



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 13 June 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The present letter is in response to the request I received from the Security Council, in a letter dated 12 April 2023 ([S/2023/270](#)) seeking my recommendations, within 60 days, regarding the request of the Government of Colombia for the expansion of the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia to support the dialogue efforts with armed groups in the framework of its total peace policy, in particular in the verification of ceasefires.

The Government's request was conveyed to the Security Council by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia in his letter of 14 February 2023 ([S/2023/112](#)). In that letter, the Minister expressed the conviction of the Government that the support of the Mission would contribute to the effective implementation of agreements that would greatly benefit communities and vulnerable populations.

As requested by the Security Council, the recommendations and options presented herein were developed taking into account the views of Council members and relevant Colombian stakeholders (especially the Government, ceasefire parties and potential counterparts in monitoring and verification mechanisms).

### Background on the total peace policy and the status of dialogue processes and ceasefire agreements

The total peace policy of the administration of President Gustavo Petro seeks to consolidate peace through the full implementation of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government and the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and through initiatives to expand the scope of peace in the countryside through differentiated dialogues with other armed groups.

As the Government has explained, this policy seeks to respond to the ongoing violence in parts of Colombia, which I have also described to the Security Council as the single greatest threat to the implementation of the Final Agreement. Following the laying down of arms of the FARC-EP, other armed groups have expanded into areas where the State had not filled the resulting vacuum and where its presence remains limited today. The resurgent violence as armed groups compete for social and territorial control and the control of illicit economies has undermined key processes within the Final Agreement, including the socioeconomic and political reintegration of former combatants, illicit crop substitution and rural reforms.

The violence among illegal armed groups, and between them and government security forces gravely affects the civilian population, most acutely Indigenous and



Afro-Colombian communities. To varying degrees, the groups with whom the Government is engaging in dialogue through its total peace policy have been accused of killing former FARC-EP combatants and social leaders, committing massacres, and causing increased internal displacement, confinement, recruitment and use of children, imposing humanitarian access restrictions, causing mine victims and perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence in areas prioritized for implementation of the Final Agreement. As stated in my latest quarterly report to the Security Council (S/2023/222), I commend the Government's dialogue initiatives and welcome its pursuit of ceasefires, given the inescapable reality on the ground today that consolidating peace requires both the full implementation of the Final Agreement and effective efforts to curb other expressions of violence.

In the nine months since the current Administration assumed office, the total peace policy has advanced on different fronts.

The legal framework for the total peace policy was established in Act 2272 of 2022, approved by Congress and signed by President Gustavo Petro on 4 November 2022. The law establishes that the Government may carry out two types of dialogue processes: (1) dialogues with illegal armed groups of a political nature to reach peace agreements; and (2) contact and conversations with armed and organized high-impact-crime structures aimed at their submission to justice and their dismantling. The law authorizes all necessary contacts to this end with such groups and structures, as well as negotiations with their spokespersons. The law also states that, within such dialogue processes, the effective participation of civil society (including women and ethnic peoples) will be guaranteed, as will the centrality of the victims. The end goal of the policy is defined as the achievement of a stable and lasting peace with standards that avoid impunity and guarantee to the greatest extent possible the rights of victims to the truth, justice and reparations.

The Government has also submitted draft legislation to Congress that would define the framework for negotiations of the submission to justice agreements. The proposal remains under discussion in Congress at this time, having already undergone substantial modifications following exchanges between the Government, political parties and State entities, including the Office of the Attorney General. The decision as to which groups will be characterized as criminal organizations, subject to submission to justice agreements, rather than political negotiated peace agreements, will be the responsibility of an executive body comprising the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the High Commissioner for Peace, reporting its recommendations to the President.

The National Development Plan adopted by Congress in May 2023, further enshrined the Government's approach to "Total Peace" in national policy. Similarly, the new national defence and security policy of Colombia, presented by the Minister of Defence in April 2023, emphasizes human security and the protection of civilians, aligning national defence and security policy with the peace strategy of the Government.

