

# TRANSCENDING THE LONG PATH

Recommendations for the security of rural women in Colombia



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# TRANSCENDING THE LONG PATH

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Recomendaciones para la seguridad de las mujeres rurales



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## The long path *Introduction*



When we think about the Colombian countryside, we conjure images of majestic mountains, of seemingly endless rivers born where the clouds end; of jungles side-by-side with deserts and forests of every size and depth, in every shade of green. Undoubtedly, the Colombian countryside country speaks to the diversity that lives in it, to the many ways in which nature and history have built how we are, who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we treat each other.

It is challenging to conceive and build a country where rurality is a substantial part of discourse and action and where women have the voice to discuss security as a concern of their own, not external to them. In this report we compile the thoughts, feelings and recommendations that arose within the framework of the project Promoting spaces for dialogue for women on security priorities in Colombia, which sought to make the voices of rural women heard by the national institutions that must guarantee their right to security and by the international community, deeply invested in the well-being of women living in every corner of this country. The rural Colombian women are entitled to all the protections and guarantees bestowed by the Colombian Constitution, including the security of the people and their property; conversely, the country needs cannot reach the sustainable peace it longs for without the full contribution of these women.

This process has been an intense experience, not because the team lacked the experience of working in rural areas, but because we—and the women we worked with—strived to think about ourselves and fully experience ourselves, to look at and describe a reality that brings both illusion and fear, hope and misgivings: the building of a peaceful country where voices are stronger than the sound of weapons.

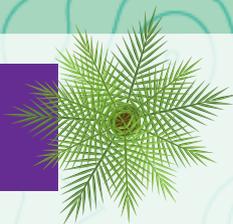
Because of this uncertainty, it is fundamental to think about security and to give the women all the elements so that they make it their own. This appropriation of security as a daily reality demand recognising the deep fear enveloping those women in the 5 areas we visited: fear that “the war will return”, that “the country doesn’t believe in peace” and that “peace is superficial”. The enormous challenge we face, all of us committed to a stable and sustainable peace, is to make efficient mechanisms of protection and prevention of gender-based violence and violence against women and to make everyday reality a safe space that empowers women to live independent lives.

This document comprises four parts. It begins with a description of the process (Exchanges in the countryside - About the process). It then reports on the notions of security and the barriers identified to guarantee this right (Habitable and inhabited paths - Women, peace and security in rural areas). A third section lists recommendations for the State (Security in a woman’s voice – The State as guarantor of the right to security), with an emphasis on the role of the Police, and the last section puts forward recommendations for the international community (Walking Hand in Hand – The international community and its role in the security of rural women).



## Exchanges in the Countryside

*About the process*



In the context of the project Promoting spaces for dialogue for women on security priorities in Colombia, the Corporation for Research, Social and Economic Action (CIASE) and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, with the support of the Government of Norway, carried out an analysis of the barriers and opportunities for rural women in the areas most affected by the armed conflict to access the right to security, with emphasis on the effectiveness of supporting systems and the prevention of gender-based violence.

The aim of this project was to generate recommendations to the National Police on their protocols for attention to women victims of violence in rural Colombia. This objective responds to the acknowledgement of the challenges to the implementation of the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and to achieve a stable and lasting peace. It is worth highlighting the project's success in achieving its goal, as shown by the recommendations in this report. Moreover, the project provides crucial information on how to conceptualize integral security for women, highlighting often-ignored factors, such as self-care, elements of risk and protection from a macro perspective at local, regional and national level and the presence of international actors engaged in Colombia.

This process was carried out in five municipalities: Caldono (Cauca), San Vicente del Caguán (Caquetá), Fonseca (Guajira), Vista Hermosa (Meta) y Planadas (Tolima), where the Territorial Spaces of Training and Reintegration (ETCR) are located. We chose these locations as they all have a shared history related to the presence of the FARC but nonetheless differ in their experiences and their topographic, cultural, ethnic, and political identity. The diversity of those municipalities allowed us to obtain a snapshot of the situations, challenges and possibilities of those areas prioritized by the peace agreement with regards to the rights of women to security and a life free of violence.

