. Slowly but surely it began to sink in that they had inflicted great suffering on other people, and the meetings with those affected accelerated the process. Iván Márquez apologized to one of the victims for the Farc killing her mother and two brothers. “The apology came from the heart”, Constanza Turbay said in an interview a few weeks later.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Four of the five victims delegations had been to Havana when General Alzate and his two associates were captured by the Farc in the Chocó province. The incident tore a huge gash in the veneer of reconciliation that had developed around the peace process, and its enemies were able to gloat that it was madness to trust anything the Farc said. The general's disappearance also slowed down the process that Leyner Palacios and the Farc were undertaking in Chocó, namely to formalize the guerrillas' apology to the victims in Bojayá.

Fortunately, the extraction of the general and his swift resignation put the peace process back on track, and the last delegation of victims met with the parties in Havana on December 16. The following day the Farc declared a unilateral ceasefire without setting an end date. The long autumn marked by the victims was wrapped up in a Havana hotel, where Farc leaders met with several survivors of the Bojayá massacre. Iván Márquez, Pablo Catatumbo and Pastor Alape made the first official apology for what had happened in Bellavista on May 2, 2002, and promised to come to Bojayá to ask the entire community for forgiveness. The ceremony was led by Colombian priests, and on the floor of the meeting room the victims unfolded a large white tablecloth with pictures of the 79 people killed. They lit candles, sang and several spoke silently about their suffering. The climax of the ceremony came when the Farc commanders and several of the victims held hands as they stood around the pictures of the dead. Loud sobs could be heard from both perpetrators and victims, and none of us in the room were able to hold back our tears.

The Farc attempted to hold a similar ceremony with the respective families of the three Americans killed by the guerrillas in February 1999, but it proved difficult to arrange. The authorities in Washington told me that Farc's apology would have to include the Americans who had been held hostage for several years, which the guerrillas were not willing to do. The relatives were also reluctant to travel to Havana. The plans for a reconciliation ceremony between Farc and the Americans thus fell through.

**Truth commissions**

Despite the visits of the five victims delegations, negotiations on how Colombia should deal with the crimes reported by the victims were slow. One option was to create a truth commission, and several experts came to Havana to brief the parties on how such a mechanism works. A truth commission is not a judicial body that investigates or prosecutes individuals. Its purpose is to identify crimes committed in a conflict, during a dictatorship or during violent periods of a country's history, in order to establish the most credible and verifiable account of what actually happened. Argentina and Chile pioneered truth commissions in the 1980s to uncover abuses during military dictatorships. Since then, a number of countries have used similar models, including Nepal, Indonesia, Kenya and Ireland. Norway established its first truth and reconciliation commission in 2018 – it investigated injustices committed against Sami, Kven and Norwegian Finns minority populations and released its report in June 2023.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The most famous truth and reconciliation commission was established in South Africa in 1995, after the fall of the apartheid regime. It was chaired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and operated for seven years. The Commission received testimonies from 21 000 victims of abuses committed by both the apartheid state and the liberation movements. It had a mandate to grant amnesty to perpetrators who admitted what they had done, and the Commission received over 7000 applications. 850 people were granted amnesty and several hundred cases were transferred to the judicial system. However, few trials have been conducted.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The parties at the negotiating table in Havana agreed early on that they would set up a truth commission. Its purpose was to establish “a pure truth, as solid as the Great Wall of China”, as Iván Márquez put it. The Farc wanted the commission to be established while negotiations were still ongoing. But the government opposed this, arguing that a truth commission had to be part of a comprehensive agreement on transitional justice. It could not be set up independently of the rest. The parties compromised by asking a group of academics to write a preliminary report on the history of violence in Colombia.

**Norway's red line**

The peace talks in Havana were Colombia's process, where the role of Norway was to push, encourage, listen, and help smoothen the path towards an agreement. I could provide input and be an interlocutor, but not question the agreements reached by the parties. But there was one exception. Early in the peace process, I made it clear to the parties that there was one red line: As a facilitator and guarantor country, Norway could not sign a peace agreement that implied impunity for the most serious war crimes and crimes against humanity. Norway was one of the most active countries in the negotiations on the 1998 Rome Statute, which forms the basis for the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. Since the establishment of the ICC in 2002, Norway has been one of the Court's main supporters. 123 countries have joined the Rome Statute, which requires all countries to punish what are known as international crimes, meaning genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. If a country does not punish those responsible, they can be tried by the ICC.

Farc and the government agreed that some form of legal settlement was needed after the war. But finding out how to organize such a judicial system was the hardest nut to crack in the peace negotiations. Should investigations, prosecutions and trials take place within the existing judicial system in Colombia? Should a special court be established? Should the judges be Colombian or foreign, or both? How should the investigation be organized? Who should be punished – only those who had directly participated in the crimes, or the entire chain of command? What about criminal liability for politicians and military leaders? If the punishment was not to be imprisonment, what could it be? In the New York group, these discussions had been ongoing since it was established in 2013. The group met regularly and gained new members, including Spanish lawyer and communist Enrique Santiago. He had been involved in the preparatory work that led to the arrest of Chile's former dictator Augusto Pinochet in London and his extradition to Spain in 1999. He had also made a name for himself as an international law expert and defender in several high-profile international conflict cases. Several Farc leaders knew Santiago from the 1990s, when he provided legal assistance to their family members who had gone into exile in Spain. Among them were Timochenko's daughter and her mother, as well as one of Pablo Catatumbo's sisters. I first met the Spanish lawyer in 2013 and invited him to join the New York group along with a Colombian lawyer, Carlos Alberto Ruiz. Both became Farc's legal advisers, with consultancy fees paid by Norway.