In addition to laying the legal and policy foundations, the current Administration announced, soon after assuming office, that under the leadership of the High Commissioner for Peace, it had begun exploratory contacts with several armed groups to assess their interest in peace.

On 31 December 2022, President Petro announced that, based on the results of these contacts, six-month bilateral ceasefires would enter into effect beginning on 1 January 2023 with five armed groups: the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (which clarified that the ceasefire was still subject to agreement at the dialogue table); two groups derived from the former FARC-EP (the Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (EMC FARC-EP) and

Segunda Marquetalia), as well as two groups considered derivatives of former paramilitary groups the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (also known as Clan del Golfo) and Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada.

The governmental decrees dated 31 December 2022 referring to these ceasefire commitments (with the exception of ELN) were included as annexes to the letter of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Security Council of 14 February 2023. The decrees explain the objectives and legal basis for the ceasefires (both in the Constitution and laws, including Act 2272 of 2022). They refer to the ceasefires as encompassing the suspension of offensive actions and the avoidance of armed incidents between the security forces and the respective illegal armed group while having the further goal of lessening the humanitarian impacts of the conflict on the population in general, and on ethnic peoples and peasant communities in particular. Each of the decrees notes further that a ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism will be established based on protocols to be negotiated between the parties. The monitoring and verification mechanisms are to include the two parties, other national entities, such as the Catholic Church, and an international component, including the Verification Mission pending the agreement of the Security Council to its participation.

### **Status of dialogues and ceasefires with armed groups**

The various dialogues and linked ceasefire initiatives have progressed at different paces.

#### *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*

The Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), founded in 1964, is the oldest remaining insurgency in Colombia, estimated by the Colombian military to have roughly 2,900 armed fighters (5,800 members), and operates in numerous departments, including areas of traditional influence in Arauca, Bolívar, Chocó, Norte de Santander, and others to which it has expanded in recent years. In October 2022, the Government and ELN announced the resumption of peace talks to end the conflict, after a four-year hiatus. The Government has underscored the political status of ELN in the context of its dialogues aimed at a peace agreement with them.

As I have informed the Security Council, the parties reached an agreement during a first round of talks held in Caracas in November and December 2022, establishing the architecture of the talks, including its international support through guarantor countries (Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Norway and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)), accompanying countries (Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), and permanent accompanying parties (the Secretary-General, through my Special Representative in Colombia, and the Catholic Church). In line with the agreement by the parties that I transmitted to the Council on 25 January 2023 (S/2023/60), my Special Representative is called upon in this role to provide political good offices, diplomatic, logistical and operational support to the dialogues.

Key outcomes of the second round of talks that concluded in Mexico City in March 2023 included agreements on a revised substantive agenda of negotiations (S/2023/299) and agreements on parameters for a ceasefire and the participation of civil society in the process. Regarding the ceasefire, the parties agreed to seek a temporary, national, bilateral ceasefire that could be renewed by mutual agreement. They agreed further that the temporary ceasefire carried out between the Government and ELN over 101 days in 2017 and 2018 would serve as a reference point for constructing the new ceasefire. The Verification Mission formed part of a monitoring and verification mechanism during that previous ceasefire, as authorized by the Security Council in its resolution 2381 (2017). As the parties began the third round

of talks in Cuba on 2 May 2023, voices from across Colombian civil society and the international community stressed the importance of reaching a ceasefire, including the Security Council in its press statement of 17 April 2023. On 26 May 2023, the heads of the peace delegation of the Government and ELN wrote jointly to the President of the Security Council and to me to reaffirm their intention to reach a ceasefire agreement during that round of talks and to express their hope that the Council would agree to expand the mandate of the Verification Mission in order to take part in the monitoring and verification mechanism

On 9 June 2023, at the conclusion of the talks in Cuba, the Government and ELN announced they had agreed on a temporary, national, bilateral ceasefire (with the participation of the Mission in the monitoring and verification mechanism) and on the establishment of a national commission to design the broad participation of Colombian society in the peace process. I issued a statement commending the parties for these important steps forward and urging them to work together in good faith to comply with their obligations under the ceasefire (the details of which are presented further below).