In each of these municipalities we held a two-day consultation (between April and May 2018) combining elements of collective learning about security with confidence-building activities and the drafting of the recommendations from a participative and relational perspective that focused on the role of the Police. We expected a participation of 90 to 120 women, aiming for as much diversity as possible. At the end of the consultations (May 2018), we counted 188 young, adult and elderly women, including farmers, indigenous, afro-descendants, victims, former combatants, and disabled and neurodiverse people. Although the groups were not methodologically selected to be proportionally representative of the rural Colombian population, the organizers put great emphasis on reaching an ethnic and socio-cultural diversity to achieve a diversity of perspectives.

To the consultation we added a series of five feedback sessions with the same women who participated in the consultations where we contextualized their feedbacks on security, fear and trust, potential actions to advocate for the creation of safe environments, and future perspectives for collective and individual initiatives for advocacy of the right to security and to a life free from violence. Those spaces and the drafting of the recommendations would not have been possible without the support and commitment of the local liaisons, women leaders as well as local organizations and networks.

Additionally, we organized dialogues with the Police about the methodological perspectives and the preliminary results of this project, in order to begin a conversation on how to envision a progressive and localised response to the security expectations of women in these rural areas.

The activities and analyses in this project were based on the understanding of the specific context, a gender perspective, intersectionality, and a feminist view of security.



# Exchanges in the Countryside

*About the process*



The project is deeply embedded in the international and national commitments with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, relying on the principles and recommendations of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions, assuming the importance of identifying elements linked to the protection, prevention and participation of women in peacebuilding scenarios. This project also includes the acknowledgment of human security as the ultimate goal, as a human and civil right intrinsically related to human dignity, the full exercise of citizenship, and the construction of a democratic society.

The analysis and recommendations are premised on the categorical analysis of the field journals maintained by the team, exercises to build shared understandings, cases narrated by women, and a mapping of actors and response mechanisms to gender-based violence against women. The recommendations presented in this documents are the product of a short but intense process (6 months), in which the methodological and pedagogical tools used have allowed us to elicit the security needs and challenges of women in these rural areas.

This being said, the findings of this project are shaped by the limited time and resources in addition to the difficulty of achieving a fully representative participation of rural women. Finally, we cannot claim to have addressed all perspectives on fear, insecurity, security, trust, and violence brought up by the women who participated in the consultations. This is just the beginning of a path to be travelled.



## Habitable and inhabited paths

*Women, peace and security in rural areas*



Discussing the security of rural women requires an understanding of fear as a determining factor through which expectations of security are built. And yet the topic of fear has been largely absent from discussions on security, even though it is ever present in the realities of rural women at all levels of their life. Furthermore, these women recognize such fears among key security actors such as the Police, highlighting the bonds of a shared humanity: "We know that the Police does not come to our area because they are afraid, afraid of what has happened—what has happened to them—and maybe, of what can happen."

The multiple dimensions in which fear is present in the lives of the women that took part in the process are illustrated by the following examples identified in the consultations:

- Fear of own death or that of a loved one;
- Fear of food scarcity;
- Fear of the return of aerial bombings, including fear of the sound of an airplane;
- Fear of being threatened when reporting a crime;
- Fear of natural disasters;
- Fear of car accidents;
- Fear of confronting someone with power;
- Fear of the husband and of former partners;
- Fear of corruption;
- Fear of speaking up publicly;
- Fear of rapists;
- Fear of armed groups;
- Fear of oppression by the family;
- Fear of public spaces.