The Farc also wanted help recruiting a third adviser, Álvaro Leyva. He had a remarkable level of trust with the guerrillas, given that he had been a prominent conservative politician and had belonged to Colombia's power elite for many years. He became acquainted with Farc leaders as early as 1983, when he was a senator and participated in the first peace process between the government and the guerrillas. That process failed, but Leyva maintained connections with Farc leaders and had been particularly close to Alfonso Cano. He was involved in all the attempts of negotiations and dialogue with Farc and ELN in the 1990s. Leyva was an old acquaintance of Juan Manuel Santos, but when the secret contact was established between the president and Farc in the fall of 2010, it was without his direct involvement. Still, he knew about the dialogue – Cano had told him about it, with instructions not to reveal what was going on.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The first time I met Leyva was in Bogotá in 2007. He had just returned to Colombia after eight years in exile. He had been accused of laundering money through art sales, the Colombian authorities had issued an Interpol warrant for his arrest, and Leyva was granted political asylum in Costa Rica. He nevertheless traveled to Spain, where he was arrested in 2002 and risked extradition to his home country. There, like the Farc leaders' family members, he received legal assistance from Enrique Santiago. In 2006, he was acquitted by the Colombian Supreme Court, Leyva returned home and ran for president of Colombia the same year.

When I met him, Leyva said that when the time was right, Norway could play an important role in negotiations with both the ELN and Farc. As soon as the peace negotiations with Farc became public in 2012, we resumed contact and met in Bogotá and Havana. He was articulate and often presented original political and legal analysis. Those on the government side wanted to keep him as far away as possible from the negotiating table in Havana. But he had the ear of Farc, and that spoke in favor of pulling him in. Initially, Norway chose to pay for Leyva's flights from Bogotá to Havana, where he met with the Farc delegation. In 2015, both he and Enrique Santiago would play even more important roles in the peace negotiations.

**The nature of reconciliation**

In the fall of 2014, we made a lot of helicopter trips in and out of the jungle. Not only to retrieve released hostages, but to transport Farc delegates to Havana, and to return others who had already been there. The task of the returning guerrilla leaders was to spread the message of the peace process down the ranks and to build understanding of the compromises that their revolutionary leaders had to make in the negotiations.

Farc commander Edilson Romaña was brought to Havana in October.[[9]](#endnote-9) He had been operating in the Meta province, where he became notorious for what the Farc leadership called the *pescas milagrosas* – the miracle captures, a series of kidnappings carried out during the tourist season and Easter holidays between 1998 and 2002. The method was to stop cars and kidnap people along the main road to Villavicencio, the capital of Meta, about four hours' drive southeast of Bogotá. Using extortion, robbery and ransom demands for the kidnapped, he raised large sums of money for the Farc.

After arriving in Havana, Romaña was walking with Iván Márquez in the corridor outside the Palco offices when they bumped into Frank Pearl from the government delegation. “Dr. Pearl, say hello to Romaña”, Márquez said. “I know who Romaña is, of course. You kidnapped my father-in-law”, Pearl told the new arrival. Pearl used to name his wife's grandfather as his father-in-law. “Who is your father-in-law?” asked Romaña. “La Chiva, the journalist”, Pearl replied, using the famous editor's nickname, a slang word for an extraordinary news item. “It was not me who kidnapped him, I was not in San Juanito”, Romaña replied. “How do you know he was freed in San Juanito if you weren't there?” replied Pearl, who was now furious, but added: “I know what you did and you know what you did, but it doesn't matter anymore. We are here to make sure things like that don't happen again”.

Romaña remained silent for a few seconds before saying: “How is your family doing?” Pearl said they were doing well, and Romaña responded by asking him to send them his regards. A few days later, Pearl conveyed the guerrilla commander's greeting to his wife. “Who does he think he is?” she thundered. “I think that was the only thing he could say to apologize”," Pearl said. Back in Havana, he then delivered a greeting to Romaña from his wife. General Mora, a member of the government delegation, also had previous dealings with Romaña. He had led a special force fighting the Farc in Meta province before becoming army commander in 1998 and then defense chief. He was responsible for the operation in August 2000, during which Pearl's wife's grandfather was released. 14 years later, Mora and Romaña, the commanders on each side, sat at the same negotiating table.

**The government's imprisonment plan**

After the harrowing meetings with the victims, and after the Farc declared a unilateral indefinite ceasefire in December 2014, the conditions seemed to be in place for further progress in the negotiations. But the government delegation began 2015 by provoking the Farc. Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Jaramillo traveled from Bogotá to Havana without a scheduled round of negotiations and without informing the guarantor countries and met with the guerrilla negotiators. The two presented a plan for post-war justice, which included the Farc leadership selecting some commanders to go to prison. The idea was that someone would serve time on behalf of the entire guerrilla.

Farc reacted with anger and total rejection. It was out of the question for them to sign a peace agreement that sent their people to prison. Timochenko had now arrived in Havana; he was not at the negotiating table, but as Farc leader he played a key role in shaping the guerrilla’s strategy and positions. Following the government's proposal, the Farc delegation held long internal meetings in *casa de piedra* to discuss what to do next. During one of them, on February 3, 2015, Timochenko appeared to fall asleep – he never used to do that – and the others realized something was wrong when he suddenly fell to the floor. At the hospital ten minutes away, Cuban doctors found that the Farc leader had suffered a massive heart attack. If he had not received medical treatment so quickly, he would have died. He remained in hospital for a month, further delaying the progress of the negotiations. The rest of the Farc delegation would not make commitments without the leader's blessing.

The government was impatient and Farc was frustrated. One morning I knocked on Pablo Catatumbo's door and entered his bedroom, where light curtains fluttered in the warm Caribbean breeze from the open window. The Farc veteran sat on the edge of the bed in his underwear, sighing heavily. Catatumbo feared the whole process was about to be derailed. The government insisted that the guerrilla leaders had to serve sentences in prison, he said. The pressure was too hard, and Catatumbo doubted there was any point in continuing. “Be patient. Keep calm until you find a solution”, I replied. Catatumbo was an important figure in the Farc delegation, a more compromising counterweight to Santrich and Márquez. But internal rifts, Timochenko's heart attack and government pressure came at a high price for the literature lover in Farc's ranks. Still, he got dressed and geared up for new tug-of-war at the negotiating table, both that day and in the days that followed.