### **Other armed groups**

#### *Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*

The armed group that calls itself Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (EMC FARC-EP) was formed by several units of the former FARC-EP that refused to sign the Final Agreement, splitting off and remaining at arms. It is estimated by the Colombian military to have roughly 2,200 armed fighters (3,500 members) grouped in several structures; operating in various regions, including Arauca, Caquetá, Cauca, Guaviare, Meta and Putumayo Departments. During the initial months of 2023, the two parties negotiated a ceasefire protocol that focuses on a halt to offensive actions between EMC FARC-EP and the public security forces. In April 2023, they named their representatives to peace dialogues and a ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism. On 24 April 2023, they announced that the mechanism had officially been established, comprised of the Government, EMC FARC-EP, representatives of the church, and an international component to include the Verification Mission (pending authorization of the Security Council) and the Mission to Support the Peace Process of the Organization of American States. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy announced that same week the support of the European Union to the dialogues with EMC FARC-EP, including the accompaniment of its Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process.

However, the process has suffered setbacks in recent weeks. On 22 May 2023, following the killing of several Indigenous youths in the Department of Putumayo by EMC FARC-EP, the Government announced it was suspending the ceasefire in four Departments where it would resume offensive operations against the group. At the same time, the Government reiterated its commitment to respect the ceasefire with EMC FARC-EP elsewhere in the country, and to establish the negotiating table. On 27 May 2023, EMC FARC-EP questioned the validity of the ceasefire protocol because of the partial suspension by the Government. International actors, including the Verification Mission, the European Union and the Organization of American States have encouraged the parties to maintain dialogue and work to strengthen their ceasefire arrangements. Grassroots organizations in areas likely to be affected by the latest decision have also urged the Government and EMC FARC-EP to maintain the peace dialogues. Despite the partial suspension of the ceasefire, there has been continued communication between the Government and EMC FARC-EP and no reported upsurge in fighting to date. On 29 May 2023, the Government issued decrees

designating the EMC FARC-EP delegates who would serve as its representatives to the local ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanisms, and as peace promoters (facilitators of peace dialogues).

#### *Segunda Marquetalia*

Segunda Marquetalia was created by several former FARC-EP commanders who signed the Final Agreement and then returned to arms in 2019, amid accusations by authorities of their involvement in illicit activities and allegations on their part of a lack of legal and security guarantees foreseen under the Final Agreement. This group is present in Departments in eastern and southern Colombia and is estimated by the Colombian military to have roughly 1,100 armed fighters (1,600 members). The Government has signalled that it considers Segunda Marquetalia, like EMC FARC-EP, as having a political character and it has maintained contacts aimed at engaging in peace talks. At the time of writing, however, the two sides have not established a ceasefire protocol, monitoring and verification mechanism or negotiating table. Legal issues which may require further judicial rulings are among the obstacles to progress with this group.

#### *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*

The Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, also known as the Clan del Golfo, was created after the demobilization of former paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia in the mid-2000s, spawned successor criminal bands. The group is estimated by the Colombian military to have 1,500 armed fighters (4,000 members) (various independent assessments place the figure considerably higher). It operates mostly in north-eastern Colombia, in particular in Antioquia, Chocó and Córdoba Departments, where it wields strong influence over a large territory and population, although it is also present in several other regions. While it also claims political character, the Government has signalled it will characterize the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia as an armed and organized high-impact-crime organization. It has engaged in exploratory contacts with the group to gauge its willingness to end its activities through a submission to justice agreement. On 19 March 2023, President Petro announced the suspension of the ceasefire with the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia and instructed the armed forces to resume offensive operations against it following an armed attack against the public security forces amid a miners' strike in Antioquia Department that involved violence attributed to the group. While this suspension remains in effect, the High Commissioner for Peace has confirmed that exploratory contacts with the group continue.

#### *Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada*

Regarding the much smaller group Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada – also a successor to the demobilization of paramilitaries, estimated to have roughly 250 armed fighters (under 1,000 members) – the official ceasefire decree remains in effect. However, there has been little information as to the status of contacts aimed at its possible submission to justice. The group operates mainly in several municipalities of Cesar, La Guajira and Magdalena Departments around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range.

### **Conflict dynamics in the context of the temporary ceasefires**

The bilateral ceasefires in effect since 1 January 2023 have been pursued for the most part in the absence of defined protocols and mechanisms of verification, making them inherently more fragile and making it difficult to assess initial compliance by the parties and their impact on conflict dynamics.

Nevertheless, official and non-official sources indicate some reductions in violence in the context of the Government's dialogue and ceasefire initiatives can be observed. Confrontations between illegal armed groups, as well as clashes between them and the public security forces have decreased, although reductions in attacks against human rights defenders and social leaders have not been confirmed.

Under its ongoing monitoring of security guarantees provisions of the Final Agreement, between January and April 2023 the Verification Mission observed tentative reductions in violence involving illegal armed groups in dialogue with the Government in several Departments (such as Arauca and Guaviare) although in others (such as Cauca and Nariño) violence has remained critically high. The Mission has registered a 53 per cent reduction in the number killings of former FARC-EP combatants through April 2023, compared with the same period in 2022. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported a decline in mass displacement and confinement from January through April 2023 compared with the same period in 2022, possibly linked to the reductions of clashes between security forces and illegal armed groups. The Office continued to register concern over the humanitarian impact of clashes between the armed groups and over their strengthened control over communities.

On 27 April 2023, the Minister of Defence reported to Congress a reduction of 21 per cent in the number of members of the public security forces killed and a decrease of 59 per cent in the number wounded during the first quarter of 2023 compared with the previous year. In addition, according to official figures, overall homicide rates nationwide dropped by 7.5 per cent between January and April 2023, when compared to the same period in 2022. The Defence Ministry highlighted especially noteworthy reductions of homicides in departments with a major presence of illegal armed actors: Arauca: 37.8 per cent; Caquetá: 33.8 per cent; Chocó: 28.2 per cent; Norte de Santander: 17.8 per cent; Antioquia: 15.1 per cent.

The military has also reported successful actions during the ceasefire period in terms of combating drug trafficking and other illicit economies linked to the armed groups. The Minister of Defence has stressed that the bilateral ceasefires only limit planned offensive military actions against the armed groups; noting they do not imply the withdrawal of forces from conflict areas or any lessening of the constitutional responsibility to protect and defend the territory and citizenry.

Despite reductions in violence between security forces and armed actors, humanitarian platforms and communities in conflict-affected areas have continued to raise concern throughout the initial period of the ceasefires about confrontations between armed groups and their continued actions against the civilian population, such as threats, forced recruitment, use of anti-personnel mines and forced displacement and confinement. They have stressed the importance of ensuring the protection of the civilian population in accordance with the obligations under international humanitarian law of parties to armed conflict.

### **Proposed role for the Verification Mission in ceasefire verification**

The request by the Government to the Security Council is for the Verification Mission participate in all ceasefire monitoring mechanisms it seeks to establish with the various armed groups. The potential participation of the Mission in the international component of the mechanisms is a common feature of the four decrees annexed to the letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of 14 February 2023, each referring to a different dialogue process.

The participation of the Mission in the monitoring and verification of the ceasefire between the Government and ELN is requested in the letter of the parties to the Security Council dated 26 May 2023 and is foreseen in the agreement announced

on 9 June in Cuba. I note also that the ELN talks are the only process for which there is also a good offices role specifically established for the United Nations in supporting the negotiations.

The broad request for the Mission to have a role in ceasefire verification reflects trust in its ability to help solidify ceasefires that, as I have reported to the Council, have the potential, if properly implemented, to reduce violence and build confidence in incipient dialogue processes, while alleviating obstacles to the implementation of the Final Agreement.

