

Colombia



In 2016, the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed the Final Peace Agreement, linking the country's peace process to comprehensive rural reform, reintegration of former combatants and addressing illicit crop cultivation, among other issues. The Peace Agreement is hailed as a landmark achievement for ending the armed conflict in Colombia. It includes reference to environmental and biodiversity protection, respect for environmental and human rights, and sustainable development, as components of the peace process. Nevertheless, implementation of the Peace Agreement can give rise to challenges for environmental protection and climate action in Colombia. Comprehensive rural reform, a core component of the Peace Agreement, may increase natural resource extraction, contribute to environmental degradation and accentuate climate vulnerabilities. Furthermore, numerous non-state armed groups (NSAGs) continue to drive violence, insecurity and displacement, heightening the vulnerability of the conflict-affected population to climate change and environmental degradation. This Fact Sheet focuses on Colombia's peace process since 2016 and how climate-related security risks interact with specific provisions of the Peace Agreement.

- Rural reforms have moved slowly, while environmental degradation and the effects of climate change undermine livelihood security and increase vulnerabilities, especially in rural areas.
- Climate-related disasters contribute to internal displacement, particularly of marginalised afro-Colombians, indigenous Colombians and women and girls. People living in informal settlements are particularly exposed to landslides, floods, and other hazards.
- Weak governance contributes to environmental degradation and accentuates climate vulnerability, while also facilitating illegal economies that are strongly linked to armed conflict.
- Implementation of the Peace Agreement – in particular, comprehensive rural reform and the resultant changes in natural resource use – can inadvertently exacerbate environmental degradation and accentuate climate vulnerabilities.

The implementation of the Peace Agreement may receive greater support from the new Colombian Government, which took office in August 2022 and has set out an ambitious approach for implementing the Peace Agreement and negotiating with the remaining armed groups. Yet, challenges remain. To address climate-related security risks, the Colombian Government and its local and international partners should ensure that post-conflict development does not accentuate climate vulnerabilities and should use the landmark Peace Agreement to guide climate and environmental action for sustained peace.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- ▶ The Government of Colombia should work with national institutions like the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM) to predict the effects of climate change on regions where comprehensive rural reforms are planned or underway, in order to reduce the risk of accentuating or creating new climate vulnerabilities.
- ▶ A national taskforce on climate-related security risks, made up of relevant government ministries, climate scientists, peacebuilders and civil society activists (including from marginalised groups) can support coordination and information-sharing in addressing the compound risks of climate change and conflict in Colombia.
- ▶ The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia should take note of how cross-cutting climate-related security risks affect the broader context of the peace process as well as the implementation of the Final Agreement, including provisions on the reintegration of FARC members and protection of environmental activists.
- ▶ Comprehensive rural reform is intended to address deep rural–urban socio-economic divides while protecting the environment and advancing climate action. To avoid creating new vulnerabilities or accentuating existing ones, including climate vulnerabilities, the government and its international and local partners should maximise the alignment of climate mitigation, adaptation and peacebuilding in the Final Agreement.