A diplomatic heavyweight came to Havana in February 2015 to meet with the parties to the peace process and help pushing it forward. Kofi Annan had been the UN Secretary-General for eight years and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001. As head of the world body, he had built up considerable moral authority, including by criticizing the superpower United States for invading Iraq in 2003. This had earned him enemies, particularly among US Republicans, but he enjoyed respect in much of the world. In the years following his retirement as Secretary-General in 2006, he mediated conflicts in Kenya, Syria and Myanmar, and the parties to the Colombia process had high hopes for a meeting with the experienced Ghanaian diplomat.

But his contribution was disappointing. Farc delegates were skeptical when they learned that Annan would spend several days in Colombia before arriving in Havana. They feared that he would be heavily influenced by government positions. After the meeting between Annan and Farc at the famous Hotel Nacional in Havana, I spoke to an irate Santrich in the hotel lobby. “Annan pushed us hard, showing a lack of objectivity and little understanding that abuses had also been committed by the government side”, he said. When Annan then sat down with both parties, Márquez emphasized that it was out of the question for anyone from the Farc to spend a single day in prison.

The guerrilla leaders were particularly unhappy with Annan's press conference in Havana, where journalists were mainly interested in learning what the former UN chief thought about prison sentences for the Farc. Annan tried to be balanced, saying that this was a matter to be left to the judiciary and that if Colombia did not meet its responsibilities, the International Criminal Court would intervene. Before the press conference Humberto de la Calle and Iván Márquez had agreed to sit on the podium with Annan between them, but leave it to him to answer questions. Márquez was very uncomfortable sitting there with no opportunity to respond.

The next day I had breakfast with Annan in his hotel room. Perhaps he felt that the meetings had not been successful, and he asked me how the Farc delegates had perceived his visit. I answered as honestly as I could, despite sitting opposite the former UN Secretary-General, my diplomatic role model: “They were reasonably happy with the meetings and very unhappy with the press conference”, I said, knowing how upset they were in the Farc camp. Annan attributed this to the journalists' questions and wondered why the Cubans had not scripted the press conference better. The visit did not contribute to progress at the negotiating table and Annan was never invited back to Havana.

In the stalled negotiations, Farc announced in February 2015 that the minimum age for guerrilla soldiers would be raised from 15 to 17.[[10]](#endnote-10) This was a small step in the right direction. Since the beginning of the peace process, the government had demanded that the Farc end the recruitment of child soldiers and send minors to school rather than using them for guerrilla warfare. But the Farc had denied that there were children in its ranks, and if any of their soldiers were underage, they had chosen to join them voluntarily, according to the guerrilla leadership.

In March 2015, President Santos responded to Farc's unilateral ceasefire by ordering the military to suspend all air strikes for one month. This effectively meant that for the first time during the peace process, the parties had ceased fire simultaneously. More than three years had passed since the secret negotiations began in Havana and almost a year had passed since the latest partial agreement had been signed. Rounds of negotiations began, ended, and no decisive steps were taken to resolve the thorny issue of justice and punishment for the war crimes. The parties realized that if the negotiations were to continue as up until now, one agenda item at a time, Santos would be finished as president before a peace agreement was ready. They therefore set up a sub-commission for the end of conflict, the fifth of the six agenda items from the 2012 Framework Agreement. This meant that the parties worked in parallel on two difficult issues: how to end the war and how to punish all the crimes committed.

**New attacks**

At dawn on April 15, 2015, ten government soldiers were killed by Farc guerrillas outside the small town of Buenos Aires in Cauca province in the southwest of Colombia. 18 were wounded. Initial reports suggested that the soldiers were sleeping in a school building, making the attack a clear violation of the four-month-old Farc ceasefire. But later the military reported that the troop was on patrol when it was fired upon and attacked with explosives. However, the Farc claimed that the guerrillas had acted in self-defense.[[11]](#endnote-11) “The government is trying to provoke attacks from us”, Iván Márquez claimed when I spoke to him. The Farc leadership in Havana did not know about the attack until it happened, and it was a reminder of the risks in any peace process: The leaders negotiating a peace deal never have full control of the soldiers on the ground.

Santos immediately lifted the ban on air strikes that he had imposed a month earlier, while General Mora responded by resigning as a member of the negotiating delegation in Havana. Again, like before, Santos refused to grant it. Probably he needed Mora more than ever; the attack on the soldiers in Cauca renewed criticism of the peace process, particularly from the military and the right, led by Álvaro Uribe. Mora's signature on a peace agreement could stem the tide of opposition – if only an agreement could be reached. In May, the government carried out several deadly bombing raids against Farc targets. 26 guerrillas were killed in one of them in the Cauca province, two of them we knew from the guerrilla delegation in Havana. They had returned to Cauca in December 2014 to carry out peace training in their own ranks. Idun had accompanied one of them, Emiro Jiménez, back to Colombia by plane and helicopter. She had bought an orange pillow in Havana, which she intended to take back to her family in Bogotá. Jiménez commented on Idun's pillow and said it was nice. “You can have it, you probably need it more than I do”, Idun replied. The young commander was delighted with the gift from the Norwegian diplomat. Five months later, he was killed.

The army's bombing raids led the Farc to lift the unilateral ceasefire the guerrillas had imposed in December. By the end of May, the mood at the negotiating table was again rather somber, while a number of new people arrived in Havana to meet the delegations. Among them were the members of the New York group, who met separately with the delegations and provided input into the negotiations on the post-war justice system. The meetings did not go well. Morten Bergsmo of the New York Group was surprised by some of Farc advisor Álvaro Leyva's ideas. They were not in line with international criminal law, Bergsmo told Farc, and he was absolutely right. The guerrilla representatives, who two years earlier had come to trust Bergsmo, responded with deep skepticism, wondering whether the New York group was a tool of President Santos. The government delegation, for its part, did not attach much importance to the talks with the international criminal justice experts.