This wide range of situations is but a snapshot of the wants and needs of rural women in matters of security, from an integral perspective. When everything provokes a fear response, the environment becomes an integral threat where it is necessary to be always alert. The consultations clearly indicated the need to both broaden and individualize the meaning of "security" for the women of these zones. As is common in many parts of the country, the women consulted initially equated security with protection. As the consultations progressed, though, they adopted a broader focus, noting, "We have always been told that security is having guns, and of course, lots of bullets, but that only reduces security into violence". In addition, the women testify, "If something happens the police never come because they say that the rural area is not in their responsibility". The reality of an ineffective response in rural areas leads women to turn to self-protection: "With bullets in the house I feel at ease". Conversely, the effective presence of the Police can reduce the prevalence of unregulated weapons in these zones.

The women placed strong emphasis on physical security, prioritizing fundamental aspects such as preserving their own lives and having the certainty that their loved ones' lives are not at risk of violence or lack of access to basic rights such as health. To physical security, the women add the need for psychological security, since they believe that being able to speak freely about women's problems and feelings without being labelled being "shrill and hysterical" is an integral part of security. They also refer to economic security, highlighting severe inequalities in the distribution of common harvests: "they leave the worst share for us, which does not provide any economic independence". They demand for women's work in the home and the fields to be equally valued: "Maybe my office is my kitchen, but that does not mean it is not work, hard work". As women are most responsible for food production for the family and for neighbouring towns, they underscore food security not just as an economic phenomenon, but as a fundamental, life-sustaining component of security.



# Habitable and inhabited paths

*Women, peace and security in rural areas*



Finally, they recognize the importance of housing and the use of their lands' natural re-sources of their territories for the well-being of the communities.

When security becomes a daily issue in the lives of rural women, they associate it with no-tions of trust, freedom, tranquillity, the absence of fear and the capacity to exist and to act. For them, security is:

- *A day in which we can trust that the State will do its job, that we can live free from fear and anxieties. A day when we know that peace is going to become a reality in which the countryside will be valued for its contributions to the country, from the stewardship of its natural resources to the production of food.*
- *The belief that we can trust people, because we already have God, but sometimes we need to trust in people, especially in the State, in the police officers, in our neighbours.*
- *When they actually do what they say they are going to do. It is not just the sign that says they are going to build a road, but rather that the road is actually built. It is when the Police is available to all people, not only for the protection of politicians or oil companies.*
- *Our security comes from social investments: before calling for police, I would rather ask for roads or better health services.*

The peace process has simultaneously brought the end of the armed conflict in these areas as well as an increase in other types of threats for women who live in areas that were formerly under guerrilla control. The disappearance of guerrilla structures, the emergence of new armed actors and the delay in the deployment of State institutions (including the public force) to assume control of that territory have contributed to an increase in crime and femi-cides.

The consultations have revealed a great sense of physical, economic and social insecurity, at individual and family level, both in public and private spaces. This feeling of insecurity presents a daily obstacle to the most basic economic and social activities that women need—and have the right—to perform. The feeling of insecurity, transmitted generationally, creates permanent barriers to women's full enjoyment of human and civil rights.

The women consulted listed a series of particularly serious risks, including:

- Communities and families steeped on sexist constructs, which normalize violence towards and control over women.
- Teenage pregnancies, specially those resulting from a relationship with a soldier or a police officer who, instead of accepting responsibility, often request a transfer to an-other area.
- Lack of formal ownership of the lands they farm.
- Unreliable land transport.
- Isolation in cases of emergencies that, in situations of violence, impedes an urgent response.
- Lack of health care infrastructure to respond to diseases and traumas, due to dis-tances and lack of local skills in first aid.
- Economic losses due to the lack or high costs of transportation for agricultural prod-ucts.
- Distrust in the State and security providers such as the Army and the Police.
- Lack of knowledge among Police and other institutions of the autonomous legal framework governing indige-nous reservations.
- Economic, social and political disruption due to the influx of new stakeholders in the communities, such as oil companies, loggers, etc., with increased risks for community leaders, especially women leaders.
- Presence of new armed actors.
- Increase in narcotics abuse, thefts, and other crimes





Faced with these risks, women see themselves as lacking the resources to guarantee security. Specifically, the women consulted identified a series of barriers to access security services of the State as a guarantor of security ("barriers" refers to all those situations and dynamics that prevent any action leading to the protection of and full access to a particular right, and, therefore, to the full set of rights). For this report, we have structured them into physical and geographic barriers, legal and social barriers, and institutional barriers.

## **Physical and geographic barriers**

- Institutions lack mechanisms to guarantee their effective presence in rural areas.
- Precarious economic conditions make it difficult for rural women to travel to cities to file a complaint or to follow up a judicial process.
- Houses are often isolated, far from neighbors, which makes intra-family violence invisible to the community.
- The processes to report a crime and to monitor investigations have been developed for urban environments and lack approaches appropriate to rural areas, where communication and access to institutions are limited.

## **Legal and social barriers**

- Rural women are often unaware of their rights and related enforcing mechanisms. Although the consultations revealed increasing awareness of gender-based violence, the awareness is often limited to physical violence; in addition, women are often blamed for "provoking" this violence.
- Patriarchal culture demands a traditional attitude of self-denial and subordination to women that curtails the understanding and acceptance of women's human rights. Women, traditionally, must prioritize the needs of others, especially their husbands and children, with the following effects:
  - Refusal to recognize a situation of violence by the victim and his / her family and social environment. The threshold for violence is raised "up to the maximum point where I can stand a situation", which leads women to accept and normalize growing situations of violence and discrimination.
  - Absolute control by heads of household prevent the use of the family's resources—time, money, vehicles, transport animals, etc.—to go to the police or judicial authorities.
  - A woman victim of violence faces enormous pressure from her family and social environment to maintain "social peace" even at the cost of her individual human rights. Very often this pressure comes from other women in the community and is enforced through measures of social discipline such as gossip or ostracism.
- Due to the rupture of the social fabric derived from the armed conflict, many women have no support networks at the community level and do not participate in the communities' social and political arenas. Women often lack safe spaces and psychosocial support to tell their stories; existing women's organizations provide some of these spaces, despite insufficient training and limited capacity to do support of this type.
- Some local power structures actively discriminate against women's participation in community spaces (communal action boards, cooperative committees, etc.) where gender-based violence against women is often normalized.





## **Institutional barriers**

- The overly legalistic language commonly used by institutions becomes an obstacle to women's access to protection and attention mechanisms.
- Women perceive high degrees of frustration among security and government personnel, which negatively affects the quality of their service provision.
- Women's double burden of farming and house work hinders their active participation in community processes and in discussions on security priorities.
- The institutions have not yet mainstreamed a gender perspective at the individual or corporate level, which results in:
  - Sexist, patriarchal, and biased behaviors by public officials.
  - Rural women perceive the police as a masculine institution; they only see policemen who often exhibit sexist and authoritarian behaviors.
  - The Police is not seen as an entry point for attention mechanisms, but rather as a barrier: "every time we go to the Police they tell us that this is a private, domestic matter, and it's not their job".
- It is not surprising, therefore, that women claim that the local Police is unaware of GBV prevention and protection mechanisms and that investigative processes often result in revictimization.
- Poor institutional coordination forces women to approach multiple institutions to obtain minimal responses. In particular, women highlight the inefficiency of institutions such as the Prosecutor's office and the Family Police Stations in the provision of protection and the resolution of situations linked to gender-based violence against women. Moreover, women do not know any of the mechanisms for the protection of women community leaders under threat.



## Security in a woman's voice

*The state as guarantor of the right to security*



### Recommendations to the State as guarantor of the right to security.

#### *State institutions and their role in security.*

- Security provision should not be limited to the presence of uniformed State actors (Police and Army). Rather, a whole-of-government approach involving all State institutions should ensure the right to security in its most broad sense. The State should make an explicit commitment in this regard to rural women and their communities.
- Poor institutional coordination, more pronounced in rural areas, forces women to approach multiple institutions to obtain minimal responses. Strengthening inter-institutional articulation implies: knowledge by officials of the responsibilities and limitations of the local institutional presence, simplification of processes, coordination of local-level institutions and the guarantee of actions for the effective performance of each institution.
- The State should build an integrated mechanism of attention and information to the communities, with emphasis on mechanisms of attention to female victims of gender-based violence in rural areas.
- Institutions and their staff should recognize that rural women feel "fear of confronting someone with power," which implies that they must understand that their positions may intimidate and preclude women from demanding their rights. Institutions should promote a culture of service and proactively reinforce the notion that rights holders are entitled to demanding enforcement of their rights by the State, rather than re-requesting a favour.
- First responders should assume a mandate of documenting acts of violence even if the victim does not recognize them as such and validating victim's statements, providing emotional and psychological support while protecting the victim's dignity and integrity.
- In the areas most affected by the conflict, such as the five of this pilot project, the State must be aware of the effects of collective victimization and generate responses addressing social and collective dynamics.
- State officials should be aware of rural women's mistrust of State institutions and frustration with the absence of services. Thus, they must accept and welcome, in a respectful manner, criticism and demands.
- Institutions should provide crime reporting mechanisms for women that avoid the high costs of travelling in rural areas. When communicating with State institutions does not become an additional burden, the safety of rural women in vulnerable situations will improve.
- Institutions can improve their capacity to respond to gender-based violence by creating mechanisms to speed up processes, reduce staff frustration, and by informing about these changes in a clear and contextualized manner.
- The State should create mechanisms to facilitate women's involvement in their own investigation or protection processes in rural areas. These could range from traditional forms of transportation, such as donkeys, to communication through community radio—with precaution to protect privacy and integrity—to modern solutions such as the ability to complete procedures via text message.

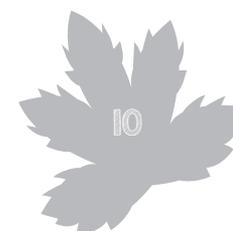


# Security in a woman's voice

*The state as guarantor of the right to security*



- The Family Local Office and the Prosecutor's Office are women's entry point for pre-vention and protection mechanisms and to report gender-based violence. Considering that women have greater trust in civilian authorities, these two institutions should expand their reach in rural areas. Existing internationally supported mechanisms, such as the Justice Roundtables, could be repurposed to this end and provided permanent funding under State budgets.
- The well-being of rural women requires an increase in the institutions' capacity to collect and analyse data, recognizing the broad diversity in rural areas. Some suggestions include the requirement to officials to undergo capacity-building in gender analysis and to file regular field reports from the areas of implementation of the Peace Agreement.
- The plans for large-scale reconstruction projects in the areas most affected by the conflict are a cause of frustration given the lengthy timelines involved and the traumas derived from physical disruptions related to such projects. While large-scale projects are important, trust can be built through small, quick-impact initiatives with results visible in the short term. In peacebuilding, small is often powerful.
- Women need safe spaces to tell their stories and psychosocial support provided by the State; the historical memory processes are insufficient and may even be detrimental for women, if disassociated from systematic psychosocial care. The construction "places or objects of memory" should be paired with psychosocial care programmes.
- Institutions must work hand in hand with women's organizations to identify security risks for women and the appropriate attention mechanisms, recognizing the value of the knowledge and particular perspectives of both parties.
- Ombuds institutions (personerías) must regain their function of oversight of State actions and resources used at the local level, reaching out to local communities to inform about available oversight mechanisms. Outreach to women should take place in times and locations where women are present, such as communal action boards or near schools at the end of the school day.
- Confidentiality should be a basic principle of care for rural women who are victims of gender-based violence, or women who are at increased risk due to their condition of women or because of their leadership. Keeping information confidential in rural areas is challenging, and unauthorized leaks increase the risks of stigmatization, discouraging reporting of crime and monitoring of legal procedures.
- National institutions should support local governments—especially in rural areas—to embed the three basic principles of UNSCR 1325, protection, prevention and participation of women in the field of security, in their programmes and plans.





### *The Police and its role in social cohesion and security*

- The Police, as the first responder to security threats, must acknowledge women's dread to receiving bad news, especially if they are related to the death of a loved one. Therefore, police first responders should undergo training in empathic communication techniques for situations of grief, trauma or shock, individual or collective.
- In order to improve their service in the areas most affected by the conflict, the Police should be sufficiently knowledgeable of the history of violence and natural disasters in those areas, especially those most directly affecting women. The awareness of traumatic historic events—including dates and locations—will enable the police to relate to local communities in a respectful way.
- Women are aware of the hierarchical nature of the Police, which is why the strongest criticisms are directed towards senior leadership and the institution as a whole, although their fears are focused on the local police officers they know. Police leadership should endeavour to highlight their internal thinking on improving rural women's security, including in mass media. The occasional presence of senior leadership in rural areas to listen to complaints and suggestions from women would increase the levels of trust and contextual knowledge.
- An increased visible presence of police women in territories and rural areas can help create a more empathic connection with local women: "A policewoman sensitive to suffering." This connection would increase the trust on the police as an entry point for women victims of gender-based violence with the confidence that their safety concerns will be taken into account. Police women should also receive training for the effective attention to rural women, whether campesinas, indigenous, or Afro-descendant.
- The culture of militarized security in the Police prevents women from seeing the institution as a tool of social cohesion. The police could adopt small symbolic changes to set itself apart from the army, such as switching footwear so that it is still tactically useful while avoiding the military look.
- Police officers—men and women—should receive training on gender-based violence: women from different areas reported feeling that officers believe that gender-based violence against women is normal and "must be endured".
- The Police should develop proactive initiatives to detect racist bias among its officers in their interactions with rural communities, with emphasis on the treatment to indigenous and Afro-descendant women.
- Written protocols are insufficient to guarantee women's human rights and sensitivity to the diversity present in the communities. The Police should endeavour to contextualize such protocols through consultations with rural women. Prior to deployment to a rural area, police officers should be exposed to active listening experiences with groups of women of similar cultural and identity characteristics as the community where the officers are to deploy.
- There's pervasive mistrust between the Police and the rural population: the spaces designed to exchange and dialogue cannot be forced on community women. The Police should partner with actors that inspire trust among women, such as regional or national civil society organizations.

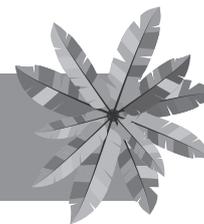




- In order to become a reliable source of information on the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the Police units deployed officers in the priority areas should be made aware of other security concerns for local women.
- The Police should ensure that first respondents act empathically, recognize gender-based violence as such, and be community-focused. This should include: clear communication of their mission as guarantors of human rights and protection; identification or personal connection with the community; sufficient knowledge of the legislation of indigenous reservations; familiarity with the Afro-descendant experience; and a commitment to making responsible use of their public service mandate.
- The Police needs to be aware of the fear women feel at the presence of the Police in their communities, both because of mistrust and because the Police may be targeted by armed or criminal groups". The Police should consult community women before deciding on the location of new police outposts.
- The Police should establish psychosocial support programmes for its officers de-ployed in rural areas, to enable them to face their own fears and the anxiety created by perceived and real threats to their own security. This type of programmes will contribute to improving the relationship with the communities.
- Building trust on a daily basis is one of the challenges for the Police. Some useful initiatives are:
  - o Small actions to change the Police's image as an authoritarian institution. For example, shaking a woman's hand very hard is seen as overbearing, while a firm but relaxed grip conveys trust.
  - o Sporadic actions of kindness, such as offering herbal teas—a common drink among women in rural areas—when recording a complaint, will improve the feeling of security and trust.
  - o Politely answering questions, even if it is asked aggressively, can contribute to a de-escalation of tension and promote dialogue.
  - o When arriving at a community space, especially one with women's presence, the Police may designate an officer to go in first unarmed to establish contact with the leadership and discuss the terms of the intervention. This will reduce mistrust and resistance to the presence of the Police. The officers remaining outside should make sure not to block the entrance. "When you see a lot of policemen together, you are afraid because they behave as if they had absolute power."
- To generate the feeling of security among rural women, the Police should understand that security is a multi-sensory experience. Sounds are mentioned as triggers of memories of violence. Women have reported to feel threatened by the combination of the sounds of helicopters and marching boots, even if the Police presence is just to visit the community.
- Women indicated that they "want the police to be a gateway to State institutions", which requires the Police to have deep and detailed knowledge of the service provision mechanisms at the disposal of the population and be able to guide them through the complexity of the institutional framework.

# Una seguridad con voz de mujer

*El Estado como garante del derecho a la seguridad*

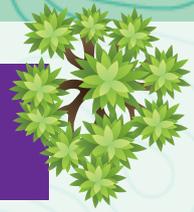


- The Police lack basic familiarity with the separate legislative framework in effect in-side indigenous reservations, as well as of the role of the indigenous police (guardias indígenas) in their communities and surrounding areas. This unfamiliarity diminishes trust in police actions. Greater knowledge about the particularities of the indigenous laws and the forms of organization and action of the indigenous police, would enhance the latter's role as guarantors of security in the territory and would contribute to increased trust in the Police.
- Women perceive a complete lack of police accountability, which undermines trust in the institution as a whole. When a complaint from a woman results in a disciplinary process involving the transfer of an officer, informing the community of the applicable sanction would increase trust.
- The Police should redeploy some officers who have been posted for long periods in the special zones to new postings. When redeploying these officers, the Police should debrief them so they can share their experiences before they are transferred to other areas.



## Walking hand-in-hand

*The international Community and its role in the security of rural women*



### Recommendations to International Community

- The international community should reconsider the way it provides security to its own teams to avoid conveying an image of fear, mistrust, and of militarized security. This can contribute to strength trust and the effective implementation of projects and initiatives.
- The international community should aimed at restoring the social fabric destroyed during the conflict and the consequent isolation of many rural women by supporting everyday community-building activities, even those that have no immediate element of capacity building or organization. The restoration of the social fabric will increase confidence within the communities and thereby contribute to protective dynamics towards women.
- In the areas of highest priority for the implementation of the Peace Agreement, projects and programmes should aim at a parallel strengthening of State institutions and endogenous civil society processes and organizations, with an emphasis on women's leadership.
- The United Nations and other international institutions should make a joint effort to improve rural women's understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the verification mission so they may contact it in situations of risk.
- The international community should support initiatives to enhance rural communities' understanding and ownership of the Peace Agreement, especially of the meaning and significance of the gender-sensitive approach in the implementation. This gender-sensitive approach should be supported through concrete actions in rural areas.
- The international community should devote resources to informative activities so that rural women know what institutions they should address to enforce their rights and to strengthen their leadership and their participation in security discussions.
- While the international community must acknowledge the pain and suffering that have afflicting these rural communities, it should avoid falling into victim-only approaches or into the trap of ranking relative suffering. Instead it should support processes that include psychosocial elements, strengthen women's leadership, and contribute to women's security.
- The international community should support self-protection initiatives in vulnerable situations in the communities, with special attention to the threats to women leaders.
- The international community should accept self-care not as a luxury disconnected from project outcomes but as specific actions that create safe spaces for rest and repose in rural areas, focused on women.
- The international community should prioritise the collaboration between State institutions and women's organizations to identify the risks for women and propose appropriate responses to gender-based violence.



