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# **POLICY BRIEF N°1**



**The Colombian FARC, From an Armed Guerrilla Group or Extremist Organisation to a Political Party: What Lesson Can Africa Learn from the Peace Deal Between the FARC and the Government of Colombia?**

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**In this policy brief, the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute reviews the shift of the Colombian FARC from a rebel group/terrorist organisation to a political party and proposes lessons which can be useful for Africa.**

In the upcoming days, FARC the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia will become a formal political party. As already presented in a recent article, the former rebel group will be revealing some 61-point agenda as part of its programme. It will further announce its nominees for 10 seats in the Colombian Parliament that were granted as a condition of the peace agreement. The FARC which for decades has been established and considered either as a Guerrilla Group, a Liberation Movement or a Terrorist Organisation is formally entering the Colombian political arena following a successful peace deal with the government of Colombia.

## **THE FARC: A BRIEF HISTORY**

The FARC (Initial in Spanish) is the oldest and largest group among Colombia's left-wing rebels and until recently was one of the world's richest guerrilla armies. The group's roots can be traced back to the



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Liberal guerrilla bands of La Violencia - the civil war between the Liberal and Conservative parties that raged from 1948 until 1958. The FARC became disillusioned with the leadership of the Liberal Party and turned to communism. One of the guerrilla bands was led by Pedro Antonio Marin nicknamed Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda who in 1966 baptised his group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The FARC were founded at a time of brutal repression against any form of action considered subversive. Colombia has historically been a country which suffers from huge levels of inequality, where vast swathes of land are owned by a very small elite. This derives from the fact that the Colombian state sold off large tracts of land to private owners in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries to pay for its debts.

Inspired by the Cuban revolution in the 1950s, some of the founders of the FARC claimed more rights and control over the land. A claim considered to be a threat by big landowners and the state, which in response, sent the army to retaliate. It was after the clashes with the army in Marquetalia Commune that the FARC decided to turn their struggle into an armed one.



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While the FARC have some urban groups, they have always been an overwhelmingly rural guerrilla organisation. There is an estimation of 6,000 to 7,000 active fighters within the ranks of the FARC. It is believed there are another 8,500 civilians who make up the FARC'S support network. This is down considerably from the estimated 20,000 active fighters they are believed to have had around 2002. The FARC was known to employ a variety of military tactics in addition to more unconventional methods, including terrorism.

The FARC'S top leader is Rodrigo Londono Echeverri, better known by his alias Timochenko. It is estimated that the FARC takes in between \$500 million and \$600 million annually from the illegal drug trade and also profit from kidnappings, extortion schemes, and an unofficial "tax" it levies in the countryside for "protection" and social services.

**A PEACE DEAL BETWEEN TWO “WORST AND IRRECONCILABLE  
ENEMIES”**

In June 2016, the FARC signed a ceasefire accord with the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos in Havana. This historic step ends the war



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that has gone on for 53 years. On 25 August 2016, the Colombian president, announced that four years of negotiation had secured a peace deal with the FARC and that a national referendum would take place on 2 October. The referendum failed with 50.24% voting against. The Colombian government and the FARC on 24 November signed a revised peace deal, which the Colombian Congress approved on 30 November. On 27 June 2017, the FARC who once terrorised the country with kidnaps, killings and attacks on towns, have ended half a century of armed insurgency at low-key ceremony in which the United Nations certified that more than 7,000 guerrillas had turned over their weapons.

“Farewell to arms, farewell to war, welcome to  
peace”

During the ceremony in the Mesetas, the FARC’S top leader, Rodrigo Londoño, addressing a cheering crowd of former combatants said: “Farewell to arms, farewell to war, welcome to peace”, “Today doesn’t end the existence of the FARC; it ends our armed struggle”.



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“Today is a special day, the day when weapons are exchanged for words.”

In the same vein, President Juan Manuel Santos said: “Today is a special day, the day when weapons are exchanged for words.”

### A PEACE DEAL THAT WON A NOBEL PEACE PRIZE”

President Santos was awarded the 2016 Nobel peace prize for his efforts to secure a deal with the FARC to end their part in a 53-year armed conflict that has left an estimated 250,000 dead, tens of thousands of people missing and forced millions from their home.