I went from meetings of the New York Group to the Gender Commission, which on 25 May had a meeting with Zainab Bangura, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Early the next morning, I rode my bike to Iván Márquez' house and told him I worried about the state of the peace process. Márquez was surprised and seemingly unconcerned. “People do not understand the connection between what is happening on the ground and what is happening here in Havana”, I pointed out. With the Colombian media reporting daily about fighting, it became more difficult for the population to believe that real peace negotiations were taking place.

In order to help the parties out of the crisis created by the flare-up in hostilities, Cuba and Norway initiated a timetable for some quick progress at the table. The first step was a public statement by the guarantor countries on May 27, in which we warned that the wave of violence was jeopardizing the process. We urged the parties to continue discussions on outstanding issues, including on the establishment of a mutual and final ceasefire.[[12]](#endnote-12) The current round of negotiations was extended and then, in line with the plan, the parties released pieces of information to strengthen public confidence in the progress of the peace process. They announced that they had agreed to establish a truth commission as soon as a peace agreement was reached and presented a demining pilot project.[[13]](#endnote-13) Furthermore, they announced that the UN and UNASUR would be invited to the table for advise on a ceasefire agreement.

The Colombian people were not the only ones wondering about the state of the negotiations. “The international community is asking why there is no progress”, said Foreign Minister María Ángela Holguín when she attended her first plenary session on May 29. Holguín was an experienced politician and diplomat, and now Santos had asked her to join the negotiating delegation while also carrying out her duties as a minister. She was a driving force and the right person to bring a new dynamic to the process. But her arrival created some friction within the government team, since Holguín's ministerial position upset the balance of power, and because she had a more informal style than Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Jaramillo. Santos had learned that there was minimal social interaction between Farc negotiators and his own emissaries in Havana, which he wanted to rectify. Invite one of the commanders to a restaurant, the president instructed Holguín.

On the very first night, she invited Farc's Pastor Alape out to dinner with her and Óscar Naranjo, the former police director. When Holguín picked up the check, Alape joked that he would pay the next time at Harry's Bar, a popular restaurant in Bogotá. Holguín concluded after dinner that the Farc leaders were mentally done with the war and were already making plans for life in peacetime. She believed that much time could have been saved if the government delegation had gotten to know their counterparts at the negotiating table better.

Norwegian People's Aid was tasked with leading the demining project agreed by the parties in June 2015. The pilot was to be carried out in two locations, one in the province of Antioquia, the other in Meta. The Norwegian organization had a long history and a good reputation with demining, especially in Africa, and I had been eager for it to get the assignment. I should have inquired more thoroughly whether it was the right choice. The NPA had a brutal encounter with Colombian reality. The project involved working closely with the military and Farc to identify and clear mines, and for the Norwegian deminers it was not easy to relate to and lead professional actors in these well-established institutions. It was also new to them to clear mines while the conflict was still ongoing, in parallel with the peace process. This required a high level of impartiality and balance, and missteps were hard to avoid, both physically and politically. Nevertheless, the pilot helped to build trust between the parties, who were able to solve tasks together on the ground. This was a good lesson for later when the old enemies had to implement a ceasefire, disarmament and demobilization of Farc soldiers.

**Commission of Jurists**

In June 2015, President Santos traveled to the Oslo Forum, where he praised Norway for its contribution to bringing the peace negotiations with Farc further than ever before, and where he announced that he would step up the peace negotiations in Havana.[[14]](#endnote-14) He did so by reaching an agreement with the Farc to establish a second sub-commission to address the issue of post-war justice. The new commission would consist of six jurists, of which the Farc and Santos would each appoint three. It would meet in Havana, but would not be part of the established negotiating delegations.

This was a new slap in the face for Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Jaramillo, who first had to accept that the foreign minister was given a dominant role at the negotiating table and was now completely sidelined. They had been negotiating with the Farc for three years and the tug of war over transitional justice had been going on for the past year. Jaramillo and de la Calle knew the issues inside out, and now completely new people were supposed to negotiate the most complicated part of the peace agreement. By creating this sub-commission, Santos undermined the authority of his own envoys in Havana, which the Farc delegation took note of.

The commission of jurists would become an important arena for the Farc's two advisers, the longtime Farc connoisseur Álvaro Leyva and the Spanish communist Enrique Santiago, who, together with a Colombian human rights lawyer, Diego Martínez, were designated as the guerrillas' representatives. Santos had appointed two former leaders of Colombia's Constitutional Court, Juan Carlos Henao and Manuel José Cepeda, as well as an American professor, Douglass Cassel. These six met for the first time on July 27 in casa 23, the Norwegian house in Laguito. The government representatives were new, while the three representing Farc were familiar with the dynamics of Havana and the many intricacies of the peace process. I observed the first tentative and informal exchanges across the table in casa 23 and found that the Farc delegates had a significant advantage. The government lawyers were skilled, and Henao and Cepeda in particular, had highly relevant experience, but the Farc lawyers were way ahead of them in the race.

Santiago played a crucial role in the commission of jurists. He was exceptionally skilled and benefited from the fact that he had discussed various ideas in the New York group, which he then tested with the Farc. An uninvited guest, Jesús Santrich, also appeared at the first meeting in casa 23. He was unable to hide a smile and a certain triumph in his eyes behind his dark sunglasses, over the fact that the Farc had succeeded in outmaneuvering de la Calle and Jaramillo.

In the summer of 2015, it was impossible to go on vacation. I had long since given up trying to keep track of how many vacation weeks and days off I had in store. I could feel my patience was wearing thin as the peace process with the Farc dragged on, and simultaneously, the ELN and the government failed to come up with a framework agreement. But I had my unique diversions, like when uniformed female guerrilla fighters with colorful make-up invited me to salsa and merengue in a Farc camp deep in the jungle on a tropical July night. I had gone there straight from ELN negotiations in Ecuador to take part in the extraction of a soldier the Farc had captured a few days earlier. Elisabeth, who now had other duties in the Foreign Ministry, was back on a short assignment in Colombia, and we went together to Puerto Asís in the far south, and from there to the Farc camp, where we were welcomed by an honor guard of several hundred soldiers under the command of Joaquín Gómez – the man who 18 years earlier had hosted Ambassador Utheim. I was given a pair of classic Farc boots as a gift and shook many hands before Gómez chaired a meeting where he briefed the foot soldiers on transitional justice.

After dinner and the subsequent dance, I went to sleep in a simple bed of wooden logs under a tent canvas. It was the kind of bed Alf Onshuus had slept on during the months he was held hostage by Farc in 2008. Next to the makeshift shelter was a meter-deep pit that I was told to throw myself into if the camp came under attack. Even though there was now a ceasefire and the zone we were in was demilitarized in line with the protocol for the hostage-taking, the Farc maintained its emergency procedures. I fell asleep to the sound of the soldiers guarding the camp, communicating with each other by imitating animals. Almost imperceptibly, the code messages blended in with the rest of the jungle's cacophony.

**First summit**

The Commission of Jurists met regularly after its first meeting in casa 23 at the end of July, ending with two days of intense work at the home of government representative Henao in Bogotá, where Santos paid the six lawyers a visit.[[15]](#endnote-15) On September 19, the Commission's proposal for Colombia's post-war judicial system was ready, and this framework allowed the parties to agree to the first summit of the peace process between President Juan Manuel Santos and Farc leader Timochenko. Since the partial agreement on drugs was reached 16 months earlier, no visible progress had been made in the negotiations, at least not visible to the majority of Colombians, and the summit was intended to remedy this. Pope Francis visited Cuba on September 19–22, and President Santos had hoped that the head of the Catholic Church could gloss the announcement of the Colombians' near-deal by his presence. But the Vatican declined, saying it was too risky to bless an unfinished deal while the civil war was still going on.[[16]](#endnote-16)

The summit was set for Wednesday, September 23, 2015, and Timochenko thought that at the meeting he and Santos would discuss a possible date, a final deadline, for signing a peace deal. He did not know that Santos had made it a precondition for coming to Havana that the parties had agreed in advance on the final date. Santos had proposed, through his delegation, to give the rest of the negotiations six months, but Farc representatives in Laguito had refused to accept a deadline. Humberto de la Calle called Santos late Tuesday night, September 22, with the answer, after which Santos canceled his trip to Havana. A few minutes later, however, de la Calle called back. Márquez had turned around when they learned that Santos would not be coming, and now the Farc delegation agreed to finish the negotiations by March 23, 2016.

Timochenko arrived in Havana early Wednesday morning. He had suffered from dengue fever and was still not fully recovered, but he showed up for the meeting with Santos in Havana. Cuban leader Raúl Castro welcomed the two before leaving the longtime enemies to their own. The atmosphere was tense and close to a breaking point when Timochenko asked what Santos meant by this deadline?

The date has already been set, Santos replied. “No, we were going to discuss whether we should have an end date and I disagree”, Timochenko said, much to the president's annoyance. “I came here because the date is set, I didn't come to talk nonsense”, Santos said. The two summoned the negotiators to hear what they had agreed the night before. Márquez and de la Calle came in and confirmed that they had reached an agreement, which the Farc delegation had failed to tell Timochenko. The guerrilla leader did not like what he heard and told the president that the Farc would be blamed if the deadline was not met, which he wanted to avoid. “That will not happen. Now we are in the same boat and we cannot let it sink”, Santos replied.[[17]](#endnote-17)

The mutual irritation was obviously put aside when Santos and Timochenko, with Cuban leader Raúl Castro between them, met the press corps afterwards. All three were dressed in white shirts and the mood was expectant. Santos and Timochenko, both a little shy by nature, seemed excited and slightly nervous, buoyed by the historic moment. Rodolfo Benítez and I read out the parties' joint declaration, which stated that they had agreed to establish a truth commission and a special tribunal to investigate and sentence those responsible for the most serious war crimes.[[18]](#endnote-18) The parties had also agreed to establish a compensation scheme for the victims and committed to finalize a final peace agreement within six months. Every peace process has an iconic image, often of a handshake, a symbol of progress and hope. The most famous picture of the Colombian process was taken this Wednesday as the ceremony ended, people applauded, and Santos stood up and held out his hand to Castro. Timochenko also extended his hand, and Castro grabbed them both and brought them together, placing both his hands over theirs as he looked smilingly into the camera. It was a golden moment for Colombia, and just as golden for Raúl Castro.

Behind the scenes, however, a great drama was unfolding. The document presented by the commission of jurists was not a definitive description of an agreement over transitional justice. Humberto de la Calle, who signed the document on behalf of Santos just before the ceremony, wrote “document in progress” next to his name. The Farc insisted that the commission of jurists had been given full powers, while the government side maintained that the main delegations had the final say. We were not finished yet, although the ceremony gave the impression that the issue of transitional justice was now settled.

**To Bojayá**

After the historic summit, reality again hit the negotiating delegations. Many details remained to be hammered out before a partial agreement on victims was ready. Both sides questioned what Timochenko and Santos had actually announced, and media statements added fuel to the fire. “Everything is taking off in different directions”, I wrote in my notebook after one of many meetings in casa 23, where delegations often sat down for small-scale negotiations. In addition to the agenda item on the victims, we were deep into the discussion on the next item, ending the war. We called in a Colombian media advisor and brought the parties together for lunch at the Norwegian residence to help them improve and coordinate their message to the public at a time when so much was at stake. It was no big success. Of the two parties, the government in particular felt that it had little to learn about media management.

On December 15, 2015, the partial agreement on victims was finally concluded. It contained a detailed description of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which was a complete framework for post-civil war justice. When it came to punishment, the agreement stated that no amnesties or pardons would be granted for the most serious crimes. Persons found guilty of such crimes and who did not admit responsibility were to be sentenced to ordinary prison terms of between 15 and 20 years. Those who told the truth and admitted responsibility could be sentenced to between five and eight years of “effective restriction of freedom and rights”. This meant that the guilty could escape imprisonment and it would be up to the Special Tribunal to decide what sanctions to impose instead.

The agreement on the victims was historic, but there were still many obstacles to deal with. In Colombia, several of the victims who had traveled to Havana received death threats. The UN's Fabrizio Hochschild reported a number of such threats, and victims' spokespersons announced in early 2015 that they had received over four hundred death threats in five months.[[19]](#endnote-19) The closer we got to a final peace agreement, the more the opposing forces mobilized. I had my doubts: Could Colombia really manage to set up a special tribunal, could the truth about all the violence be found? Would the victims experience justice and reparations? And how would Uribe and his supporters react to the fact that it was possible to avoid prison sentences, even for the most serious crimes?

These doubts remained with me as I traveled to Bojayá in December 2015. A year had passed since the reconciliation ceremony in a Havana hotel between the Farc and a few of the victims of the 2002 massacre. Now the guerrilla leaders were making good on their promise to hold a ceremony in the community that had been so badly affected by their gunfire. As we flew over Chocó province, below me I saw verdant, sharp valleys, as if carved by their creator with a sword. Glittering rivers flowed through the lush landscape. This must be the most beautiful place in the world, I thought, but so marked by brutality. The people who lived here lacked health care, proper schools and security in their daily lives. Could the peace process in Havana change that?

When we arrived in Bellavista, chairs were set up in front of the now restored church where the ceremony was to take place. Pastor Alape from Farc and Sergio Jaramillo from the government entered the church together and stayed inside for a few minutes on their own. An indigenous group offered a prayer before local actors reconstructed the 2002 attack in a moving play. Survivors recounted their experiences. With tears in his eyes, Alape apologized on behalf of Farc and assured that the guerrillas now wanted peace and that the victims would be compensated. For the government, the time had not yet come to apologize on behalf of the state. That would come at a later date, Jaramillo indicated in his speech in Bojayá.

# Afterword

by Dag Nylander

Colleagues and friends at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been interviewed for this book, as well as reading and commenting on the manuscript. Some of them were part of the Norwegian team during the peace process, while others held important positions in Oslo or at Norwegian foreign missions. Their views have been invaluable. Some of them are mentioned by name in the text, others are given as sources in the footnotes. The same applies to all those we have spoken to in Colombia and internationally. A few did not wish to be named.

Editor-in-chief Nina Castracane Selvik in Spartacus deserves a special mention for enthusiastically supporting the idea of a book, and for guiding the work with knowledge and curiosity.

Journalist, author and my co-author Tove Gravdal has been the most important person in the writing process. Her journalistic pen and systematic work with a large material and many sources has been decisive for this eventually becoming a book.

Gratitude also to my friends Erik Flågan and Peder Nærbø who opened their doors when my involvement in Colombia was at its most uncertain and I needed fresh perspectives.

My deepest gratitude goes to my two beloved, Pernian and Dorothea Sofie, who have allowed me to neglect family duties while the writing was at its most intense. Little did I know during my many extended stays abroad in connection with the peace process in Colombia that such treasures would await me at home in Norway.

Oslo 15 January 2023

# Important dates in Colombia's peace process

1964:

Two guerrilla movements emerge: The Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia – the People's Army (Farc) and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

1984–1987:

Ceasefire and first attempt at peace negotiations with the guerrilla groups.

1991–92:

Peace negotiations in Venezuela and Mexico.

1999–2002:

Peace negotiations between the Farc and the government in San Vicente del Caguán.

2000:

The US is stepping up its military aid to Colombia with Plan Colombia.

February 2002–July 2008:

Íngrid Betancourt is a Farc hostage.

January–July 2008:

Norwegian-Colombian Alf Onshuus is a Farc hostage.

2006–2009:

Juan Manuel Santos is the Minister of Defense.

March 2008:

Farc's founder and leader Marulanda dies. Alfonso Cano takes over.

January 20, 2009:

Barack Obama becomes president of the United States.

August 7, 2010:

Juan Manuel Santos is sworn in as president of Colombia.

September 7, 2010:

Santos initiates a secret dialogue with the Farc leadership via a courier.

March 3, 2011:

First secret meeting between Farc and the government.

15.–16. July 2011:

Second secret meeting between the Farc and the government.

20-21 July 2011:

Third secret meeting between the parties.

November 4, 2011:

Alfonso Cano is killed by the military. Timochenko (Rodrigo Londoño) becomes leader of the Farc.

22–23 January 2012:

Fourth secret meeting between the Farc and the government.

February 15, 2012:

First retrieval of Farc delegates by helicopter.

24 February–26 August 2012:

Ten secret negotiation rounds in Havana.

13.–15. April 2012:

American summit in Cartagena. Close to a breakdown in the negotiations.

August 26, 2012:

A framework agreement for formal negotiations is signed.Agreement to negotiate on six points.

October 18, 2012:

The formal negotiations are launched by the parties at a press conference in Hurdal in Norway.

November 19, 2012:

Formal peace negotiations begin in Havana.

May 26, 2013:

The first partial agreement is concluded, on land reform.

20 June–27 October 2013:

The American Kevin Scott Sutay is a prisoner of the Farc.

November 6, 2013:

Second partial agreement is concluded, on political participation.

May 14, 2014:

Close to a break in the peace negotiations.

May 16, 2014:

A third partial agreement, on drugs, is finalized.

June 15, 2014:

Santos is re-elected president.

Autumn 2014:

Five delegations of victims of the conflict meet the parties at the negotiating table.

9–25 November 2014:

Two soldiers are being held prisoners by Farc in Arauca.

