

ROOT OF CONFLICT

Root of Conflict Podcast

Episode: Perspectives on the Colombian Peace Process

featuring

Ambassador Sergio Jaramillo Caro, Former Colombian High Commissioner for Peace

interviewed by

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featuring guest student speakers

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Monday, January 27, 2020

Full Transcript

University of Chicago Public Policy Podcast Introducer: Hi, my name is Pridhi and you're listening to the University of Chicago Public Policy Podcasts.

Aishwarya Raje and Mwangi Thuita: You're listening to Root of Conflict, a podcast about violent conflict around the world and the people, societies and policy issues it affects. You'll hear from experts and practitioners who conduct research, implement programs and use data analysis to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our world. Root of Conflict is produced by UC3P, in collaboration with the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflict, a research institute housed within the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

Camila Perez: I actually have a very interesting anecdote. In 2017, a year after the peace agreements were signed, I was working in Monteria in the northern part of Colombia. This city is one of the epicenters of the ongoing conflict in my country. And during the night I went to this show of five former FARC combatants. They were playing Andean music, and the show was organized by a social leader in Monteria. And the objective was basically to foster recapitulation scenarios. And back then, I couldn't imagine combatants holding anything different than weapons in their hands. So, it was very touching. And at the end of the show, I hugged him because I was very moved by the whole experience. And I congratulated him and thanked him for the experience. And he just smiled and he left and he was like, "Oh yeah, this has been great. But I just hope I don't get killed."

He's 21 years old. This was two years ago. And a couple of weeks ago in Colombia, we celebrated the first local elections after the peace agreement. And I heard that he was elected as part of their, of the Municipal Council. He's very young and he's very brave. And he passed from being threatened of death to actually represent his community. He's also part of the LGBTQ community in a very conservative city. So, this just to say that the beautiful thing about the peace agreement is that it just changed the narrative of the country.

Mwangi Thuita: My name is Mwangi Thuita. I'm one of the producers of Root of Conflict. In 2016, the Colombian government signed a peace agreement with the revolutionary armed forces of Colombia or FARC,

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a militant group whose insurgency against the government lasted over 50 years. The agreement was not without its critics. When first put to a referendum in October 2016, it failed with 50.2% voting against it. Almost two months later, the government signed a revised agreement, which was then ratified by Colombia's Congress. The final agreement addresses topics such as rural reforms, political participation, the end of hostilities, solutions to the production of illegal drugs, the rights of victims, and the mechanisms of implementation and verification. Critics of the agreement complained that the terms were too lenient. Guerillas would not serve time in prison. They would automatically be awarded 10 seats in Congress. Some claim that the deal would legalize narco-trafficking and legitimize violence within the country. One of the people responsible for ending the conflict is Sergio Jaramillo, who served as chief peace negotiator for the government. On a recent visit to the University of Chicago, as part of the Pearson Institute's Distinguished Speaker Series, Mr. Jaramillo sat down with Manuel Bustamante and Marina Milaszewska to discuss his role in the peace process and how the lessons learned during the negotiations can be applied to conflict resolution efforts around the world.

Manuel Bustamante: You gave the inaugural lecture of Pearson Institute back in 2017, and on that occasion, your lecture was titled *The Possibility of Peace*. Let me just start by asking you, what is the Colombian peace agreement in your own words? Are you optimistic about its implementation?

Sergio Jaramillo: Well first, let me thank you for this invitation. I'm very pleased to be back here at the Pearson Institute. I have very good memories of the lecture. Two years ago, the Colombia peace agreement is an agreement that ended a 50-year war, 53-year war actually, between the state of Colombia and the largest insurgency in the history of Latin America, which was the FARC. But it is also an agreement to try to establish measures so that this violence would not recur. So, it's not simply an agreement about DDR, although it's also that it's an agreement that tries to address the factors that kept the violence going over these years.

The implementation of the agreement is naturally tied to the political situation. We have a government that won the elections a year, year and a half ago on a platform of opposition to the peace agreement. So, that in principle, does not look very promising, but actually, I think the reality itself is pushing everyone in the right direction. The Colombian institutions, the judiciary, the constitutional court, the Congress, remained very committed to the peace agreement and especially the communities on the ground are very committed to the peace agreement. So, the government is slowly but surely waking up to the fact that the best thing to do is to implement the peace agreement and seems now to be taking slowly a more positive view.

Marina Milaszewska: Many of us wonder what it took for one of the world's most protracted civil armed conflicts, a so-called intractable conflict lasting more than 50 years, as you just said, to finally end in 2016. What were some of the reasons that you believe the negotiation with Colombia's largest guerilla group, which we know of as FARC succeeded in 2016 when peace processes in Colombia had previously failed time and time again?

Sergio Jaramillo: Yes. Well, the first thing I would say is that we did our best to learn from our own past mistakes. I am a big believer myself in the idea of lessons learned, if you know what you're doing, and you understand that each case is different. You can learn a lot from others, but you can learn the most from the mistakes you've made in the past. So we tried this time to do things differently and to be very careful. In that Pearson Lecture, I refer to what I call the strategy of prudence, of doing things step by step. And I think there the critical move was to begin with secret talks, to agree to a framework agreement. I think really that framework agreements set the whole process on very solid rails. The framework agreement took six months of secret talks February to August, 2012, the final agreement took four years from October of 2012 to October, November of 2016. Still having agreed already, not just to the subjects we were going to talk, but number one to the narrative, that this was about ending the conflict, coming up with a new narrative that sent a clear message to

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Colombia at this time, it was serious. And secondly, agreeing previously to what you might call the structure of the deal. It was already clear that there had to be disarmament. There had to be political participation, but there was also going to be justice for the victims, that there was also commitment from the government to the rural development. Some of the more difficult things had already been previously agreed in the framework agreement, so that it then became a question more of fleshing out that then of striking the basic deals. There were many other things that were important, but I think that may have been the critical move.

Marina Milaszewska: As you said, major strides have been made in resolving the Colombian conflict, but other countries around the world, such as Syria, Yemen, and Venezuela, continue to struggle in the face of internal crises. Can you share with us some of the insights that you learned from the negotiation process with the FARC in Havana and how do you think policy makers can apply them to conflict resolution and peace building efforts beyond Colombia?

Sergio Jaramillo: Again, I think that one should always be humble and not think that one knows everything and try to learn from others. But of course, as an economist would say, you just take the best practices from one place and put them somewhere else. I mean, you need to sort of understand where you're coming from and what your needs are. So, one has to also be quite humble at the time of offering anybody any wisdom from one's own experience. But I do think there are certain things that we did that can be applied in many places that have to do more with the structure of the negotiation. I mentioned a moment ago, the idea of doing first, a framework agreement in secret talks. I think in situations as difficult, for example, as Afghanistan today, with which I'm a little bit familiar, it seems to me that would be exactly the right thing to do, because once you go public, you come under massive pressure from society.

There are all kinds of different interests and the negotiators have much more difficulty in doing things because they have to always be looking over the shoulders, looking back, making sure they're not upsetting their own constituency. So, they lose a lot of margin of maneuver, a lot of flexibility that is sometimes needed to come to a consensus. So, I think that's one thing. Another thing is being very methodical, preparing things very carefully. If you look at the situation in Venezuela, which is absolutely tragic, the world is not conscious of the human tragedy that is happening today in Venezuela. And yet, it's now been going on for a number of years at this level. And above and beyond the politics, part of the reason also is that they've had great trouble organizing themselves around what talks should look like and having a disciplined approach to talks and preparing themselves.

I think preparation is critical to success. You need to really have as clear a map in your head as possible of what you want to achieve. You can't just sit down and talk to about sitting down and talking to somebody, talk about having a clear plan of where you want to go to and trying to see how you fit your counterpart within that plan. And there were other things, but I will stop those.

Manuel Bustamante: So, many of us, especially I, as I'm Colombian, don't understand how the referendum held in 2016 to ratify the peace agreement with the FARC resulted in people rejecting the agreement, albeit by a very low margin. The resulting peace treaty was one of the 14 unanimously adopted decisions in the United Nations Security Council's history. What do you think went wrong? Or how do you think that the public narrative regarding the peace process in 2016 shaped these results?

Sergio Jaramillo: First, we need to recognize that we lost the referendum in October of 2016, but we also need to tell your listeners that sadly, the turnout was low. It was very low, only about 37% of Colombians participated and the no vote won by 0.3 of a percent. So, in the end, it was only 18% of Colombians who rejected the agreement and won by 0.2 percent. So, in terms of the legitimacy of the result, it was low. It has to be said that

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if it'd been the other way around, it would have been also a problem for us to win with such a low turnout and such a low percentage. The campaign itself, as many know, was very similar to what had happened a few months before in the UK with Brexit, a lot of things were said that had nothing to do with the agreement, stories were put out that we were going to corrupt children, that we were going to introduce something they call gender ideology, that we're going to turn Colombia into Venezuela, and of course, all of that affected things.