This trust in the added value of the Mission is based on several factors. First, its unique experience with ceasefire monitoring in Colombia under Security Council authorization in earlier stages of the peace process. During 2016 and 2017, the Mission led the tripartite ceasefire monitoring mechanism (United Nations, Government and FARC-EP) that verified and reported on compliance with the end of conflict ceasefire within the Final Agreement. In 2017 and 2018, the Mission coordinated the monitoring and verification mechanism for a 101-day ceasefire between the Government and ELN that also included the two parties and the Catholic Church. While that ceasefire was not renewed, I reported to the Council on its positive effect in reducing casualties and improving the security of communities in areas affected by the conflict ([S/2018/279](#)).

In addition to the accumulated experience with ceasefires, the Mission's field deployment within Colombia already places it in most of the key areas where the main armed groups in question are present, with deep knowledge of the terrain and of conflict dynamics accumulated over nearly seven years, and the trust of local authorities, communities and vulnerable populations, including social leaders, former combatants, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations, and women's organizations. As with its verification across the current mandate, the Mission would approach ceasefire verification taking into account gender considerations and the differentiated impacts of conflict and ceasefire dynamics on women, children and ethnic communities. Collaboration with the relevant United Nations agencies would contribute to the awareness of the Mission of how the ceasefire affects humanitarian outcomes.

The Mission has existing capacities, both logistical and personnel, in its current mixed teams of Mission staff working with civilians and unarmed international observers that could kick-start early verification activities if authorized by the Security Council, pending necessary reinforcement. The Mission has also established security and medical evacuation arrangements with the host country, fluid working relationships with the Colombian security forces, and degrees of prior engagement with the armed groups in the context of its current mandate. The Mission has a track record of cooperation with potential partners in new verification activities, including the Catholic Church, civil society organizations and platforms, women's groups and the Organization of American States Mission.

Given the current state of dialogue processes as described above, there are two most immediate opportunities for the Mission to add value through its participation in ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanisms. First, the mechanism for the Government and ELN ceasefire announced by the parties on 9 June. Second, the monitoring and verification mechanism for the ceasefire with EMC FARC-EP.

### **Ceasefire with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional**

Regarding the ceasefire with ELN, details on its scope duration, objectives and the composition and functions of the mechanism for monitoring and verification were announced by the Government and ELN on 9 June 2023. The parties agreed on a six-month national, temporary, bilateral ceasefire to be implemented in phases, and

subject to renewal based on a joint evaluation by the parties. During a preparatory phase, from 9 June to 5 July, the parties will finalize pending protocols, conduct sensitization within their ranks, and start preparing the mechanism for monitoring and verification. The parties agreed also to establish a channel of communication through my Special Representative during this phase. During the next phase, starting on 6 July, the parties will cease offensive operations against one another. Finally, the full ceasefire, with all protocols in place and with the fully functioning mechanism, takes effect on 3 August, for an initial period of 180 days. The parties indicate that their intention is to renew the ceasefire thereafter, based on a joint evaluation.

The stated objective of the ceasefire is to lower the intensity of the conflict, to facilitate humanitarian actions, and to foster the participation of Colombian society in the peace process. Additional goals are to generate improved conditions for vulnerable groups to exercise their rights, including social and environmental leaders, ethnic peoples, women, children, and human rights defenders. In a protocol on specific actions covered under the ceasefire, and therefore to be monitored by the mechanism, the parties undertake commitments, among others, to act in accordance with international humanitarian law, to cease offensive military actions against one another, to guarantee the unfettered work of the mechanism, and to not impede the implementation of humanitarian agreements reached at the negotiating table. The parties also commit to continue analysing the inclusion of other actions within the scope of the ceasefire and its monitoring and verification.

The mechanism for monitoring and verification, per the respective protocol, would be comprised of delegates of the Government, ELN, the Verification Mission and the Catholic Church. It would be constituted at national, regional and local levels. Its functions include fostering communication; promoting adherence to the ceasefire and its protocols; conducting monitoring and verification activities in response to incidents of possible violations; issuing technical findings about those incidents and recommendations to the parties; and periodically informing the public. The Mission would be present at all levels of the mechanism. The parties anticipate that the mechanism would also coordinate with networks of social organizations who can help to strengthen its monitoring and prevention by alerting about possible clashes between the parties and risks to the security of communities.