16.–30. November 2014:

A general in the army is a prisoner of the Farc in Chocó, which triggers a crisis in the negotiations.

December 17, 2014:

Several measures to improve relations between the United States and Cuba launched. Diplomatic relations to be restored.

19–26 December 2014:

A soldier is a prisoner of the Farc in Cauca.

December 20, 2014:

Farc declares unilateral ceasefire with no end date.

March 10, 2015:

Santos announces that all airstrikes cease for one month.

April 15, 2015:

10 soldiers are killed and 18 wounded by Farc in Cauca.

May 21, 2015:

26 Farc soldiers are killed in an airstrike in Cauca.

May 27, 2015:

Norway and Cuba ask the parties to step down the acts of violence.

7–19 July 2015:

A soldier is being held hostage by Farc in Putamayo.

12 July 2015:

A sub-commission of six jurists is set up to negotiate a solution for transitional justice.

September 23, 2015:

President Santos and Farc leader Timochenko meet for the first time in Havana.

December 6, 2015:

Ceremony in Bojayá where Farc apologizes to victims of a massacre in 2002.

December 14, 2015:

A fourth partial agreement is concluded, concerning the victims.

25 January 2016:

The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2261 to establish an unarmed UN force in Colombia to monitor the ceasefire and laying down arms as soon as a peace agreement is concluded.

February 2016:

Crisis in the negotiations when four members of the Farc's negotiating delegation visit their own forces in La Guajira.

20–22 March 2016:

President Barack Obama visits Cuba. Secretary of State John Kerry meets Farc.

June 23, 2016:

Agreement on ceasefire and weapons.Heads of state, the UN secretary-general and Norway's foreign minister take part in the signing ceremony in Havana.

August 24, 2016:

The final peace agreement is ready.A small ceremony in Havana.

September 13, 2016:

The UN Security Council adopts the mandate for the observer mission in Colombia.

17.–23. September 2016:

Farc members approve the peace agreement.

September 26, 2016:

Signing ceremony in Cartagena.

2 October 2016:

Referendum on the peace agreement.

3 October–12 November 2016:

Negotiations in Bogotá and in Havana on a revised peace agreement.

October 7, 2016:

The Nobel Committee announces that President Santos has been awarded the Peace Prize.

November 8, 2016:

Donald Trump is elected president of the United States.

November 24, 2016:

New peace agreement is signed in the Teatro Colón in Bogotá.

December 10, 2016:

President Santos receives the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.

August 15, 2017:

The UN-led effort to collect Farc's weapons has been completed.

2017:

The Special Court of Peace (JEP), the truth commission and a commission responsible for searching for missing persons are established.

2018:

Ten former Farc leaders take seats in Congress.

August 2019:

Farc's negotiator Iván Márquez resumes the armed struggle.

January 2021:

JEP indicts Farc leaders for war crimes.

June 2022:

The truth commission's report is presented.

# Key persons

Colombians have both father's and mother's surname with the matronym (mother's surname) at the end. We have largely chosen to omit this surname.

**From Colombia, the government side:**

Juan Manuel Santos

president 2010–2018

Sergio Jaramillo

national security adviser 2010–2012, head of delegation in the secret phase, high commissioner for peace 2012–2017

Humberto de la Calle

head of delegation September 2012–November 2016

Frank Pearl

High Commissioner for Peace February 2009–July 2010, member of the government's negotiating delegation from January 2012 to November 2016

Alejandro Eder

met Farc in the first secret meetings in 2011, member of the negotiating delegation until November 2013

Jaime Avendaño

met Farc in the first secret meetings in 2011, participated in the negotiations throughout the process. Main responsibility for organizing transport of Farc members and released hostages

Elena Ambrosi

head of the technical team at Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace, involved in the negotiating delegation from start to finish

Jorge Enrique Mora

general, member of the negotiating delegation from autumn 2012 to autumn 2016

María Angela Holguin

Minister of Foreign Affairs 2010–2018, part of the negotiating delegation from May 2015

Enrique Santos

President Santos' older brother, member of the negotiating delegation in the secret phase, then in and out

Oscar Naranjo

Colombia's police director 2007–2012, member of the negotiating delegation from autumn 2012 to autumn 2016

Nigeria Rentería

High Commissioner for Gender Equality, member of the delegation from November 2013 to October 2014

María Paulina Rivero's

responsible for human rights in the Ministry of the Interior, member of the delegation from November 2013 to autumn 2016

**From Colombia, the Farc guerrillas:**

Timochenko – Rodrigo Londoño – Timoleon Jimenez

Farc's leader from November 2011 until the guerrilla was disbanded in 2017

Mauricio Jaramillo – el Médico

Farc's chief negotiator in the secret phase from February to August 2012

Iván Márquez

Farc chief negotiator October 2012–November 2016, resumed armed struggle in May 2019

Jesús Santrich

member of Farc's delegation from October 2012, resumed the armed struggle in May 2019, killed in May 2021

Rodrigo Granda

met with government representatives in the exploratory phase (March 2011–January 2012), included in Farc's negotiating delegation from February 2012

Andrés París

met the government's representatives in the exploratory phase (March 2011–January 2012), member of the Farc delegation from February 2012 to October 2014

Marco León Calarca

member of the Farc delegation from February 2012

Pastor Alape

member of the Farc delegation from October 2014

Victoria Sandino

member of the Farc delegation from April 2013

Tanja Nijmeijer

member of the Farc delegation from November 2012, originally from the Netherlands

Sandra Ramírez

member of the Farc delegation from February to August 2012, the widow of Farc founder Marulanda

Pablo Catatumbo

led the initial dialogue with President Santos from September 2010, joined the Farc delegation in Havana from April 2013

Carlos Antonio Lozada

member of the Farc delegation in Havana from October 2014

Edilson Romaña

member of the Farc delegation in Havana from October 2014

Joaquín Gómez

member of the Farc delegation from December 2014

Viviana Hernandez

member of the Farc delegation from October 2012

Miguel Angel Easter

one of Farc's founders, membert of the Farc delegation from October 2012 to October 2014

Simon Trinidad

Farc commander who was extradited to the USA in 2004, where he is still imprisoned.