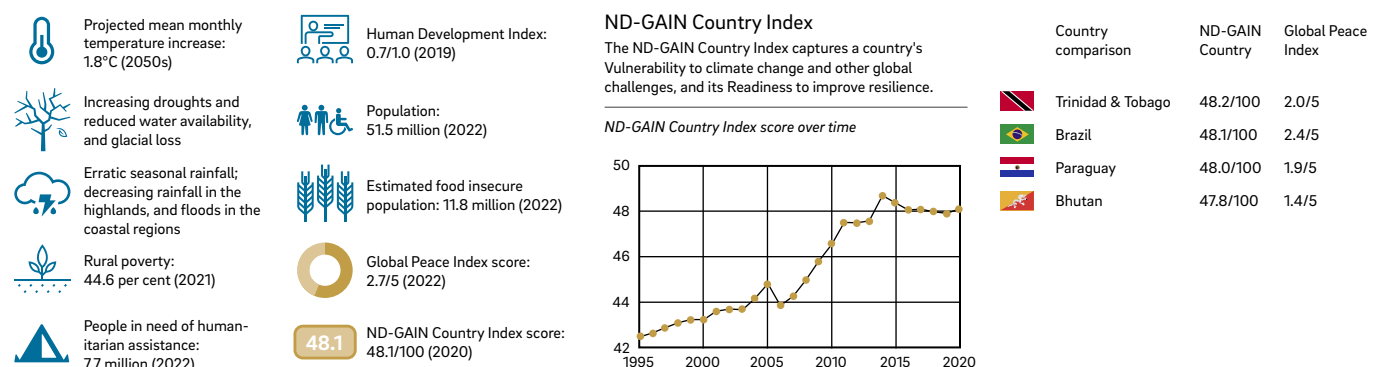


Figure 1. Data sources: World Bank Group. (2021). [Climate Risk Profile: Colombia](#). Colombia Reports. (2021). [Poverty and inequality](#). Humanitarian Needs Overview (2022). [Colombia](#). UNDP. (2020). [Human Development Report: Colombia](#). UNFPA. (2022). [World Population Dashboard: Colombia](#). WFP. (n.d.). [Hunger Map Live: Colombia](#) Vision of Humanity. (2022). [Global Peace Index: Colombia](#). Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative. (2020). [ND-GAIN Rankings](#).

Climate Trends and Projections

Colombia has Pacific and Caribbean coastlines, eastern lowland plains, a south-eastern Amazon basin and high-altitude Andes mountains. The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) creates variable inter-annual weather. El Niño results in droughts and higher temperatures, whereas La Niña brings floods and colder temperatures.

Temperature: Mean annual temperatures range from 13°C to 27°C across altitudes.¹ In the past twenty years, maximum temperatures have risen by 1°C and 0.6°C per decade in high and low altitudes respectively.² Under a high emissions scenario, average monthly temperatures are projected to increase by 1.8°C in the 2050s, with slightly higher increases between December and January, particularly in north-eastern Colombia.³

Precipitation: Average annual rainfall varies between 6mm and 7 000mm in the Pacific coast and the Andean interior, and below 500mm in the north and southwest. Under most scenarios, average yearly rainfall is projected to decrease in the highlands and increase in the Amazon basin and coastal regions by the end of the century.⁴

Socio-ecological Vulnerabilities

Colombia's varied geography is exposed to various climate trends. Increased surface run-off from snowmelt and extreme rainfall in degraded forest ecosystems lead to more landslides and floods in the central Andean highlands. Rising seas, increasing storm surges and hurricanes threaten coastal areas with floods. The Amazon region is vulnerable to high-intensity rainfall, causing floods, landslides and soil erosion, as well as to extended periods of drought.⁵

The effects of climate change are unevenly distributed. Some 85 per cent of Colombians live in areas exposed to natural and climate-related disasters, but their climate vulnerability depends largely on socio-economic status, access to resources, gender and more. Socio-economically marginalised groups, including subsistence farmers, indigenous and afro-Colombian populations and internally displaced people (IDPs), are particularly vulnerable. The gendered impacts of climate change also intersect with class, race and ethnicity, affecting indigenous, afro-Colombian, displaced and other marginalised women differently.⁶ Other factors informing climate vulnerability include urban-rural socio-economic divides, highly uneven distribution of land and

access to resources, regional political instability and weak state governance in conflict-affected regions.

Climate-related Peace and Security Risks

Climate change, conflict and post-conflict development in Colombia are intricately related. Conflict undermines resilience to the effects of climate change and can accelerate environmental degradation. Climate change and environmental degradation can undermine post-conflict development and increase the risk of new or renewed conflict. This Fact Sheet uses four interrelated pathways to navigate the complex relationship between climate change, peace and security, and how these intersect with provisions of the Peace Agreement: (1) livelihood deterioration, (2) migration and mobility, (3) military and armed actors, and (4) political and economic mis-management.⁷

Livelihood Deterioration

The Peace Agreement calls for comprehensive rural reforms which include developing rural areas with little or no state presence, closing rural-urban development gaps, protecting the environment, and ensuring the right to food.⁸ Rural development and the associated improvement of rural livelihoods can increase communities' adaptive capacity and resilience; including to the effects of climate change. However, almost five years after the Peace Agreement's ratification, a mere 4 per cent of planned rural reforms had been completed.⁹ During the same period, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change had become more pronounced, affecting rural livelihoods and food security.

Climate change is altering the availability of water, land, forests, and other natural resources, affecting livelihoods throughout Colombia. By 2050, rising temperatures, soil erosion, desertification and flooding could affect over half of Colombia's farmland, reducing the yields of 80 per cent of crops.¹⁰ The effects of climate change and environmental degradation deepen livelihood and food insecurity, which in turn may exacerbate local tensions and erode the prospects for peace and security.¹¹ Chocó Department on the west coast is among the hardest hit by climate change and violent conflict. As the livelihoods of mainly indigenous and afro-Colombian populations are eroded, these communities become increasingly vulnerable to NSAGs, whose operations can accelerate internal displacement and migration.¹² Women and girls are among the most vulnerable to climate-related security risks

Observed Average Annual Precipitation of Colombia for 1901-2021

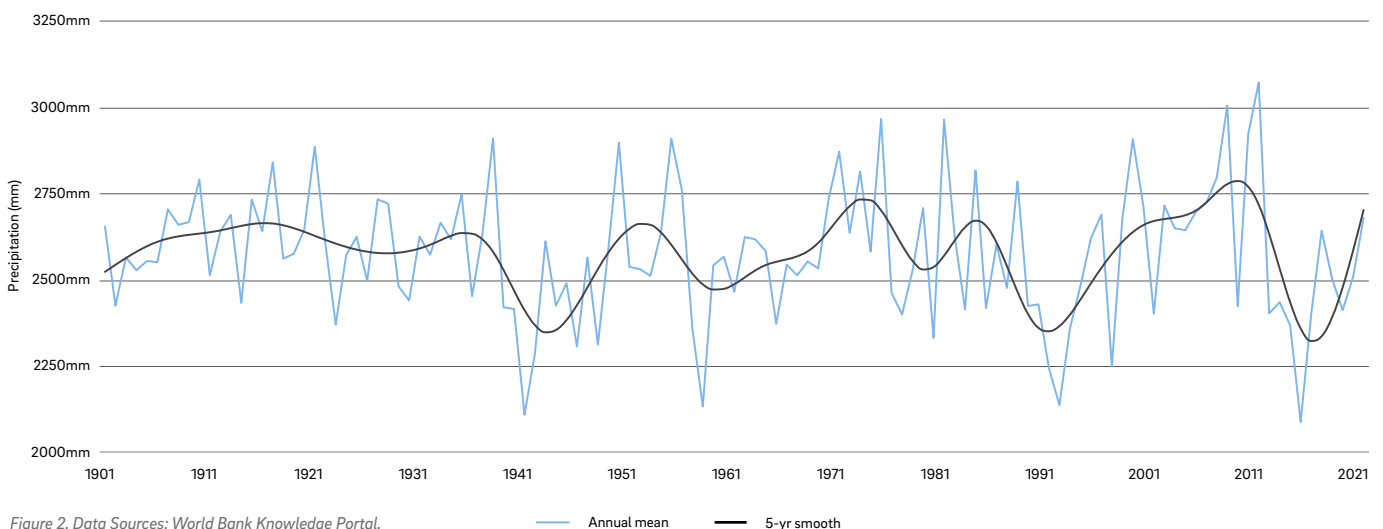


Figure 2. Data Sources: World Bank Knowledge Portal.

¹ World Bank. (2021a). Climate change knowledge portal Colombia. [Current climate: Climatology](#).
² World Bank, 2021a.
³ World Bank Group. (2021b). [Climate risk profile: Colombia](#).
⁴ World Bank Group, 2021b.
⁵ World Bank Group, 2021b.
⁶ Smith, J.M. et al. (2021). [The climate-gender-conflict nexus](#). Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.
⁷ Mobjörk, M. et al. (2020). [Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers](#). Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

⁸ [Final agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace \(peace agreement\)](#). (2016). Section 1.
⁹ Crisis Group. (2021). [Deeply rooted: Coca eradication and violence in Colombia](#). Latin America report no. 87; Isacson, A. (2021). [A long way to go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years](#). Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).
¹⁰ Smith et al., 2021.
¹¹ Smith et al., 2021.
¹² ACAPS. (2021). [Colombia regional needs analysis: Chocó](#); Delgado, C. (2020). [The World Food Programme's contribution to improving the prospects for peace in Colombia](#). Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

because of gender-based differences in time-use, assets, access to credit, decision-making powers and treatment by formal and informal institutions.¹³