But still, a lot of people voted against because they just rejected the FARC. And then obviously they had their also the good right not to be in agreement. So, we also have to be humble enough to sort of understand what it was, above and beyond the lies that went wrong. Did we not explain carefully enough? That's something that still needs more analysis, including from our side, from those of us who were promoting the yes vote, especially.

Manuel Bustamante: So your conversation to the Pearson Distinguished Speaker Series, is titled "How to Change a Society." Some of the issues that were included in the agreement with the FARC are not only issues that the FARC had been fighting for, but that the whole country desperately needs such as rural development; however, the Colombian state has been remarkably incapable of providing them. What do you think that it will take for Colombian institutions to finally get to a point in which they are able to tackle these questions? Do you think we are close to getting to that point?

Sergio Jaramillo: No, not particularly, but I do think that a peace agreement is an opportunity for change. It does introduce some change itself directly, such as stopping a war, which is not a minor thing, stopping the violence that's derived from that war. But mainly it creates a framework for change and it has to be taken advantage of, it's not going to happen on its own. So, for example, a major program derived from the peace agreement are a series of programs called rural development programs with the territorial approach. There were 16 large development programs, which cover more than a fifth, perhaps close to a quarter of Colombian territory.

And there are designed to precisely bring development to the regions of the country that were hardest hit by the conflict, but also in a sense, to repair. They are a form of reparations of damage done from the suffering. And they're premised on the idea of a very strong participation through a so-called participatory planning process. The good news is that this has happened. Close to 250,000 people have in these programs and the government, the new government, even though it was not sympathetic to the peace agreement is taking this program seriously and has decided to start implementing them with more vigor, which is good news. We need more resources, but the political decision is important. And what the programs actually do in the end, to answer your question, they don't just try to produce public goods. They're trying to, in a way, redefine the relation between state and society in those regions, by making the citizens much more active participants.

And by acknowledging that the citizens of Colombia, those communities that suffered a lot, had already organized themselves to survive the violence had already been engaged in very serious peacebuilding exercises. So, the question was, how can we build on that? And how can we put the communities and the authorities in the regions, in the driver's seat and have a development model that is much more built upon those capacities than thinking that technocrats from the capitol are going to solve everyone's problems.

Marina Milaszewska: Just to wrap up, we are going to bring it back to the local elections that were recently held in Colombia, where most observers consider the opposition to the current government of President Iván Duque to have come out on top. Most of these parties present themselves as an alternate to traditional politics that support the 2016 peace agreement. Do you think that this marks a change in Colombian politics, and more generally, do you think that politics need to change for peace to cement itself in Colombia?

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Sergio Jaramillo: Yes, and yes. So, the first yes is I do think that these elections mark a change, I think they are directly related to the peace process, not because the people weren't necessarily voting for peace as such – they were voting for their local mayor – but the fact that the peace process ended the war and that the narrative of what you think about the FARC was no longer at the center of things opened up the field to a new politics and put the challenge at the table of, “Okay, what are we going to do about the problems that are really pressing problems for urban Colombia?” And that's what opened the space for these alternative candidates to come in with anti-corruption agendas, with modernizing agendas, with a new politics agenda, because there was more space. So, I actually associate the results of his elections directly to the phase in which Colombia is in thanks to the peace process.

And of course, if you want to implement the agreement properly, you do have to do a new politics. And it's not just a cliché. For example, I was describing this rural development programs. And in some of your students here, such as your interviewer is studying this, “Why does Colombia have big problems with using public goods in peripheral areas?” Well, the quickest answer is because of the politics, because of the way that politics work works and public goods are distributed and filtered through regional political interests that block those public goods from getting to where they need to get. So, you need a new way of relating the state to the citizens and making sure that public goods, and I would say, institutions at large can be strengthened. And for that, you need a new politics.

Manuel Bustamante: Perfect. Thank you. So, thank you, Mr. Sergio Jaramillo for joining us on the Root of Conflict, a University of Chicago Public Policy Podcast.

Sergio Jaramillo: Thank you very much for this invitation.

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Mwangi Thuita: A great thing about being at Hatteras is how international the student body is. In addition to speaking with Sergio Jaramillo, we wanted to hear from Colombian students about the impact of the peace accord and their expectations for the future of their country. We are joined by Camila Perez and Daniel Vallejo, two first-year master's students at Harris. Daniel is a civil engineer focused on rural reform in Colombia. He previously worked with Fundo Colombia en Paz where he supported post-conflict implementation of the rural reform measures of the peace agreement. Camila came to Harris after a stint at the Electoral Observation Mission, a Colombian NGO that fosters citizens' political and civil rights. This conference has been going on basically your whole lives. Can you tell us a bit about your experience of the conflict growing up? How aware of it were you and how did it shape your political imagination?

Camila Perez: I mean, Colombia has been in a conflict for the past 60 years. It's still going on. It was part of our history classes. This is part of the way that people read me when I was abroad. I was always in the airports – I have this memory like of always being separated and inspected even more because I'm Colombian and I'm a woman and because I'm young, like maybe I would like carry some drugs with me, who can tell? And I think that we were all related. Relatives of mine were threatened by guerillas. And I think that we all have stories like this. I have this very vivid memory of a guerilla attack in Bogota, in a very wealthy club. A bomb exploded there in 2003 and it was right in the core of Bogota.

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One thing about the Colombian conflict is that it has mostly affected the rural areas. But during the first part of this century, the guerillas actually got to the cities. My dad was supposed to be there that night and he wasn't. So, yeah, it has been tough, but also you see how things evolve and I was actually telling another student that in 2000, when was the world cup in Brazil? It was 2016, right? I was wearing my Colombian t-shirt on the day that we lost against Brazil. And for the first time in my life, people approached me to take a photo with me because of something positive of my country. And I'm not saying that this is because of the peace agreements. I'm just saying that the way that people see us after the agreement is way different. It's way more positive, not more positive, but at least more complex. We are not just Pablo Escobar. We're not just drug dealing. We are more than that. That's not the only story that we we have to tell

Mwangi Thuita: How would you explain the concept of territorial peace?

Camila Perez: So, this is a concept that Jaramillo exposed first in a conference in Harvard. What he says is basically that peace is not just about the absence of conflict, right? Peace has to be built up from bottom up. it has to be with the participation of the community themselves in the sense that the institutions understood us, the set of social rules that we use to regulate our behavior. And we have to rebuild that in Colombia because we have solved all of our conflicts with violence. Not just the armed conflict, but on a daily basis, that's how we react towards conflict. We react violently. And the comfort will always be there. But the core is that in order to get an ongoing peace, what we need is to rebuild this institution, these social institutions, and imagine ourselves dealing with our conflict in a peaceful way. The conflicts will always be there, but we have to choose between being violent or actually negotiating.

Mwangi Thuita: Daniel, your past work in water resources has taken you to too many rural parts of Colombia. Can you speak about those experiences and how the conflict impacted some of the communities that you were able to engage with?

Daniel Vallejo: For some years, I've been working in rural regions in Colombia, especially on a region called Montes de María, it's on the northern part of Colombia in a little town called El Salado. So, I've been there. I was there for two years working on water resources. So, I was focused there on some regions near El Salado. Salado was a town that suffered a massacre, not by guerillas, but from the paramilitary, when the guerillas started increasing their violent acts on rural regions, or even in some urban regions. Some civilian groups armed themselves, and became the defendant of the people initially against the guerillas.

There are some theories where these come from. There were some groups supported by some of some local governments for these self-defense groups, but they quickly grew into another thing. And in the 2000s, these groups became much more violent, because they were fighting those that were supposed to be guerilla helpers. For example, this town, El Salado. As the guerillas have existed since long ago, many towns that were forgotten by the government in rural regions had had a lot of guerrilla influence influencing their everyday. So, the paramilitary actions were to clear these villages, eh, so that people that were supposed to support the guerillas were killed or were displaced or were disappeared. That was the mentality of it. Who are they to judge? No one. How did they judge? No idea.

For example, this town, El Salado, I know a lot of the story about these towns, but there are over 60 of these massacres in the country, like strong massacres, small massacres, can count a lot of them, but in this town, one day, like the guerillas used this town as an important point for cokedrilling. And when the guerillas started losing a little territory there, they moved, and the army came into the town. I'm telling it from what the people there told me. One day in the middle of the afternoon, the army went out of the town. They just left the town.

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Nobody understood why. When the army left that same night, a whole group of paramilitaries invaded the town. And in this next morning, they start killing a lot of people in one of the soccer fields in the town.

There are books about this. It's horrible what happened? There are a lot of dark histories in, but there was a special case of a girl there, that the day of the of the massacre, they killed her father. And she went running to her house. A lot of paramilitary followed her and she was raped until a point that she couldn't even remember how many were there. That was terrible. But what was amazing about this was when I was working with her, I was working with her during the period of the peace assignment agreement, and guerillas did some very harsh things as well. And these people were not even guerillas nor paramilitary. They were people, they were farmers, rural people who had nothing to do, that had to assume that a lot of people came with guns, that must have assumed what was happening there.

And she was, after suffering all this, she was one of the strongest supporters of the peace agreement. I was amazed. For example, after the peace agreement went for the plebiscite, I got curious. They didn't win. So, like the peace agreement lost. And I went to talk with my colleagues there, from El Salado, from the rural regions in Montes de María. And they couldn't believe it. Like, of course, they didn't agree with forgiving FARC's actions, but they preferred to forgive than to continue the war. They are the ones that suffered the war. They are the ones that are poor because of war. Yet, they are a minority. Rural communities in Colombia represent – the ones that work the land – 13% of the people. So, they don't show a majority in the votes, some even can't because they live far away. So, they cannot represent their speech on public participation, yet they are the ones that are paying all the offering.

Mwangi Thuita: You later went on to actually work on the peace accord. What was it like working on the implementation of rural reforms that were part of the peace agreement?

Daniel Vallejo: Some years later, I had the opportunity of working in the presidency with the post-conflict direction. That was the office in charge of implementing or monitoring the implementation of the agreement. And I was fascinated. I had to read the agreement in different ways, not only like literary reading, but understanding it. And what I started seeing is that the agreement is quite magnificent, because what is different from other peace agreements is that this is not a ceasefire treaty. This is way far from being that. Like, the agreement divides in six main points.

Only one of these points is the ceasefire. The other points are focused on the rural regions, on how to prevent this from occurring again. And that's what I think is amazing about this agreement. For example, I'm going to tell you a little bit about the six points. The first one is the rural integral reform, which is rural development. And it's focused on climate change, environmental protection, but rural reform. The second one is political participation. The third one is the end of conflict. So, you can see that part as the ceasefire, it is much more complex than a cease fire, but it's like the idea there. The fourth point is the drug conflict, which is very important here because it's the economic source of this violence. So, it has to be put in there.

The fifth point is the victims. So, I was telling you, and that was what impressed me a lot. This agreement is based on forgiveness, it's the most important part of this. And forgiveness is not an easy thing. This conflict has been for more than 60 years in our country. So, the amount of dead people due to the conflict is huge. And you must convince people that, "Please forgive, or we won't get anywhere." So, there's a big part here for victims, where FARC has to accept what they did, where people want to hear what happened. They don't want to judge. They just want to hear. Where is my mom? Where is she buried? Is she's still alive. When did you kill her? Why did you kill her? That's a very important part for victims. And the six part is the monitoring and verification of disagreement.

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But what I want to highlight about this, maybe on a personal opinion, I think the rural development part of this agreement is amazing because what it tries to do is refocus the rural model way of seeing the country. We have a lot – people in rural regions are way poorer than people in urban regions, and they are usually forgotten. So, this part looks to change that, and to prevent a new group from appearing because that will happen if we don't fix that part. And thus, to conclude, there is one thing that I am worried about this agreement, and about the implementation of the agreement, is that initially when the agreement was shown to the public, there was a very big part about land redistribution, like land, property, redistribution, and property in Colombia is very badly distributed.

And that's the source of some of the most rural inequality. Unfortunately, that land is in the hands of important people and nobody wants to give their land. So, that ended up not being on the peace agreement or kind of is, but not as strong as initially. And it's not being implemented, that part has been left behind. And what worries me is that it can make the problem resurge in some time. But in general, I invite people to read, not the agreement, it's like 2000 pages long, but there are summaries that you can read and see why it was a so interesting agreement.

Mwangi Thuita: Thanks for listening to this episode of Root of Conflict. Marina Milaszewska and Manuel Bustamante were your interviewers. Thank you to Yi Ning Wong and Aishwarya Raje for editing this episode. Be sure to subscribe to Root of Conflict wherever you get your podcasts. For more information on the work underway at the Pearson Institute, please visit thepearsoninstitute.org and follow them on Twitter.