Manuel Marulanda – Pedro Antonio Marín – Tirofijo

founded Farc in 1964, led the guerrillas until his death in March 2008

Alfonso Cano

Farc leader from March 2008 until his death in November 2011

Mono Jojoy

leading commander, killed in September 2010

**ELN:**

Juan Carlos Cuellar

imprisoned contact person at ELN

Antonio Garcia

ELN's negotiating leader, the guerrilla's leader from summer 2021

**From Norway:**

Day Nylander

special envoy to Colombia 2010–2016

Elisabeth Slåttum

member of the facilitation team from June 2011 to November 2014

Vegar Brynildsen

member of the facilitation team from March 2012 to October 2012

Day Nagoda

employee at the Norwegian embassy in Havana, part of the facilitation team from summer 2012 to summer 2016, worked later with the peace process at the embassy in Bogotá

Rita Sandberg

deputy leader of the facilitation team from August 2012 to August 2016

Idun Tvedt

member of the facilitation team from January 2013 to December 2016, from January 2014 at the embassy in Bogotá, where she also followed up the agreement in 2017.

Ingrid Kvammen Ekker

member of the facilitation team from January 2013 to August 2014

Hilde Salvesen

special advisor for gender equality, member of the facilitation team from April 2014 to December 2016

Torleif Kveim

employed at the embassy in Caracas, then in Bogotá from May 2013, working mainly on the ELN process

Iver Williksen

employee at the embassy in Havana, member of the facilitation team from January 2013, continued working with the peace process at the embassy in Bogotá from September 2016

Jonas Gahr Støre

Minister of Foreign Affairs October 2005–September 2012

Espen Barth Eide

Minister of Foreign Affairs September 2012–October 2013

Børge Brende

Minister of Foreign Affairs October 2013–October 2017

**From Cuba:**

Carlos Fernández de Cossío

responsible for Colombia's peace process at the Foreign Ministry 2012–2013

Abel Garcia

member of the Cuban facilitation team 2012–2016

Rodolfo Benitez

responsible for Colombia's peace process at the Foreign Ministry 2013–2016

Iván Mora

ambassador in Bogotá, later responsible for Colombia's peace process at the Foreign Ministry

Bruno Rodríguez

foreign minister from 2009

Raúl Castro

president 2008–2018

**From Venezuela:**

Hugo Chávez

president 1999–2013

Nicolás Maduro

Minister of Foreign Affairs 2006–2013, President from 2013

Ramón Rodríguez Chacin

envoy to the peace process, former head of intelligence and minister of the interior

Roy Chaderton

envoy to the peace process 2012–2016, former foreign minister

**Others:**

Álvaro Uribe

President of Colombia 2002–2010, leader of the opposition to the peace process with the Farc

Iván Duque

President of Colombia 2018–2022, allied with Uribe

Alvaro Leyva

Colombian conservative politician with close ties to Farc and ELN, adviser to Farc during the negotiations, foreign minister from August 2022

Iván Cepeda

Colombian senator from the far left party, adviser to the Farc and messenger between the Farc and Santos

Enrique Santiago

Spanish lawyer and politician, adviser to Farc

Leyner Palacios

human rights activist, victim of massacre in Bojayá in May 2002

Camilo Umaña

son of executed human rights lawyer, jurist and specialist in international law, Colombia's Deputy Minister of Justice from August 2022

Luz Marina Bernal

mother of Fair Leonardo Porras, who was killed by the Colombian military in January 2008

Ximena Ochoa

daughter of Celmira Sánchez, who was kidnapped by Farc in 1990

Ingrid Betancourt

Farc hostage 2002–2008, presidential candidate in 2002 and 2022

Guillermo Cortés Castro

prominent editor, kidnapped by the Farc for seven months in 2000, the grandfather of Pearl's wife

Alf Onshuus

Norwegian-Colombian, Farc’s hostage January–July 2008

Ana Maria Aldana

Onshuus' wife, Farc’s hostage January–March 2008

Yezid Arteta

former Farc commander, now in exile

Morten Bergsmo

expert in international criminal law, director at the Center for International Law Research and Policy (Cilrap) in Florence, Italy

Bernie Aronson

US special envoy to the peace process in Colombia from March 2015

**UN:**

Jean Arnault

UN envoy to the peace negotiations from August 2015, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) from March 2016 to December 2018, led the force that monitored the disarmament of the Farc

Fabrizio Hochschild

UN coordinator in Colombia 2013–2016

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   <https://www.hchr.org.co/informes_tematicos/informe-de-la-mision-de-observacion-en-el-medio-atrato-bojaya/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Number of victims from the Truth Commission report 28 June 2022:

   <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/las-victimas> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mora, page 291. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ochoa later became a strong opponent of the peace process and she voted no at the referendum over the peace accord in October 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. El País 11 September 2014: «Forgiveness is the pillar of peace says victim of FARC». [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The commission was appointed by Stortinget in 2018 and finalized its report in June 2023. <https://uit.no/kommisjonen> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Information from United States Institute of Peace: <https://www.usip.org/publications/1995/12/truth-commission-south-africa> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Information from Álvaro Leyva. He was appointed Colombia’s foreing minister in August 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Romaña’s real name was Henry Castellanos Garzón. He took up arms again in 2019 and was killed in Venezuela in Desember 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
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16. Santos, page 331. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Sources are Timochenko 25 February 2022, Santos 25 November 2021 and Santos, side 331–333. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
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    Chapter 11: The United States, Cuba and Colombia’s Peace

    Events are recounted with the help of conversations with Iván Cepeda (Bogotá 25.11. 2021), Børge Brende (4.10.2022), Enrique Santiago (3.11.2022) and Bernie Aronson (phone call 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)