



# Mobilizing to Counter Post-agreement Security Challenges: The Case of the “Humanitarian Accord Now” in Chocó

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## INTRODUCTION

The department of Chocó, located in the northern Pacific Coast of Colombia, has been a space of dynamic resistance to war on the part of the Afro and Indigenous communities that make up the vast majority of Chocó’s population.<sup>1</sup> Over the past three decades, communities throughout the department have developed innovative strategies to

<sup>1</sup>According to the 2005 census, the ethnic composition of Chocó is 82.1% of African descent, 12.7% indigenous, and 5.2% white or mestizo (Censo General 2005).

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remain in their territories and nonviolently counter armed group violence and control, including the creation of humanitarian zones and peace communities to avoid displacement and limit armed group incursions; peace flotillas to counter blockades and allow humanitarian aid to pass through strategically vital rivers; and inter-ethnic institutions to amplify demands for human rights and build solidarity across ethnic lines. Despite the lack of government support and limited access to basic necessities, Afro and indigenous communities have managed to maintain these humanitarian spaces and work toward building local peace in the face of changing conflict dynamics.

The history of the armed conflict in Chocó dates back to the late 1970s with the arrival there of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Given the state's neglect of the area, the rebels found there an ideal rearguard area. Chocó's proximity to the border with Panama, access to both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and its abundance of natural resources including gold and timber made the area a crucial strategic territory for the conflict. The department rapidly became a main conduit for trade in arms and drugs, as well as a source of significant tax revenue from the mining and logging industries active in the region. In the face of a largely absent state, the FARC managed to exercise control over large portions of the territory and population. However, as in many other areas of the country, the rebels' territorial dominance was severely challenged by paramilitary and state forces beginning in the second half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the FARC continued an active and highly profitable cross-border trade and exercised significant economic and social control over communities throughout the strategically vital San Juan and Atrato river basins until 2015, when the FARC declared its final ceasefire en route to signing the 2016 peace agreement with the Santos administration.

Chocoans survived over two decades of sustained violence generated by competition over their ancestral territories between the FARC, other guerrilla organizations, paramilitary armies, and the forces of the state. By the time of the 2016 peace agreement, though the FARC were still a powerful armed presence in Chocó, they were not the only ones. As such, the peace deal and the subsequent withdrawal of the FARC generated both significant expectations and deep uncertainties among residents. Community leaders recognized both the promise of the peace deal to reduce violence and invigorate local peacebuilding efforts in the department, as well as the potential instability and insecurity that the exit of the FARC could generate.

Indigenous and Afro movements in Chocó almost universally supported the peace deal, and the demobilization of FARC did initially lead

to a reduction in overall violence in the department (Garzón Vergara and Silva Aparicio 2019). Nevertheless, the ethnic leadership remained cognizant of the threat presented by other active non-state armed groups, including the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*, AGC), a non-state armed group that emerged from the demobilization of the paramilitaries in the period 2002–2005, and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN), now the country’s largest rebel group. Even before the signing of the peace deal, community leaders in Chocó warned that absent significant state action, the demobilization of the FARC would trigger a new round of violence as these other armed groups fought to fill in the power voids left by FARC and control strategic corridors for the arms and drugs trade to the Pacific Ocean (OCHA 2015).

Thus, communities found themselves needing once again to be innovative in fortifying existing organizational efforts and effectively respond to this rapidly changing context. These pressures led to the creation of the Humanitarian Accord Now! For Chocó (*Acuerdo Humanitario ¡Ya! Para el Chocó*, AHY) in August 2017, a broad-based, multi-ethnic initiative of Chocoan civil society. The Humanitarian Accord serves as a grassroots peace platform that makes concrete demands on all parties to the armed conflict to respect the autonomy and human rights of the communities and to negotiate a definitive end to post-agreement violence.

In this chapter, we explore how communities with long histories of collective action against violence and in favor of local peace responded to the 2016 peace agreement and sought to encounter and shape the post-peace deal period. Specifically, we ask: How did the signing of the 2016 peace agreement and the subsequent withdrawal of FARC affect community organizing in Chocó? We argue that although the peace agreement and the withdrawal of the FARC were met with hope and overwhelming support by Chocoan civil society,<sup>2</sup> rather than initiating a “demobilization” effect on collective action for peace, the peace process had a “revamping” effect.

The opportunities and threats generated by the peace process and its subsequent impacts pushed peace movements in Chocó to give new and improved form and structure to their existing efforts, reflecting both innovative thinking in response to a new context as well as the accumulated, hard-won knowledge of communities and leaders with nearly 30 years of experience collectively responding to armed conflict. We contend that this shift is most likely to happen in multi-party conflicts, that is, those

<sup>2</sup>Nearly 80% of voters in Chocó supported the peace deal in the October 2016 referendum.

involving more than one non-state armed group, where peace agreements often involve some but not all active factions and thus threats to communities persist after a peace deal. Far from making community collective action against conflict redundant, the peace deal with FARC created momentum and expanded space for organizing, and the subsequent impacts of the deal made organizing even more pressing. Thanks to a strong tradition and organizational infrastructure for contentious collective action against war, communities in Chocó were able to capitalize on this new opportunity for communal action. The response that we observed in Chocó and discuss in this chapter reflects the accumulated learning of these communities on how to respond to constantly changing conflict dynamics.

As such, this chapter provides a detailed, grounded account of the process of post-accord community (re)organization with an emphasis on the creation of the Humanitarian Accord Now! The data comes from fieldwork conducted in the department of Chocó in January–December 2018 and April–August 2019, in which the authors interviewed the main indigenous and Afro leaders of the Humanitarian Accord and accompanied them in crucial activities, such as internal meetings, public speeches, workshops with the international actors involved in the process, and public launches.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section offers a historical account of community organizing in Chocó to defend its territories and communities from the violent dynamics of a longstanding armed conflict. The second section details the ambivalent effects the peace deal between the Santos government and the FARC brought to the communities of Chocó, as the remaining armed groups in the territory expanded their territorial control. The third section describes the launch of the AHY as a response by ethnic groups to ongoing human rights violations by the state and the armed groups. The fourth section analyzes the conditions that led to the revamping effect of collective mobilization, pointing out three core elements: political opportunity structure, incentives/grievances, and movement capacity. The final section concludes by discussing how the change of government in 2018 affected the development of the AHY.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND WAR IN CHOCÓ