Extreme concentration of land ownership is among the core drivers of armed conflict in Colombia that rural reform seeks to redress. In 2016, 84 per cent of small-scale farms occupied less than 4 per cent of all productive land.¹⁴ Land concentration is associated with large-scale farming, which contributes to both climate change and climate vulnerabilities. Cattle ranching is a significant driver of land clearance for pastures: it accounted for 45 per cent of deforestation in Colombia, in 2017.¹⁵ Monocultures like industrial palm-oil cultivation lead to soil depletion and biodiversity loss. Land concentration pushes marginalised agro-pastoralists into peripheral areas, where land clearance for farming contributes to deforestation and land degradation, including in national parks.¹⁶ Combined, livestock, agriculture and changing land-use account for 59 per cent of Colombia's CO₂ emissions.¹⁷

Comprehensive rural reform has the potential to increase the resilience of rural communities, reduce livelihood and food insecurity, and decrease rural-urban inequalities. However, rural reforms have moved slowly, while environmental degradation and the effects of climate change continue to undermine livelihood security and increase vulnerabilities. To ensure that rural reforms are climate-sensitive, the Government of Colombia should work with national institutions like IDEAM to forecast how climate change will affect regions tapped for rural reforms.

Migration and Mobility

The Peace Agreement makes numerous references to the rights of displaced Colombians, including provisions for restoring their land rights, granting land to displaced persons and encouraging voluntary return, as part of comprehensive rural reform. It recognises the specific vulnerabilities of Colombians who have been displaced by conflict, and the need to address structural inequalities through rural development.¹⁸ Conflict-related violence is the main cause of forced displacement, often from rural to urban areas. Natural and climate-related disasters also contribute to internal displacement: between 2008 and 2021, 525 disaster events displaced 3.6 million people.¹⁹

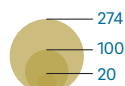
Many displaced Colombians live in informal settlements near major urban areas, often characterised by high rates of poverty, violence, NSAG presence and recruitment. Moreover, these settlements are exposed to disasters, and lack the resources or capacities to adapt and develop emergency planning.²⁰ The effects of disasters are accentuated by weak state governance; a recent survey found that 318 of 557 disaster-affected municipalities are under de facto NSAG control.²¹

Converging inequalities and vulnerabilities, conflict, displacement and climate change demonstrate that compound risks cannot be addressed in silos. Effective responses to climate-related security risks in Colombia will require coordination, information-sharing and coherent policies and programming across national ministries, multilateral

Armed Violence and Deforestation

Colombia

Armed Violence
Battles, violence against civilians and explosions Fatalities (Jan 2018 – Aug 2022)



Tree cover loss
2000 – 2020



Urban areas



Rivers

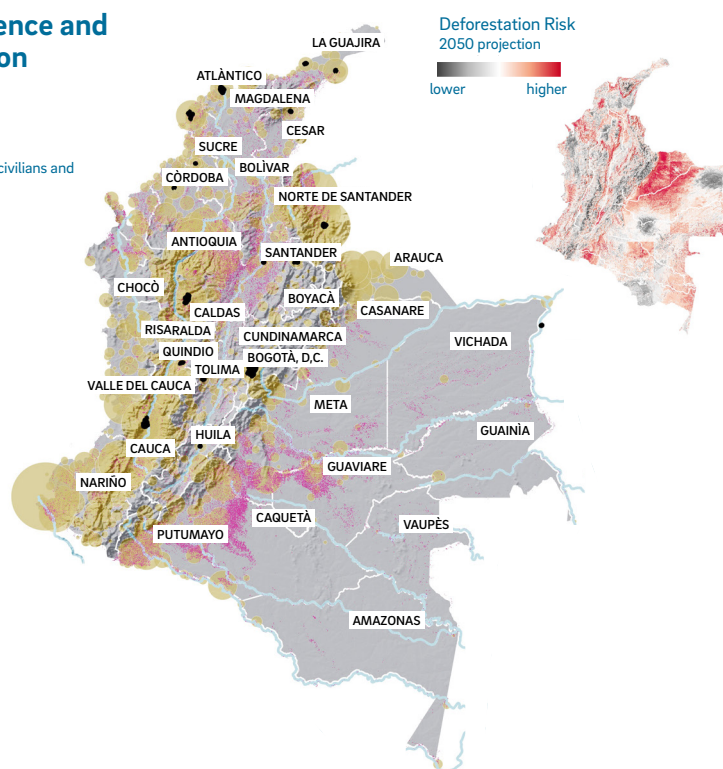


Figure 3. Data sources: ACLED, GFC, Natural Earth & Bastin et al. 2019

organisations, bilateral donors and more. A national taskforce on climate-related security risks, with representatives of government ministries, climate scientists, peacebuilders, and civil society activists, including representatives from marginalised groups, can support this aim.

Military and Armed Actors

Another pillar of the Peace Agreement is the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of FARC combatants. Economic and social reintegration provisions foresee opportunities for former combatants to participate in environmental protection and recovery, as well as de-mining efforts.²² At the time of ratification, almost 14 000 combatants laid down arms, but numerous NSAGs have remained active. In areas under their control, the co-optation of land, rivers and other resources accentuates vulnerabilities by limiting natural resource availability and livelihood security. For some, NSAGs can offer an income.²³ Several hundred persons have been killed by these groups, and unknown numbers have joined their forces.

NSAGs have strong links to the illegal economies in Colombia. These activities contribute to environmental degradation and exacerbate the effects of climate change. Coca cultivation leads to deforestation, and processing coca into cocaine requires large amounts of chemicals. Between 2000 and 2014, an estimated 750 000 metric tons of chemicals were used and disposed of in Colombia's forests.²⁴ Illegal mining operations use highly toxic chemicals, including cyanide and mercury, which kill the micro-organisms in gold mining rivers, rendering them sterile.²⁵ NSAGs also charge tariffs for buying and selling forested land, and sometimes incentivise deforestation to open new trafficking corridors.²⁶

¹³ World Bank Group, 2021b.

¹⁴ Oxfam. (2016). *Unearthed: Land, power and inequality in Latin America*.

¹⁵ Lema, S. & Kleffmann, J. (2019). *Linking climate change and peacebuilding in Colombia through land access*. Climate Diplomacy.

¹⁶ García, J.H. & Slunge, D. (2015). *Environment and climate change management: Perspectives for post-conflict Colombia*. Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change.

¹⁷ IDEAM et al. (2021). *Tercer informe bienal de actualización de Colombia a la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas para el cambio climático (CMNUCC)*.

¹⁸ Peace agreement, 2016, section 1.

¹⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2022). *Country profile: Colombia*.

²⁰ UN OCHA. (2022). *Colombia: Humanitarian needs overview 2022*.

²¹ UN OCHA, 2022.

²² Peace agreement, 2016, section 3.2.2.6.

²³ Delgado, 2020.

²⁴ Cárdenas, J. et al. (2021). *Climate-driven recruitment and other conflict dynamics in Colombia*. UNU Centre for Policy Research.

²⁵ Unpublished findings from fieldwork in Choco Department, Colombia, 2019.

²⁶ Cárdenas et al., 2021.

Weak state governance in conflict-affected regions accentuates local climate vulnerabilities. Communities in NSAG-controlled territories are at risk of displacement and confinement due to military operations, restrictions on freedom of movement and access to fields and hunting grounds, and higher levels of food insecurity. NSAGs have also targeted community activists who advocate for implementing the Peace Agreement's provisions on access to services, land reform and environmental protection.²⁷ Since 2016, more than 400 activists have been killed, and thousands more threatened, in violence that affects indigenous Colombians disproportionately.²⁸

Effective environmental governance and the enforcement of inclusive environmental legislation is vital for addressing climate-related security risks in Colombia, as are policies and programmes that offer sustainable livelihoods outside of illegal economies and NSAGs.²⁹ The Peace Agreement provides a framework for the Colombian Government to emphasise reintegration programmes for former combatants, and projects for environmental protection and humanitarian mine clearance in post-conflict regions, where demobilised combatants can play an important role in environmental conservation.³⁰ The UN Verification Mission should take note of how cross-cutting climate-related security risks affect the implementation of the Peace Agreement, including provisions on the reintegration of FARC members and the protection of environmental activists.

Political and Economic Mismanagement

The implementation of the landmark Peace Agreement can give rise to challenges for environmental protection and climate action in Colombia. Comprehensive rural reform, a core component of the Peace Agreement, may increase natural resource extraction, contribute to environmental degradation and accentuate climate vulnerabilities.

Comprehensive rural reform centres on 170 municipalities which are former FARC strongholds and have been particularly affected by armed conflict. The government aims to stabilise and develop these regions through territorially focused development programmes (PDETs). The PDETs are implemented through action plans created at village, municipal and subregional levels, and include social organisations, producers' associations, victims of the armed conflict, ethnic communities, and others.³¹ Many PDET municipalities are rich

in water resources and have highly diverse ecosystems; and many of the opportunities for local economic development relate to extractive activities, like mining and oil exploitation, and agro-industry, like palm-oil cultivation.³² These activities are linked to deforestation, wetland destruction and biodiversity loss, as well as pollution. Deforestation increased by 44 per cent in the year following the 2015 ceasefire, as the departure of FARC from some territories facilitated the purchase of affordable and densely forested land for logging.³³ The drive for rapid economic growth in rural areas can therefore pose challenges to ecosystem and biodiversity conservation; it risks exacerbating land-cover change, including deforestation, and increasing climate vulnerability.³⁴

Land dispossession in Colombia is closely associated with the development of large-scale agro-industrial and mining projects.³⁵ Land restitution disrupts the interests of the current owners or stakeholders and exacerbates conflict.³⁶ The persistent levels of insecurity in rural areas, coupled with the intricate relationships involving NSAGs, government officials and the interests of the business elite, have placed land claimants and activists who voice concerns around corporate land-intensive activities under serious threat.³⁷ Moreover, power imbalances between land claimants and businesses, including access to legal representation and the pre-eminence of ongoing agro-industrial projects or mining activities on claimed land, significantly hamper the judicial process and result in many cases being discontinued.³⁸

The Peace Agreement objective of comprehensive rural reform entails many challenges in achieving development that can close deep socio-economic divides while simultaneously protecting the environment and advancing climate action. The Colombian Government and its international and local partners should support a tailored, case-by-case and inclusive approach to the PDETs. In addition to building good local governance, natural resource management and development, rural development should be climate- and conflict-sensitive, paying close attention to the risks of creating new vulnerabilities or accentuating existing ones, including climate vulnerabilities, in PDETs and adjacent regions.³⁹

²⁷ Crisis Group. (2021). [A fight by other means: Keeping the peace with Colombia's FARC](#). Latin America report no. 92.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2021). [Left undefended: Killings of rights defenders in Colombia's remote communities](#).

²⁹ Salazar, A. et al. (2018). [The ecology of peace: Preparing Colombia for new political and planetary climates](#). *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 16(9).

³⁰ Armenteras, D. et al. (2019). [Fires in protected areas reveal unforeseen costs of Colombian peace](#). *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 3(1).

³¹ Peace agreement, 2016, section 1.3.

³² Sistema de las Naciones Unidas en Colombia y Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible (2014). [Consideraciones ambientales para la construcción de una paz territorial estable, duradera y sostenible en Colombia – Insumos para la discusión](#). Bogotá.

³³ Cárdenas et al., 2021.

³⁴ Salazar et al., 2018.

³⁵ Wesche, P. (2021). [Business actors and land restitution in the Colombian transition from armed conflict](#). *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 25(2).

³⁶ Prieto-Ríos, E. et al. (2022). [Foreign concerns: the impact of international investment law on the ethnic-based land restitution programme in Colombia](#). *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Online first.

³⁷ UN OHCHR. (2022). [Colombia: Extreme risks for rights defenders who challenge corporate activity](#); Grajales, J. (2011). [The rifle and the title: Paramilitary violence, land grab and land control in Colombia](#). *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(4).

³⁸ Wesche, 2021.

³⁹ García & Slunge, 2015.

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