### **Ceasefires with other armed groups**

#### *Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo*

With respect to EMC FARC-EP, the monitoring and verification mechanism set up on 24 April 2023 (Mecanismo de veeduría, monitoreo y verificación), had begun to function at the national level prior to the recent partial suspension of the ceasefire in four Departments by the Government. It has not yet resumed sessions, however the Government is seeking to reactivate the mechanism while maintaining contacts aimed at establishing the dialogue table. The functions of the mechanism and the focus of its monitoring are established in a protocol that remains confidential, however the key joint commitments of the government forces and EMC FARC-EP contained therein are to cease offensive operations against one another, to avoid contact, as well as not to hinder medical or humanitarian missions or the work of civilian authorities or to affect the civilian population in their military operations. The mechanism is charged with analysing developments impartially, issuing technical findings on incidents and directing recommendations to the two parties to prevent and address possible violations. Having provided good offices to facilitate initial contacts between the Government and EMC FARC-EP, and having participated as an observer in the initial activities of the mechanism, the Verification Mission, pending Council authorization, is poised to contribute to this mechanism.



*Other armed groups*

Although the Mission's role in ceasefire monitoring vis-à-vis the other remaining armed groups has been requested by the Government in similar terms as to that of ELN and EMC FARC-EP (as part of the international component of a monitoring and verification mechanism), the respective ceasefires are still at either an embryonic stage or not currently in effect. In the case of Segunda Marquetalia and Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada, the ceasefire decrees remain in effect, however without any agreed protocols or a monitoring and verification mechanism. In the case of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, the ceasefire remains suspended by decision of the Government. There is therefore currently no role for the Mission to play in those ceasefires, although this could change as circumstances evolve.

Were the Mission to be tasked by the Council to participate in the mechanisms once established, the same considerations related to its added value mentioned previously would apply (ceasefire experience, standing capacities and relevant field deployment, knowledge of the terrain and trust with counterparts). Given its focus to date in verifying the Final Agreement with the former FARC-EP, and in supporting dialogue and ceasefire experiences with ELN, the Mission has greater familiarity with ELN and groups deriving from the former FARC-EP than with others. Its field deployment is also concentrated more in the relevant regions for the ceasefires and less extensively in the areas of northern Colombia and the Caribbean coast that would be important for the verification of ceasefires with the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia and the Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada.

I am mindful that some Member States have, in the course of consultations, expressed reservations or sought clarifications as to the implications of the dialogues and ceasefires with the groups that may be characterized within the total peace policy framework as criminal, rather than political, in nature.

Regarding this issue, I would recall that the Government has made clear that it intends to pursue different types of agreements with the different armed groups, but that the purpose of the ceasefire arrangements is the same, irrespective of the eventual characterization of the group. The expressed objective is to reduce violence and the suffering of the population, while helping to build confidence that enhances the prospects for successful dialogue.

The major groups, irrespective of whether they would be characterized under the Government's peace framework as political or criminal, are considered by the International Committee of the Red Cross to be parties to internal armed conflicts and subject to international humanitarian law. Where their actions threaten security forces, ex-combatants, human rights defenders and social leaders, the security of communities and the implementation of the Final Agreement, the expectation is for the ceasefires to contribute concretely to reductions to those threats. The ceasefires are also potentially valuable for establishing a more peaceful environment for campaigning and holding of regional and local elections in October 2023.

Furthermore, in the current complex terrain in certain regions of Colombia, the success of any one ceasefire and the dialogue process to which it is attached can be affected by armed groups outside of its scope whose actions could make them spoilers. In Cauca and Nariño, for example, the groups EMC FARC-EP and Segunda Marquetalia are in conflict with each other. In Antioquia and Chocó Departments, there is combat between the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia and ELN. In Arauca, Cauca and Valle del Cauca, EMC FARC-EP and ELN are in conflict with each other.

The strategy of the Government, however complex, is therefore aimed at carrying out simultaneous processes of dialogue and de-escalation that seek, as a whole, to reduce to the greatest extent the possible violence that is causing suffering for the civilian population and posing an obstacle to peacebuilding.

### **Options and implications for configuration of the Verification Mission**

With the above considerations in mind, I would like to present the following two options for the consideration of the Security Council:

1. A limited (or gradual) expansion of the current Mission mandate that would authorize participation in the monitoring and verification of the expected ceasefire with ELN, in addition, the ceasefire with EMC FARC-EP. This option would leave open to future consideration the Verification Mission's participation in the other processes for which the Government has also requested support. The Secretary-General would keep the Security Council apprised as to the advance of ceasefire developments with respect to the remaining groups (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra Nevada and Segunda Marquetalia) and provide recommendations regarding the Verification Mission's potential involvement in their monitoring and verification based on assessment of implications, opportunities and risks. This could be a practical option allowing for an immediate contribution by the Mission focusing on the processes available at this time and for which it is particularly well positioned to provide support, while leaving open the possibility of its engagement with other processes for which there is still uncertainty.

2. A broader, one-time expansion that would grant authorization and the requisite capacity for the Verification Mission to participate in the full range of ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanisms, in line with the requests of the Government. In this scenario, the Verification Mission would still start with the ceasefires of immediate application, namely, those signed with ELN and EMC FARC-EP, and could then incorporate, without further authorization, other monitoring and verification mechanisms as they are established between the Government and the remaining illegal armed groups. This approach would align the support more closely with the request of the Government for the involvement of the Verification Mission in all monitoring and verification mechanisms. It would not require additional authorizations by the Security Council as other dialogue processes move forward. However, it would also mean tasking amid greater uncertainty regarding these other processes and their associated ceasefire arrangements.

In either scenario, it can be anticipated that the Mission would carry out its responsibilities within the international component of the monitoring and verification mechanisms in a similar manner. Teams dedicated specifically to ceasefire monitoring tasks would take part in the activities of the monitoring and verification mechanisms at the national and regional or local levels in the field locations where it would be established. Given the early, confidence-building nature of the ceasefires being established at this time, the mechanisms would prioritize communication and cooperation between the ceasefire parties with a spirit of preventing violations and encouraging maximum compliance.

For a brief initial period following the authorization by the Security Council (no more than 45 days), the Mission could kick-start its participation drawing on current capacities, working from its Bogotá headquarters and its network of 11 regional offices and 6 subregional offices. Small mobile teams, including civilian staff and international observers would operate out of the field offices, participating in activities of the mechanisms and reporting internally to the heads of the regional offices.

The Mission would need to scale up steadily after this initial period, through an increase in personnel comprising additional mobile teams assigned to the monitoring and verification mechanisms that would be expanding their footprint into key areas for the respective ceasefires. The mobile teams would be deployed flexibly according to the evolving priorities of the verification.

I note that the phased approach taken by the Government and ELN to implementing their agreement is prudent to ensure a well-planned transition into the ceasefire environment. This provides the Mission with an opportunity to prepare for its potential role in monitoring and verification ahead of the full entry of the ceasefire on 3 August. While awaiting a decision of the Security Council, my Special Representative and his team can initiate provisional planning and engagement with the monitoring and verification partners.

At Mission headquarters in Bogotá, a ceasefire verification area would be established with capacity to participate in the mechanisms at the national level and advise and support the mobile field teams. A unit chief supported by a small team of international observers and civilian staff would report to my Special Representative through my Deputy Special Representative, who provides day-to-day supervision of the ceasefire verification work of the Mission.

With this approach, the mandated work on ceasefires would be integrated into the current structure of the Mission in the same manner as the existing aspects of its verification mandate, through a dedicated area that engages with national level counterparts and guides and coordinates the work of field teams based in regional and local offices.

In line with the decrees sent to the Security Council by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the protection of the members of the respective monitoring and verification mechanisms is the responsibility of the Colombian national police force known as Unidad Policial para la Edificación de la Paz, a special unit established under the Final Agreement.

### **Observer requirements**

To ensure sufficient capacity to cover multiple ceasefires in the field, additional personnel would be required beyond the current ceiling of 120 observers employed under the existing mandate. If the first option is chosen, the Verification Mission estimates a need for 95 additional international observers with military and police background, plus some additional international civilian staff and United Nations Volunteers. This would increase the authorized strength of international observers for the duration of the ceasefires from the current level to 215. If the second (broader) authorization is chosen, 130 additional international observers would be required to cover the full range of ceasefires, requiring an increase in the observer ceiling to 250. The Mission would only increase the actual deployment of observers to this level if all of the expected monitoring and verification mechanisms were to be established. The actual level of observers on the ground within the overall ceiling can be flexibly adjusted. Should any of the temporary ceasefires be discontinued, observer strength can be reduced accordingly. In either scenario, the Mission would seek to maintain its strong representation of women among its international observers (currently close to 40 per cent).

Additional logistics (principally transportation) and communications would be required for either of the options, however there is no anticipated need to open new field offices. Mission components fulfilling operational, security and administrative support functions would need some reinforcement.

I would keep the Security Council informed of the Mission's ceasefire verification activities within the same quarterly report already established.

### **Conclusions**

I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to present the above recommendations and I hope that it will consider favourably an expansion of the Mission's mandate to participate in the monitoring and verification of ceasefires.

I would also welcome the Security Council's recognition in this context of the good offices role that the Special Representative has been providing in the talks between the Government of Colombia and ELN.

The efforts by the Government to broaden the scope of peace through dialogue processes with armed groups are worthy of the support of the United Nations. Preliminary ceasefire agreements are an important element of the strategy as they have the potential to bring early reductions in violence and to improve the environment for talks. I am encouraged in this respect by some reductions already seen in certain indicators of violence.

We know from global experience that the establishment of solid protocols and robust and inclusive mechanisms of monitoring and verification are crucial to the success of ceasefire arrangements. There was strong agreement among the stakeholders consulted in developing these recommendations that the participation of the Mission would strengthen the mechanisms.

There is of course no substitute for the political will of the parties and thus in recommending this investment by the Council in the verification of the ceasefires, my call upon the parties is to adhere in good faith to their commitments and obligations.

The preliminary ceasefires should not be used by the parties to gain military advantage, or by the armed groups to tighten social control. It is imperative that they result in stronger protection for civilians and tangible alleviation of the suffering of the communities. This should include efforts to explicitly prohibit actions, such as the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence in conflict and indiscriminate use of antipersonnel mines. The parties to the armed conflict in Colombia are bound by international humanitarian law and should fully respect it. The Mission would keep the Security Council closely abreast of the situation on the ground.

Allow me to conclude by stressing the complementarity and potential synergies between the Mission's current mandate focusing on the Final Agreement with FARC-EP – which shall remain at the core of its work – and the monitoring of ceasefires with armed groups.

The ceasefires are to be implemented in the same regions of Colombia in which the Mission currently verifies implementation of the Final Agreement, and where the ongoing violence has become the single greatest threat to progress. Nearly all aspects of implementation are currently affected, though none more so than the security guarantees for the former combatants who laid down their arms, for social leaders and for conflict-affected communities. The ceasefires have an important potential to contribute to improved security conditions for those vulnerable groups, and the participation of the Mission in the monitoring and verification mechanisms would provide unique insights and opportunities to reinforce the enjoyment of their guarantees as promised under the Final Agreement.

The Security Council's support for the Colombian peace process has been a critical factor in the historic progress achieved to date. Today, through its dialogue and ceasefire initiatives, Colombia is adapting its strategy to evolving circumstances. I believe that the United Nations should also be ready to adapt to the current reality

on the ground, one in which preserving the hard-fought gains of peace will require an effective strategy to curb the remaining expressions of violence. The participation of the Mission in ceasefire verification would be a timely investment by the Council in helping to preserve this success.

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**

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