The backbone of Chocoan civil society is indigenous and Afro “ethno-territorial” organizations, or ethnic-based organizations that have legally recognized authority over a demarcated collective territory (Castillo 2007;

Domínguez Mejía 2012). The contemporary iterations of these organizations emerged during a wave of organizing in Chocó in the late 1970s and 1980s in the context of rising visibility and activism of ethnic and indigenous peoples across Latin America and the dire threat that new economic interests, particularly timber companies, represented to Chocóan local autonomy and lands. The Chocóan organizing process was further sparked by the arrival of Liberation Theology-inspired priests within the local dioceses (Ríos Oyola 2017) and by the emergence in the 1970s of the powerful indigenous movement in Cauca, which set off a wave of indigenous organizing across Colombia (Velasco Jaramillo 2014). With the accompaniment of the Catholic Church's Indigenous Pastoral, a regional indigenous organization, the Embera-Wounaan Regional Organization (*Organización Regional Embera-Wounaan*, OREWA), was officially formed in 1982 to fight for the unity, culture, territory and autonomy of the indigenous peoples of Chocó (Velasco Jaramillo 2014).

The formation of OREWA, the accompaniment of the Diocese of Quibdó, and the looming threat of timber expansion led to the formation of Chocó's first Afro ethnic and territorially based organization in the Medio Atrato region, then known as the Integrated Campesino Organization of the Atrato (*Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato*, ACIA). ACIA was instantly a remarkable success, achieving a historic land management agreement with the Colombian government in 1986 and building an efficient, wide-reaching rice cooperative (Gutiérrez and Restrepo 2017). Their success buttressed the rapid formation of Afro peasant organizations throughout the department. The territorial claims of these organizations were vindicated and formalized in the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and the Law 70 of 1993, which created community councils (*consejos comunitarios*) as the entity with "maximum authority" to administer the titled lands adjudicated to Black communities (Hinestroza Cuesta and Cuesta Rentería 2017).<sup>3</sup>

While these organizing processes were taking shape, war was steadily encroaching into the department. The presence of both FARC and ELN guerrillas in Chocó dates back to the 1970s. For many years, rebels took

<sup>3</sup>Law 70 of 1993 recognizes that Black communities who have settled on uncultivated lands in the coastal rural areas of the rivers of the Pacific basin, in accordance with their traditional production practices, have the right to collective ownership. It also establishes mechanisms for the protection of the cultural identity and the rights of the Colombian Black communities as an ethnic group, and the promotion of their economic and social development, in order to ensure that these communities have the same opportunities as the rest of the Colombian society.

advantage of the isolation of the region and used it as a safe area beyond the reach of the government and, later on, the paramilitaries. In addition, its geographical proximity to Panama and the Pacific Coast made northern Chocó a strategic route for arms trafficking and illicit trade.<sup>4</sup> However, despite insurgent presence, the region remained largely nonviolent and was known as an “oasis of peace” (Restrepo and Rojas 2004).

This all changed in the second half of the 1990s. The paramilitaries, often with open acquiescence and cooperation of the army, began entering the region from the northeast and started to displace local people to expand their economic activities, primarily cattle ranching and palm oil crops (Grajales 2013). Violence became increasingly common, and the relative calm of this “oasis of peace” came to a definite end in 1997 with the launch of Operation Genesis—a massive counterinsurgent initiative by the Colombian military and the paramilitaries to eliminate the FARC from the Bajo Atrato region of northern Chocó.

Economic and strategic incentives drove the paramilitaries and the army to continue the war throughout the 2000s. The rivers of Chocó are key access points to both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, driving intense competition to control profitable corridors for arms and drug trafficking. Furthermore, the abundance of natural resources in Chocó, including gold, timber and land suitable for palm oil production and cattle ranching incentivized the paramilitaries to fight the guerrillas and strategically displace the local population, largely stigmatized as loyal to the insurgents.<sup>5</sup> The humanitarian costs of the war in Chocó have been devastating. Since 1985, the Colombian government’s official Victim’s Registry (Registro Único de Víctimas, RUV) has catalogued approximately 430,000 victims of forced displacement, 24,200 victims of confinement, 19,200 persons who received threats, and 11,700 homicides in the department, staggering totals for a department of approximately 500,000 inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond the sheer numbers, the war has had an overwhelming effect on the social and cultural fabric of Chocó. Residents recall Chocó before the 1990s as a place with a powerful sense of community, where they did not need to lock their doors at night and could show up unannounced in a

<sup>4</sup>Interviews with an academic expert (N. 01), March 2019, and a regional government officer (N. 02), February 2018.

<sup>5</sup>For the concept of strategic displacement, see Steele (2017, Chap. 1).

<sup>6</sup>Official victims totals are available at: <https://cifras.unidadvictimas.gov.co/>. Population estimates are based on data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), consulted on April 7, 2020, at <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2018/informacion-tecnica/presentaciones-territorio/190806-CNPV-presentacion-Choco.pdf>.

different village and easily find something to eat and a place to sleep. Now, as a social leader put it, trust between people has been shattered.<sup>7</sup> The conflict destroyed norms and traditions that strengthened community and maintained cultural identity including traditional cooperative production and conflict resolution practices, as armed groups sought to replace traditional authorities and impose strict control over community life. Community leaders perceived this destruction as a deliberate strategy to break the strength of community organizing in order to facilitate armed group control.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the strategies of the armed groups to weaken the relationships within and between indigenous and Black communities, as in other areas of the country, violence and disorder provoked by armed competition created incentives and opportunities for community collective action (Masullo 2017a). In response to violence, existing ethnic organizations developed innovative strategies to remain connected to their land and culture, avoid displacement, protect themselves from violence, and maintain their autonomy from armed groups.<sup>9</sup> In broad social movements, often with international accompaniment and at times as individual communities, civilians in Chocó have come together to collectively stay put in their territories, demarcate areas off-limits to armed groups, break social isolation, and maintain access to food and medical supplies.

One of the most vivid examples of these organized responses to war comes from Cacarica, in the Bajo Atrato region. In the late 1990s, hundreds of people who had fled their villages due to increased levels of violence and military confrontations in the context of Operation Genesis decided to return to their lands and create a “zone of peace”,<sup>10</sup> hosting over 20 communities (almost 3000 people at the date of this research) and establishing two humanitarian zones as safe spaces for temporary displacement (CAVIDA 2002; Sanford 2003). In another response to the threat of displacement, the Major Community Council of the Middle Atrato (Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato, COCOMACIA<sup>11</sup>) constructed humanitarian centers, physical structures located throughout the Middle Atrato region for use by both indigenous and Afro communities

<sup>7</sup> Interview with a social leader from Chocó (N. 03), May 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with a social leader from a community council of Chocó (N. 04), May 2019, and with an academic expert (N. 08), May 2019.

<sup>9</sup> For the concept of “civilian autonomy”, see Kaplan (2017).

<sup>10</sup> For the concept of “zone of peace”, see Hancock and Mitchell (2007).

<sup>11</sup> COCOMACIA is the later iteration of the organization ACIA after it received its land title in 1997.

as safe spaces for temporary displacement Nuestros Logos (n.d.). But collective responses have gone beyond avoiding displacement and engaging in forms of noncooperation with armed groups.<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2003, OREWA and COCOMACIA, along with other local and international organizations, organized the mass movement “Atratiando” to break the seven-year blockade of the Atrato river by sending scores of boats to move collectively on the river with the accompaniment of the Church and international organizations (Quiceno Toro 2016).

Finally, communities have created collective platforms as a way to enhance social cohesion across ethnic lines, strengthen international alliances, and denounce violence and other illegal activities more safely. An illustrative example is the Inter-Ethnic Solidarity Forum (*Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó*, FISCH), which was established in 2001 to promote integration, coordination, and consultation among the ethno-territorial and social organizations of Chocó. Although in its origins it represented both Black and indigenous organizations, the latter decided to form their own platform, the Permanent Dialogue and Negotiation Table of the Indigenous Peoples of Chocó (*Mesa Permanente de Diálogo y Concertación de los Pueblos Indígenas del departamento del Chocó* or *Mesa* in short), which integrates the five major indigenous organizations of Chocó and advocates for the respect of their rights. Both FISCH and the *Mesa* continued to articulate cooperative strategies to build peace in the region at the time of writing.

## PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FARC

In 2012, the government of Juan Manuel Santos began peace negotiations with the FARC in Havana, reaching a final agreement in 2016.<sup>13</sup> From the moment that the news of the peace negotiations was made public in 2012, Chocóan civil society was actively engaged in ensuring that their voices were heard at the negotiation table. Of particular importance was the process that two Chocóan leaders led to gain a space for Afro and indigenous voices in the peace talks. At the beginning of 2013, Marino Córdoba, who was the international representative in Washington DC for the Association of Displaced Persons of African Descent (*Asociación de Afrodescendientes Desplazados*, AFRODES), and Richard Moreno (then

<sup>12</sup>For the concept of noncooperation, see Masullo (2021) and Arjona (2017).

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed account of the peace process, see Nasi and Rettberg (2019).



the legal representative of FISCH) had the idea of creating a platform that would bring together different organizations of Afro communities across the country in order to have more leverage in their negotiations with the government. These two Chocoan leaders discussed the idea with leaders of Afro organizations with strong presence in other areas of the country, such as the department of Valle del Cauca,<sup>14</sup> and were eventually able to put into place the Afro-Colombian Peace Council (*Consejo Nacional de Paz Afro-Colombiano*, CONPA).

CONPA expanded to include nine Afro organizations at the national and regional levels, leading a national and international campaign to secure direct participation in Havana.<sup>15</sup> They drafted an Afro-Colombian peace agenda, reflecting their historical struggle for rights and their efforts to refuse to cooperate with armed groups and take part in the war. Formulating an ethnically focused vision for peace proved crucial, as the drafts that were originally discussed in Havana lacked an integrated ethnic perspective and neglected well-established ethnic rights (CONPA 2015).

Recognizing the need to put significant pressure on the government to have a voice in the negotiations, CONPA joined efforts with two large national indigenous organizations and launched the Ethnic Commission for Peace and Territorial Rights in March 2016. The organizations initiated a coordinated effort that matched national mass mobilizations with international lobbying, eventually gaining the support of the United States, Norway and Cuba, in addition to the Colombian Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In June 2016, the Colombian government finally agreed to invite ethnic leaders, including several Chocoans, to Havana and to include an ethnic chapter in the Final Peace Agreement.<sup>16</sup> In parallel, FISCH visited the different communities of the territory to inform them about the agreement and the inclusion of the Ethnic Chapter. All these efforts translated into massive support by the Chocoan people for the peace agreement in the October 2016 peace referendum.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Interview with a Black social leader from a regional ethnic-territorial organization (N. 05), April 2018.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with a Black social leader from a regional ethnic-territorial organization (N. 06), March 2018.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed account of this process, see Rodríguez Iglesias (2018).

<sup>17</sup>As mentioned earlier, nearly 80% of voters in Chocó supported the peace deal in the October 2016 referendum.

Communities in Chocó saw the deal as an opportunity to “build peace from the ground up”, bring “real security” to Chocó, rebuild infrastructure and restore the social fabric, address the needs of victims, and foster community-owned development.<sup>18</sup> In fact, during the last phase of the negotiations and the first few months following the signature of the deal, Chocoans did experience some improvements in their quality of life, with levels of violence decreasing, more freedom of movement, and, in general, less harassment by armed groups.<sup>19</sup> As an indigenous academic expert from Chocó put it,

We had a good break from violence during the peace process; our freedom of movement was respected; we could go fishing and hunting at night without problems; there was tranquility, meetings and events. And that situation lasted about six months after the FARC turned in their weapons.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, despite this period of (relative) calm, ethnic leaders in the department were already anticipating imminent danger stemming from the demobilization of the FARC. The words of a legal representative of an indigenous ethnic-territorial organization from Chocó referring to the position of the elders of the community are clear in this respect:

One way or another our elders did an analysis: the FARC go away, we have to prepare ourselves because it is going to be difficult now that they are talking about a peace process because many illegal armed forces are going to emerge and there is no one to talk to. These actors have no principles, no clear policy, and thus what is going to be discussed? FARC could have caused some damages, but they at least had a political cause, and many things could be discussed and agreed on [with FARC].<sup>21</sup>

Given the multi-party nature of the Colombian armed conflict, the peace agreement with FARC, even if successful, could only bring at best an “incomplete” or “partial” peace. Although the FARC was the longest-lived armed group in Colombia, it was far from the only one. This was

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with various Chocoan civil society representatives, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a civil servant from the Inspector General’s Office (N. 07), August 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with an ethnic academic expert from Chocó (N. 08), February 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with the legal representative of an indigenous ethnic-territorial organization from Chocó (N. 09), February 2018.

especially true in Chocó, where both the AGC and the ELN were present in large parts of the territory and had control and interests over a significant portion of Chocó's illegal economies in 2016.

Warnings about the “vacuum” the FARC would leave behind and the potential for violent clashes between other armed groups to control these territories and illegal economies date back at least to 2015 (OCHA 2015). Given the strategic and economic value of these territories, observers knew that, following the peace deal, there would be a lot “up for grabs” in the department, attracting significant attention from other armed groups in the region.<sup>22</sup>

These expectations soon proved correct. With the exit of the FARC, other armed groups present in the territory, including the AGC and the ELN, expanded their struggle to control the drug trafficking routes and illegal mining. This resulted in serious violations of the rights of the communities, including recruitment of minors, threats and killings of social leaders, and the confinement or displacement of entire communities. The Diocese of Quibdó, which closely accompanied the affected communities, publicly denounced the situation:

The Gulf Clan,<sup>23</sup> the ELN, and other illegal groups continue to operate in almost all of Chocó; they directly and indirectly involve the civilian population, finance their activities through illegal economies, extort people, sow landmines, recruit minors, steal domestic animals, exert pressure on members of communities to participate in meetings, arbitrarily organize sporting activities and cultural events in the territories, and hinder communities from performing their traditional tasks. This year there have been a number of massive and individual forced displacements, economic blockades, occupation of schools and community homes, bullying, shortages, confinement of communities, killings of leaders and threats, such as denounced by ethnic-territorial organizations, the Catholic Church, the Ombudsman's Office, the UN, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. (Diocese's Report 2018)

These violations persist to the date of writing. Thousands of residents of the municipality of Bojayá were confined from February 2019 until the beginning of 2020 due to an escalation of violence between the AGC and the ELN (Semana 2020). Armed groups have been vying for control over

<sup>22</sup> Interview with an international aid worker (N. 10), March 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Gulf Clan (*Clan de Golfo*) is another name for the AGC neoparamilitary organization.

the strategically important Bojayá River that connects with the Pacific Ocean, and the Atrato river, with the Atlantic Ocean and the border with Panama.<sup>24</sup>

The expansion of the paramilitaries and the ELN in the territory has had an important impact on economic and social life in many areas of the department. According to a leader of a community council, as the FARC used to limit extractivism and played a regulating role in the drug economy; after their demobilization, volatility in both legal and illegal economies has increased.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, residents have felt that the newly arriving groups are significantly harder to deal with, as they tend to be smaller, more fragmented and decentralized, and more criminally oriented.<sup>26</sup> Interlocutors inferred that the strategic value of the areas of Chocó under contestation (in particular, drug routes leading to the Pacific Ocean) and the ferocity of the conflict between the ELN and the AGC made the ELN insensitive to community demands.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the AGC has pursued a strategy of intentionally fomenting internal divisions within the local population and terror by placing spies within communities throughout their area of influence.<sup>28</sup>

The resumption of war in Chocó has brought about continuous violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, while the state has failed to provide security or humanitarian assistance to communities in Chocó despite countless meetings, repeated promises, and multiple high-level security committees.

## THE HUMANITARIAN ACCORD NOW! FOR CHOCÓ

In response to the reactivation of armed conflict, Chocoan organizations came together to launch the Humanitarian Accord Now! For Chocó (AHY). The AHY is a regional initiative that puts forward concrete humanitarian demands to the Colombian government and the ELN to put an end to the ongoing armed conflict affecting their communities and

<sup>24</sup>As these two routes are key for the transportation of cocaine to Central America, Bojayá has been historically a geostrategic point for armed groups (Escobar Moreno 2019).

<sup>25</sup>Interview with legal representatives of a Black community council of Chocó (N. 11), April 2019.

<sup>26</sup>Interviews with a Black social leader from a community council of Chocó (N. 12), July 2019; and with a member of the Diocese of Quibdó (N. 13), June 2019.

<sup>27</sup>Interview with a think tank expert (N. 14), February 2020, and with an academic expert (N. 15), February 2020.

<sup>28</sup>Interview with a social worker of a Colombian NGO (N. 16), February 2020.

territories. The initiative was launched in August 2017 with the signature of a document by FISCH and the *Mesa*, as well as 90 other Chocóan civil society and ethno-territorial organizations.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to requesting humanitarian action, the AHY aimed to give Chocóans a voice in the then-ongoing peace talks between the government of President Santos and the ELN.<sup>30</sup> Thus, social leaders in Chocó sought to extend the gains made in the negotiations with the FARC to other peace negotiations and were eager to play an active role in these negotiations from the beginning.

The AHY presents a set of 11 demands<sup>31</sup> on behalf of the Chocóan communities calling for an immediate halt to violence in the department and for respect of the territorial autonomy of ethnic communities. While the specific motivation of the Humanitarian Accord was to advance peace talks between the ELN and the Colombian government, its intent was to articulate a holistic agenda for peace in Chocó that would eventually encompass all active armed groups (FISCH y la Mesa Indígena, 2019). Inherent in these demands is a reconceptualization of the idea and practice of security, challenging the state model that seeks to bring security via increasing militarization of the territories and individualized protection schemes for threatened social leaders. Rather, the Accord articulates a holistic vision of security rooted in respect for the autonomy and world-views of ethnic communities.<sup>32</sup>

Led by FISCH and the *Mesa*, many other civil society organizations took an active role in shaping the AHY. Especially notable was the role of women's and LGBTQ organizations that worked to expand the platform to include and account for the specific impacts the war has had on women, gay, and trans people. As they were left out of the conformation of CONPA

<sup>29</sup> A full list of signatories can be found here: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Acuerdo-Humanitario.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> The talks between the ELN and the government started in January 2018 under the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos and were suspended in January 2019 by President Iván Duque following an attack on a police station by the armed group.

<sup>31</sup> The Accord demands an immediate ceasefire and demobilization by all armed groups, leading to a negotiated, definitive political solution (points A, B, and E). Second, it demands respect for the territorial autonomy of the communities (point C), as well as an end to violence, displacement, confinement, recruitment, and illegal economies affecting communities, recognizing the specific impacts of violence against minors, women, and LGBTQ people (Points D, F, G, H, I, and J). The final point asks for accompaniment and monitoring by international partners (point K).

<sup>32</sup> Field notes, May 2019.

and had a secondary role in the negotiations with the FARC, on this occasion female and LGBTQ leaders sought to step up their presence and voice from the very beginning of the negotiations of the AHY and made sure that the issue of violence against women and LGBTQ people was at the center of the discussions.<sup>33</sup>

The Accord was born from the ambivalent effects of the peace deal described above: from the hope, relative calm, and expanding political space created by the deal as much as from real concerns about the prospect of imminent violence by other non-state armed groups active in the territory. Beyond its proximate causes, the Accord builds on a long history of broad-based inter-ethnic platforms for peace in Chocó that can be traced back at least to the creation of FISCH in 2001, the first collective attempt by Chocoan civil society to create a departmental-level dialogue space to articulate shared goals around peace, territory, and human rights. In fact, the name “Humanitarian Accord” itself dates back to 2003, when FISCH put forward the first Humanitarian Accord as a proposal for the autonomy and security of the communities in the department. However, given the intensity of the armed conflict at that time, the proposal did not gain much traction as neither the government nor the guerrilla or the paramilitary paid much attention to it.<sup>34</sup>

FISCH again sought to build a collective peace platform in 2009 with the Regional Agenda for Peace (*Agenda Regional Inter-Étnica de Paz del Chocó*), which aimed to articulate a regional vision for peace based on territorial autonomy, stronger organizations, ethnic-based development, gender equity, and victim rights. Presentada Agenda Regional De Paz Para El Chocó (n.d.). This document, in addition to establishing a set of political demands to both sides of the conflict, intended to make visible the humanitarian crisis in Chocó and to diagnose the underlying drivers of war, with a particular focus on legal and illegal extractive economies. The document was updated and expanded in 2015, during the advanced stages of peace talks with FARC. The scope and intent of the Regional Agenda for Peace marks it as a clear precursor to the Humanitarian Accord.

Beyond a long tradition of working toward regional peace and promoting dialogues with armed groups, the AHY also emerged within a broader

<sup>33</sup>Interview with a social leader from a women’s organization from Chocó (N. 17), January 2018.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with a member of the Diocese of Quibdó (N. 13), June 2019.

context of increased social mobilization in the department. In 2016, civil society marched in Quibdó for several days demanding investments in basic public services historically underdeveloped in the region, such as health, education, and communication infrastructures. As a result, the government agreed to take action and committed to finance several social projects. These promises were largely unfulfilled, leading to a civil strike in May 2017. Leaders of ethnic-territorial, women's organizations, and victims took advantage of this contentious moment to also discuss the worsening of security and humanitarian conditions (especially in the rural areas) and to explore possible actions. Simultaneously, FISCH and other ethnic organizations were advancing a legal campaign to recognize the Atrato river as a subject of legal rights and a victim of illegal mining, which resulted in the Sentence T-622 from the Constitutional Court.<sup>35</sup>

The Humanitarian Accord creates a monitoring and implementing infrastructure responsible for collecting information and building awareness of Chocó's humanitarian crisis at the local, national, and international levels. It creates a platform for political dialogue with the national government and the armed actors present in Chocó and strengthens the internal organizing capacities and social fabric of Chocóan civil society. To do so, the Humanitarian Accord divides functions between three levels: the sub-regional committees, the departmental committee, and a technical secretary. The Accord divides Chocó into five "subregions", each of which created a committee responsible for raising awareness of the Humanitarian Accord in their region and recording violations of human and humanitarian rights.<sup>36</sup> The Departmental Committee of the Accord is responsible for guaranteeing a gender and inter-ethnic/inter-cultural analysis in the reports of the Humanitarian Accord as well as maintaining relationships with international allies. Finally, the Technical Secretary is charged with leading direct negotiations with the national government and the ELN, and overseeing the work of the subcommittees and the departmental committee (Primer Informe de Seguimiento al Acuerdo Humanitario ¡Ya! En el Chocó, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> By recognizing the Atrato river as a subject of legal rights, the sentence, pronounced by the Constitutional Court in 2016, requires the Colombian state to guarantee the protection and preservation of the river.

<sup>36</sup> The subregions are organized around the major rivers of the department: the middle and upper Atrato, lower Atrato, Baudó, San Juan, and the Pacific Coast.

Based on the reporting of the regional subcommittees, the AHY has exerted political pressure on the Colombian government by publishing regular reports on violations of human rights in Chocó (Primer Informe de Seguimiento al Acuerdo Humanitario ¡Ya! en el Chocó, 2019). The Ethnic Issue's Group (*Grupo de Asuntos Étnicos*) of the Inspector General's office, led by Richard Moreno, former FISCH legal representative, has taken a leading role in circulating the Humanitarian Accord reports to responsible government agencies and filing petitions for government responses under the threat of legal action.<sup>37</sup>

Since the launch of the Humanitarian Accord, Chocóan leaders have understood the importance of support from the international community both to mobilize resources and to give more visibility to their initiative. As international lobbying during the negotiations with the FARC proved to be very fruitful, once again they sought support from the international organizations present in the territory. The UN Resident Coordinator, the Mission to Support the Peace Process of the Organization of American States (MAPP/OEA), the embassies of Sweden, Switzerland, and Germany, and the European Union representative for Colombia joined efforts to support the infrastructure of the Accord and provide humanitarian assistance based on needs identified at the local level. Despite some difficulties in the international engagement,<sup>38</sup> international linkages have been of primary importance to develop the Humanitarian Accord in the five subregions of Chocó, as well as to scale up efforts at the national level. The aid of the international community has also contributed to enhanced political engagement between the government and local civil society.

In addition, donor support created space for a delegation of the Humanitarian Accord to participate in the negotiations with the ELN in Quito. The delegation had a twofold objective: to make sure that ethnic worldviews and rights were reflected in the final agreement and also to sensitize the Colombian government and ELN leadership to the

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a social leader from a women's organization from Chocó (N. 17), January 2018, and with members of the Inspector's General Office (N. 07), August 2019.

<sup>38</sup> The relationship between the international community and AHY's Secretariat has been contentious for a number of reasons. First, the international donors perceived that the leaders lacked the administrative capacity to oversee financial resources and chose the Diocese of Quibdó as the administrator of the funds. Second, there was deficient coordination among donor countries with respect to the priorities of the project, something that resulted in continuous delays. Interview with an international aid worker (N. 18), May 2019.



humanitarian and security crisis in Chocó. On August 31, 2017, Chocóan leaders went to Quito to present the Humanitarian Accord to the lead negotiators of the ELN and the Colombian government; a month later, representatives of the Colombian government and the ELN came to Quibdó to build a collective understanding of the current situation in Chocó. These meetings afforded a rare opportunity for communities to express concerns directly to the national leadership of the ELN.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the Accord has served as a platform for dialogue, unity-building, and conflict resolution across Chocóan civil society, particularly around sensitive issues such as reincorporating ex-combatants into communities.<sup>40</sup> The regional subcommittees have created opportunities for activists to build relationships with each other and stay up-to-date on emerging threats within their region.<sup>41</sup> It led to the formation of the Women, Peace and Security roundtable, which incorporates the major gender-based organizations of Chocó to ensure that the Accord maintains its stated commitment to mainstream gender in implementing each provision.<sup>42</sup>

The Accord has also sought to strengthen ethnic organizations by modernizing their bylaws (*reglamentos*) and by strengthening community leadership. It has generated skill-building workshops for community leaders, training them on the peace process and the vision of the Humanitarian Accord, landmine safety, data and communications security, and gender issues.<sup>43</sup> The Women, Peace, and Security roundtable has also organized specific workshops within the framework of the Humanitarian Accord on building women's leadership, collective care and self-protection strategies specific to women.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> As the government used the Humanitarian Accord to put pressure on the ELN to stop kidnapping, the leadership of the Accord expressed publicly that the AHY was an initiative of the ethnic-territorial organizations, and rejected that the government co-opted it for advancing talks with the ELN. Interview with an international aid worker (N. 18), May 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with a social leader from a women's regional organization from Chocó (N. 17), May 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with social leader from Chocó (N. 19), July 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with a social leader from a women's regional organization from Chocó (N. 17), May 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with members of community councils (N. 04, N. 11), April/May 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with a social leader from a women's regional organization from Chocó (N. 17), May 2019.

## ANALYSIS

The experience of the Humanitarian Accord illustrates that neither a national peace deal nor the demobilization of a key armed group necessarily deactivates or renders unnecessary civilian collective efforts to resist war and build local peace. On the contrary, a peace deal can drive a revamping effect for grassroots movements.

Ex ante, there were various reasons to expect the peace deal to have a “demobilization” effect on grassroots collective action in Chocó. First, peace implementation created opportunities for the institutionalization of contentious collective action, including roles within the state for key leaders and a formal role within the peace implementation infrastructure for FISCH.<sup>45</sup> Second, the signing of the peace deal, the demobilization of the FARC, and, in particular, the addition of the Ethnic Chapter into the peace deal satisfied key goals that had animated the Chocoan ethnic leadership since at least 2012. Furthermore, as we have shown, the demobilization of the FARC created a breather for Chocó in which violence and armed group pressure dropped significantly, making resistance against war and local peacebuilding appear less urgent in the new post-agreement era.<sup>46</sup>

Despite these significant pressures toward deactivation, the movement did not demobilize, but rather reacted to the peace deal by revamping its collective work: expanding and innovating new platforms to advance its claims for respect for fundamental ethnic, human, and humanitarian rights. The combination of three forces help us understand how this was the case in the department of Chocó. First, the national peace process created new allies and spaces for dialogue and participation of communities—in particular victims of violence—and created momentum for local and regional engagement in national peace efforts. Second, the (largely successful) demobilization of the FARC triggered the violent reaccommodation of other armed groups in the territory, creating a complex set of new challenges and threats to local communities that demanded a collective response. Third, while these specific challenges were new to residents, communities were well organized both internally and externally

<sup>45</sup> Institutionalization, understood as the incorporation or co-optation by the state of movement leaders and organizations, has been identified in social movement theory as a central force toward movement deactivation (McAdam et al. 2009, Tarrow 2011, 190).

<sup>46</sup> As noted in social movement research, the satisfaction of key claims could reasonably trigger a *facilitation* mechanism toward movement deactivation (McAdam et al. 2009, Tarrow 2011, 190).

and carried lessons learned during several decades of collectively navigating war. These three conditions speak, respectively, to political opportunity structures, incentives/grievances, and movement capacity, three key basic ingredients that have been found crucial for effective community collective action both in the context of war (e.g., Masullo 2017a) and in other contexts of indigenous mobilization (e.g., Yashar 2005).

### *Opportunity: Expanded Political Opportunity Structure*

The case of the AHY suggests that a peace process can represent a widening of the political opportunity structure for collective action for peace.<sup>47</sup> In the Chocó case, this is reflected in at least three crucial dimensions: (i) the possibility to place movement members in positions of power within the state; (ii) new opportunities to build relationships with key international actors; and (iii) the opening up of internal movement structures to traditionally marginalized actors. The fact that attempts to create a similar type of accord back in 2003 failed due to the intensity of the armed conflict—as the Diocese explained to us—but then succeeded in the aftermath of the peace process clearly suggests an opening in the political opportunity structure.<sup>48</sup>

First, the peace deal created opportunities for ethnic movements across Colombia to place leaders in powerful positions within the state. It led to the 2017 creation of the Ethnic Unit within the Inspector General's office, which was headed by Richard Moreno, the former secretary of FISCH. Since Moreno arrived, the Inspector General has closely followed the Humanitarian Accord, playing a key role in bringing spokespeople to the Quito negotiations, circulating the Accord reports throughout the government and accompanying meetings with government officials to document and follow up on government promises for support.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the peace agreement created the Special High Level Panel of Ethnic Peoples (*Instancia Especial de Alto Nivel con los Pueblos Étnicos*, IEANPE)

<sup>47</sup> For seminal work on the concept of political opportunity structures in social movement research, see Eisinger (1973), McAdam (1982) and Tarrow (2011). For a discussion on how the dynamics of civil war, in particular territorial contestation, can create an opening for civilian collective action, see Masullo (2017a, Chap. 3).

<sup>48</sup> Interview with a member of the Diocese of Quibdó (N. 13), June 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Richard Moreno, delegate of the Ethnic Unit at the Inspector General Office, December 2017.

to more actively involve ethnic groups in the implementation and verification processes (Communiqué # 13, 2017). This platform, in which current FISCH leaders are active members (e.g., Abid Manuel Romaña), has paid particular attention to the development of the AHY, openly supporting its efforts in public meetings and seeking ways to translate the initiative to other territories.<sup>50</sup>

Second, cognizant of the importance of international support, the ethnic-territorial organizations of Chocó were able to capitalize on the international linkages gained during the negotiations with the FARC for the advancement of the AHY. They sought the support of the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN agency OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), and the MAPP/OEA for financial and technical support in order both to give visibility to the AHY and also to channel funds to deploy the local monitoring structures of the Accord. For example, international actors have provided them with the technical capacity to monitor *in situ* the humanitarian impacts of the conflict and strengthen the internal structures of their organizations. By widening the international reach of their public denunciations, they have managed to put their claims into the public debate on an ongoing basis, even more so since negotiations with the ELN collapsed in early 2019.

Furthermore, the peace process has expanded the political space in Chocó to include previously marginalized actors, particularly on gender and LGBTQ issues. While the Humanitarian Accord is not the first Chocóan platform to include women's issues, the gender focus is greatly expanded in this document. Importantly, the AHY requires both the departmental-level committee and the technical secretary to guarantee a gender focus in the analysis of, and strategies to address, each point of the Accord. As one participant put it, the Accord is an opportunity to “push violence against women to the center” as a taboo issue that has been sidelined for too long.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, LGBTQ organizations partnered with women's groups to successfully include language recognizing the differential impact of the conflict on LGBTQ groups and the need to advance specific protections for LGBTQ people.

<sup>50</sup> For instance, with the support of the OAS, various members of the AHY traveled to Arauca, in the northeast of the country, to share their experience with the regional leaders at the end of 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Social leader speaking at a Humanitarian Accord event (No. 23), June 2019.

*Incentives/Grievances: New Threats, New Responses*

Peace processes in multi-party conflicts tend to be partial or “incomplete”—that is, involving some, but not all parties in conflict. As recent research has shown, this situation can create incentives for armed groups not seated at the negotiation table to use violence to consolidate territorial control (Prem et al. 2018) and thus forge negative attitudes toward peace among communities exposed to these “excluded” groups (Kreiman and Masullo 2020). Given Colombia’s “incomplete peace”, incentives and grievances for continued collective action for peace in Chocó were always likely to persist.

Although the FARC had significant control over large portions of Chocó, rather than bringing stable peace, their demobilization ignited competitive dynamics between other armed groups active in the area. After a short period of relative calm following the peace agreement, violence resumed. In particular, the AGC and the ELN, which have had significant presence in Chocó since the 1990s, began, after the FARC’s withdrawal, to compete for control of the territory and its illicit economies, in particular drug routes to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>52</sup> As early as September 2015, AGC combatants warned community members that the peace deal would open space for them to expand their territory (“Omisión, tolerancia de Fuerza Pública” 2015).<sup>53</sup> Fighting between these two groups continues to the date of writing, as reflected by dramatic episodes of violence in multiple regions of Chocó at the end of 2019 (Semana 2020).

In addition, once again, the state was seen as not holding to its promises. Activists reported that the oncoming wave of violence, combined with ongoing state delays and broken promises to implement key elements of the peace deal, created significant disillusionment and frustration following the hope created by the signing of peace.<sup>54</sup> As one leader put it, “The state had promised that they would be present in the territories after the FARC left. Instead, the paramilitaries and the ELN arrived.”<sup>55</sup> Another

<sup>52</sup> Interviews with an academic expert (N. 01), March 2019.

<sup>53</sup> The FARC anticipated these dynamics. In 2015, before their demobilization, they aimed to forge alliances with the ELN to try to halt the AGC’s progress in the area (Defensoría Nota de Seguimiento N. 004-17, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> Interview with a social worker of a Colombian NGO (N. 16), February 2020. Interview with a member of the Diocese of Quibdó (N. 22), June 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with legal representatives of a Black community council of Chocó (N. 11), April 2019.

expressed, “The crisis is now getting worse not just because of the armed groups but because the state does not implement its own policies”.<sup>56</sup>

The six-month period of calm after the peace deal and the looming threat of new violence were powerful incentives for Chocoan organizations to defend the relative calm after the FARC withdrew from their territories. The failures and delays in the implementation of the peace deal furthermore incentivized communities to act, as they realized that the state lacked either the capacity or the will to make good on guarantees of non-repetition by establishing a strong and comprehensive presence in rural Chocó. The persistence of old grievances, plus the emergence of new ones, sparked communities’ motivation and urgent need to revamp their organizational efforts, confront armed groups trying to take their territories over, and publicly denounce the humanitarian crisis, as they had done in the past.

### *Movement Capacity*

We understand a movement’s capacity as its ability to mobilize people and resources, articulate claims, innovate and implement strategies, and negotiate with other actors. Social movement scholarship identifies three key factors that shape movement capacity. First, movements’ integration into pre-existing social networks with culturally resonant repertoires of collective action grants significant mobilizing capacity, resilience, and internal and external legitimacy. Second, formalized organization creates a platform to unify the movement around shared vision and strategy, coordinate and problem-solve between factions internally, and speak with a single voice in negotiations (Spector 2002; Tarrow 2011). Third, significant previous experience with collective action facilitates heuristic learning and innovative thinking (Ganz 2009), knowledge of what tactics are appropriate for what venue (Meyer and Staggenborg 2012), and the tools and training to represent the movement in formal venues (Spector 2002). As described previously, all these elements can be found in the strong mobilization history of local communities in Chocó.

The foundations of Chocoan community mobilization are two ethno-territorial units: the indigenous *cabildos* and the Afro community councils. Both of these are formal administrative bodies that are built out of

<sup>56</sup> Social leader (No. 21) speaking at an event organized by the Inspector General’s Office, May 2019.

pre-existing forms of traditional authority and collective action. Although war has in many cases debilitated their capacity to administer their territory, they are still recognized by the state and by international actors as legitimate voices of local people, both because of their formal role within the state architecture and because of their demonstrated capacity and vision in fighting for the defense of their territory for decades. These territorial organizations are integrated into two ethnic umbrella organizations: the *Mesa* and FISCH. These department-wide organizations have strong horizontal ties given their nearly 20-year history of cooperation, creating space to resolve inter-ethnic tensions. Furthermore, the tiered structure of the movement reflects strong vertical ties between communities and their departmental leaders, enhanced by the fact that leaders generally begin as the local representatives for their community, gaining experience and formal training within the movement.<sup>57</sup> The pressure of multiple decades of conflict has seriously threatened the strength of the movement, opening room for mistrust, corruption, and ineffectiveness. However, this dense movement structure, built on the base of traditional associative practices and generations of struggle, has proved its resilience and innovation in its three-decade history of resisting conflict. As we have seen in other instances of indigenous mobilization, for example, in local resistance to criminal governance in Mexico, developing these trans-local bonds and expanding village-level efforts and practices into regional ethnic autonomy regimes is crucial for contentious collective action (Ley et al. 2019).

Hard-won experience gave leaders the tools for sophisticated conflict analysis that allowed them to anticipate what the likely impacts of a peace deal would be. Chocoan ethnic leaders had been warning the government since at least 2015 that the FARC demobilization would generate new conflicts as other armed groups competed to fill the power vacuum left by the FARC, especially if the state was unable to rapidly fill those areas with a holistic state presence. However, their voices were not taken into account, driving the need for the creation of the Humanitarian Accord.

These experiences provided such leaders with valuable political experience and relationships that allowed them to capitalize on and extend the momentum and opportunities created by a peace deal. As we have illustrated, the foundations of the Humanitarian Accord were built over

<sup>57</sup>Interview with a Black social leader from a community council of Chocó (N. 12), July 2019.

decades of collective resistance to conflict—its participatory negotiation methodology, cross-ethnic relationships, and leadership infrastructure of FISCH and the *Mesa*. Much of its content and political analysis stem from the founding of FISCH in 2001 and the first Humanitarian Accord in 2003, if not earlier. Thus, the core infrastructure of the AHY was already in place before the peace deal.

The inclusion of the Ethnic Chapter in the final peace agreement was a crucial, recent experience that had a direct impact on the Accord and fostered the organizational capacity of ethnic-territorial organizations both at the national and regional levels. In that process, indigenous and Black organizations learned that gaining space for ethnic voices within government negotiations required significant collective mobilization and international allies. Furthermore, they learned the necessity to unify forces between different ethnic organizations around a common vision in order to have more leverage over the government. Likewise, leaders learned that it was important to convey the public message that neither the armed groups nor the government truly represented the interests of the ethnic groups, thus establishing themselves as the legitimate representatives of the ethnic communities of Chocó. As FISCH was a core member of CONPA and the Ethnic Commission for Peace that negotiated the Ethnic Chapter in Havana, their leadership at the local level was reinforced and helped them prepare for the talks with the ELN. Another lesson from this participation was the need to scale up their struggle and establish links with the international community. As guarantor countries such as Norway and Cuba, as well as the US special envoy, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had been key allies of the Ethnic Chapter, on this occasion the regional organizations of Chocó contacted OCHA, the MAPP/OEA, and the different embassies with projects in the territory to ask for their support and to scale up their contention. As in comparable instances of indigenous mobilization in Latin America (Ley et al. 2019), scaling up local collective action to the regional and international level has enhanced communities' capacity for collective action, by both strengthening internal control and external protection.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> For the processes of “scale-shift” and their importance in the strength (and diffusion) of contention, see Tarrow (2005) and Tarrow and McAdam (2005). In light of this literature, one can characterize the AHY effort to establish international allies as a process of “upward scale shift” (Tarrow 2005, 120–140).



## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have addressed the question: “How did the signing of the 2016 peace agreement and the subsequent withdrawal of FARC affect community organizing in Chocó?” Although the peace deal was hoped to introduce a new era of peace in the territories most affected by the Colombian armed conflict, Chocoan organizations warned well before peace was signed that it could spark a resurgence of violence caused by fighting between groups over territory formerly controlled by the FARC. This was particularly likely in the areas of coca and mineral production and along the strategic riverine routes that channel the drug, minerals, and arms trade in and out of Colombia. We argue that, although there were both theoretical and empirical reasons to expect the 2016 peace agreement to lead to a demobilization of the Chocoan peace movement, the ethno-territorial organizations of Chocó demonstrated resilience and innovation in revamping their organizing efforts to respond to the expanding conflict between the ELN guerrillas and AGC neoparamilitaries following the FARC demobilization.

This “revamping effect” built on the accumulated experience of these organizations to resist the armed conflict over decades, was based on the intersection of three factors: (i) expanded political opportunity structure, as a result of political space and international involvement created by the peace deal, (ii) persistent and emerging incentives in the form of grievances for organizations to maintain their mobilization, stemming from the violence sparked by the reorganization of remaining armed groups following the peace deal and a weak state incapable or unwilling to hold on its peace implementation promises, and (iii) strong movement capacity developed over many years of collective action against violence that has allowed them to effectively advocate and lobby for their ethnic rights both nationally and internationally.

While the story of the Humanitarian Accord demonstrates how well-organized communities can take advantage of the window of opportunity presented by a peace process, it also demonstrates how quickly that window can close. The 2018 election of President Iván Duque on an explicitly anti-peace deal platform generated significant uncertainty about the future of the Humanitarian Accord. Several months later, in January 2019, the government formally suspended negotiations with the ELN following the groups’ attack on a police academy in Bogotá. Despite this, the signatories to the Accord remained committed to the implementation of the AHY and have repeatedly declared that the Accord will be

implemented with or without the support of the ELN leadership or the Colombian government.<sup>59</sup>

This has proven to be a significant challenge. As one activist shared, “the document is still good but the context has changed”.<sup>60</sup> The new government has little political motivation to support the peace movement, resources are more limited, and violence continues to increase.<sup>61</sup> In practice, this has meant that individual communities have been forced to fall back on the localized self-protection strategies and neutrality norms that they have developed and implemented during different stages of the war. However, this is far from an ideal strategy, as shifting local dynamics following a peace process may severely undercut the effectiveness of such responses. In Chocó, the proliferation of smaller, more criminally oriented, and less hierarchical armed organizations, as well as increasing conflict between the ELN and the AGC over former FARC territories, have made a neutral position tenuous and productive dialogue with armed groups extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the work of civil society continues.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with a social leader involved in the AHY (N. 25), May 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with a social leader from a women’s regional organization from Chocó (N. 17), May 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with a member of the Diocese of Quibdó (N. 20), June 2019.

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