“Our peace is real, and it’s irreversible,”



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President Santos declared: “Our peace is real, and it’s irreversible”.

Though the original peace accord was rejected by voters in a referendum, a revised deal went into effect on 1 December 2016, laying out the terms of the FARC demobilisation, justice for victims of the conflict, and new guarantees for participation in politics.

## **AFTER THE DEMOBILISATION WHAT NEXT FOR THE FARC MEMBERS?**

“I want to be a lawyer to help the new party” but  
“First, though, I have to finish high school.”

Ex-combatants are due to remain in the camps until the end of July, when the UN will remove the weapons-filled containers. The arms will be made into three monuments to be installed in Bogota, Havana and New York.

Mauricio Jaramillo, a member of the FARC secretariat who began the first talks with the government six years ago in Havana, said that when he



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handed his weapon to the UN two months ago he felt a “huge sense of commitment with Colombia”. Rank-and-file rebel fighters admitted they were nervous about future life as civilians. Jairo, 36-year-old who spent 20 years in the FARC ranks unveils his big plans. At the special transition zone in Mesetas, he said “I want to be a lawyer to help the new party” but “First, though, I have to finish high school.”

## **A SECOND PEACE DEAL ON ITS WAY IN COLOMBIA**

Officials and Colombia’s second guerrilla group, National Liberation Army (ELN), are currently engaged in peace talks in Quito, Ecuador. Both parties are set to reach a cease-fire before the upcoming Pope’s visit this month.

## **AFRICA, A CONTINENT DISTORTED BY WARS AND TERRORISM**

We strongly believe that similar peace can also be reached in Africa despite the contextual difference characterising the conflicts and the



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regions. The African continent has been literally in a state of war for decades, distorted by all sort of conflicts including religious conflicts and ethnic conflicts such as the cases of Central African Republic and South Sudan. Terrorist movements such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Isis in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Al Qaeda in Mali, Al Shahab in Somalia and Kenya testify for a real crisis, emergency and security *vaccum*. Similar observation applies to the cases of Burundi, DRC where the ongoing turmoil is fuelled by the current crisis of governance. Can the shift that is happening in Colombia triggers the search for new and alternative approach to these conflicts? We believe it is possible. The current exclusive military approach to solve conflict in Africa has been consistent for decades. Yet the situation is worsening as time goes by, meaning something need to be changed. Looking at the Colombian situation, President Santos decided to adopt a new approach despite the fact that the FARC have been destroying properties and goods, resorting to explosive devices, kidnapping and killings for years in a deadly war against the Colombian government. For half a century, the country was subject to a brutal distribution of violence (legal and illegal) where innocent and civilian populations were left with the privilege to pay the heavy price. It is this frightening record that the President of Colombia chose to ignore



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even though it was not easy to do so. He instead chose to capitalise and dream about a future of peace and security, a dream that finally came into pass. President Santos chose to replace the law of weapons with that of words and it worked. The peace deal reached last year between both parties is the evidence that the voice of guns can always be silenced if positive attitude and trust take over scepticism, hate and suspicion. Yet it was not an easy initiative for the current Colombian president to make such a delicate move in an environment where family's victims of the FARC atrocities have been traumatised, emotionally unstable and dreamed only about justice, anger, pain and revenge. Indeed, the failure of the referendum was a warning which fortunately was not powerful enough to stop president Santos. Despite various pressures and recommendations which urged him not to discuss with the FARC members, the president against all odds went ahead and the initiative resulted to a win-win situation.

It is time that African leaders try something else instead of relying to the systemic and systematic military approach to attempt to restore peace and security. What is there to lose, nothing at all. The security crisis in Colombia for more than half century was more or less similar if not worse than the one in Africa. Yet a peace deal has been possible in Colombia



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and therefore there is no reason not to believe that such piece deal cannot be replicated on the African continent.



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Gerard Emmanuel Kamdem Kamga was trained in law and political science, human rights, critical theory, security and gender analysis. Holding a doctoral degree in laws with focus on emergency regimes from the University of Pretoria, he has over the years, developed a sound expertise in emergency and security issues. Gerard is the Executive Director of the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute.