

Formal peace processes

Peace processes 1990–1994

Vera Grabe

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The peace policy adopted by President Barco in 1988 and continued by President Gaviria resulted in successful negotiation processes with the 19 April Movement (M-19), the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and Quintín Lame. These processes also influenced the creation of the 1991 National Constituent Assembly, which allowed for the participation of a wide spectrum of social and political groups in order to rethink the structures of the state and to develop a new constitution for the country.

In order to explain the peace processes of 1990–94, we must bear in mind their predecessors. No peace process can be understood in isolation, and in each process the previous ones appear: as light or as shadow. Before looking more closely at these processes, it is worth noting that they had antecedents in developments earlier in the 1980s. The beginnings of the debate on a political solution to the conflict could be traced to the responses to the M-19's seizure of the Dominican Embassy in 1980, and the debate it launched on the question of guerrilla amnesties. It also had roots in a ceasefire accord signed by the Betancur administration with the M-19, EPL and Workers Self-Defence Group (ADO) in 1984, which revolved around a proposed 'National Dialogue' and gave the guerrillas more public space and sympathy. Yet the agreement generated tension within the Colombian establishment, setting a course that eventually led to the Palace of Justice tragedy in November 1985, where an M-19 initiative to take several judges hostage resulted in the bombardment of the building by the army and the deaths of 95 people. New actors and circumstances arose in the years following the Palace of Justice tragedy, not least the growing impact of the drug trade on the violence. Peace acquired new complexities and concern about politics began to grow within the guerrilla movement.



From the limits of war to an opening for peace

The M-19's response to the Palace of Justice disaster was to deepen its commitment to armed warfare. It strengthened its military units and militias, created new fronts and a battalion with recruits from the Andean region, and pushed for insurrection and unity amongst the guerrillas. Despite the military gains, however, it could not regain the political initiative in a country weary of war. It was evident that fighting for peace through war was not resulting in the swelling of the insurrection.

In an attempt to regain its political direction, the M-19 undertook some deep-seated reflection and redefined the direction of the armed conflict: with whom? against whom? and for what? Until that point they had defined annihilating the armed forces as a primary military objective, but now concluded that this strategy was not weakening the ruling oligarchy. So it redefined its struggle as war but on the oligarchy, and as life for the country (in the framework of the movement to defend life that was emerging as a response to the 'dirty war' waged by the paramilitaries). This was an attempt to present a whole vision of its struggle to a divided country.

This decision was publicly launched in a military initiative that paradoxically opened the path for a new peace process; from an action aimed at polarization, reconciliation was born. In May 1988, the M-19 kidnapped Álvaro Gómez, a conservative leader and symbol of the Colombian oligarchy. The whole of the establishment reacted against this, and the M-19 understood that unnecessarily deepening the confrontation was counter-productive. The incident led to a reconnection with the political, with communication between the M-19 commander and the kidnapped leader, and a dialogue between multiple sectors. The result was a commitment from the political leaders of the country, representatives of the business associations, union leaders, religious leaders and members of M-19 diplomatic wing to think seriously about a reconciliatory solution to the national crisis, and from the M-19 a commitment to free Gómez.

Premises for a new peace process

The issue of peace was given new life. The government – M-19 negotiation model was built on two initiatives: an M-19 peace proposal launched during a political summit that emerged from the freeing of Gómez and President

Barco's 'Peace Initiative' of September 1988, which established three phases of negotiation with the armed groups: demilitarization, transition, and incorporation into civilian life.

M-19 camps became political meeting places, providing impetus to a new peace process. It was not possible to gain the support of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Body (CGSB), of which the M-19 was a member, in the short time available. The opportunity had to be seized: for Carlos Pizarro, the M-19 commander, it was clear that peace needed a new model and new aims, including the possibility of demobilization.

On 10 January 1989, Pizarro and Rafael Pardo, Presidential Commissioner for Peace, signed a document committing them to peace. For the first time the guerrillas accepted the possibility of disarming, and the government the possibility of democratizing the state and society. At the time this was not an organizational decision by the M-19, but a commitment from its leadership to begin a pedagogical and dialogue process with leaders and militants. It became a democratic organizational decision to disarm in September 1989 at the 10th National Conference of the Movement, when in a secret ballot, 227 votes were cast in favour and 3 against.

Peace needs clarity: itineraries

The result of these first meetings was a negotiation model with several key features. Firstly, the main M-19 forces would be concentrated in an area in Santo Domingo, Cauca in order for negotiations between the presidential delegates and the M-19 commander to take place. The M-19 proposed this small village at the height of the central Andean mountain range, away from any urban centres, to symbolize a non-arrogant attitude, especially to the military. Secondly, participatory Working Groups on Analysis and Consensus were established for discussions with different national sectors about proposals and political, economic and social reforms. These were to be legitimized through Congress and the Presidency in a Political Pact, formalized in a ceremony. Thirdly, mechanisms were introduced to guarantee the full incorporation of combatants into civilian life, with security schemes, the application of pardons, and economic support for reintegration. Finally, a 'political favourability' scheme would be implemented, to compensate for the obvious inequalities of an organization recently incorporated into civilian political life, by enabling electoral advantage to guarantee representation in the country's legislative bodies. Various legally constituted offices were also established during the negotiations, which the M-19 called 'Peace Houses', where the organization was able to contact those who wanted to join their cause.

The people are in charge

Santo Domingo, the site for the negotiations, became a 'mini peace city' as one journalist put it, a meeting place and reference point for those hoping to join the peace process, whether union members, *campesinos*, indigenous people, students, researchers, the religious, poets, musicians, or politicians; a place for political discussion, and a place to sing, dance, study, dream, and think up projects.

People took the process to heart, warming to the personality of Pizarro, which reaffirmed the decision to make peace and confirmed that building a political option was a real possibility. For this reason the M-19 never doubted the process, despite the many uncertainties and obstacles. In the middle of the negotiations, the army attacked an M-19 camp, leaving two dead. At another stage, the police assassinated one of the most loved and respected leaders of the M-19, Afranio Parra, in Bogotá. Faced with the crisis this provoked, the government investigated and detained those responsible within a few days. Transparency and sincerity were vital for keeping the process moving forward, as was the will to deal with obstacles instead of using them as an argument for mutual recriminations.

Decision versus negotiation: a leap into the unknown

The M-19's democratic vote in favour of disarmament needed to be given substance in agreements to make it a reality. Thousands of proposals on socio-economic, political and judicial reforms resulted from the Working Groups, which were brought together in a *Political Pact for Peace and Democracy*, signed in November 1989. The Pact also included an agreement on political favourability and an Amnesty Law. However, the government, simultaneously fighting a war against drug-trafficking, merged the first part of the Pact, concerning substantive reforms, with a constitutional reform to combat drug-trafficking, including the institutionalization of extradition.

This mixture blew the reform. When the constitutional reform reached a vote in Congress in December, the political class who had kept their distance from the peace process turned the issue of extradition into the principal point of divergence between the Congress and the government and the reform was defeated. In effect, the *Political Pact* through which the M-19 agreed to disarm was rendered more a letter of intent than a firm agreement. There were plenty of arguments to justify a decision by the M-19 to return to war. However, the decision was taken to reaffirm their will for peace. Carlos Pizarro called it a "leap into the unknown".

Utilizing the State of Siege and the Amnesty Law, the government agreed to suspend the arrest warrants against the main M-19 leaders so they could travel to Bogotá to continue the demobilization process and their political development as the Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD M-19). Faced with the sinking of the reform, the M-19 sought a guaranteed commitment from all the Liberal presidential nominees (the only likely winners of the elections) to comply with the agreed accords, especially the convening of a Constituent Assembly. Similarly the National Registry agreed to include the names of demobilized M-19 members in the electoral lists in March 1990, in which all posts were contested except that of the President. An extra ballot called the *Séptima Papeleta* (seventh paper) was introduced in these elections by groups campaigning for the Constituent Assembly to give weight to the idea of an autonomous reforming body. Mass demonstrations in support of the M-19 in Bogotá removed all doubts: the decision for peace was the correct one, despite the fact that the political favourability option had not been firmed up, and despite continuing uncertainty about the reintegration process.

The country imagined lines of guerrillas surrendering their weapons, yet the M-19 always made it clear that it would never surrender its weapons, but would voluntarily disarm. This was a free and sovereign decision, one that did not mean they were abandoning the struggle, but were simply dropping weapons as an instrument that no longer served the purpose. For this reason the disarmament ceremony was not attended by government representatives, but by international observers as well as the national and international press. There was no doubt about the message when Carlos Pizarro wrapped his weapon in the Colombian flag and gave his last military order: "For Colombia, and for peace, put down your weapons."

An involving environment

A National Constituent Assembly was convened in February 1991 to create a new constitution for Colombia. It was an idea that had been presented as far back as 1984 by the EPL, resurrected on various occasions, and now gathered new strength, with impetus from the peace process, student mobilizations and support from sectors of the Gaviria government. What was originally proposed as a constitutional reform through a Supreme Court of Justice decision, turned into a mandate to bring about the formation of a fully-fledged Constituent Assembly. Its 70 delegates were appointed through public elections held in December 1990. The result was a body that reflected a new country, a shift away from the domination of public bodies by the Liberal and Conservative parties, with a few representatives of the marginalized left. Members of the traditional parties, former guerrillas,

indigenous people, sporting leaders, social leaders, and cultural and democratic figures were elected to the Constituent Assembly. The three fundamental forces were the National Salvation Movement, led by Álvaro Gómez, members of the Liberal party elected as individuals, and the AD M-19. It was an opportunity to design an institutional structure that reflected a country requiring transformation in its political culture, the recognition of fundamental rights and organs that could implement these.

The National Constituent Assembly sat in session for five months, voting on its mechanisms and decision-making processes. More than anything, it was an arena for consensus and collaboration, most specifically regarding relations with the Congress of the Republic, reluctant to accept any change. Perhaps what was most significant was the widespread enthusiasm generated by the process, seen by many as a unique opportunity for participation in the design of a new country.

The process also stimulated movement towards peace negotiations among the rest of the insurgency. The EPL, the Quintín Lame and the PRT entered into talks with the national government, which sped up during 1991 because demobilization became a condition of their obtaining seats and participating in the Assembly. During the discussions, the CGSB also re-established contacts with the national government, which were formalized in the Caracas and Tlaxcala talks. Although these talks eventually broke down, they continued to have an effect, with an important sector of the National Liberation Army (ELN), grouped under the name of the Socialist Renewal Current (CRS) deciding to venture into peace talks in 1994, as did the militia forces in Medellín.

Every process is a learning process

Although all the accords followed the same model and are seen as being part of one process, each group learned from earlier processes, perfecting agreements according to the moment and the variations in individual emphasis.

19 April Movement (M-19)

For the M-19, seven out of the ten points in the accord were political, and as a consequence, the pace of the process was set by politics, to the detriment of more careful work on the issue of reintegration, which was in itself a learning experience given that this was an unacceptable concept up to this point. The mechanisms for political favourability did not work, but were rendered unnecessary as the electoral results were better than expected. The AD M-19 gained one million votes for the Assembly, half a million for the new Congress post-Assembly and then went through a process of political dispersion. Although it was ultimately unable



to consolidate its early successes, the majority of AD M-19 activists are still alive and actively support peace and democracy-building, both visibly, and in other less obvious civilian efforts.

Popular Liberation Army

The final accord between the National Government and the EPL stated that two EPL spokesmen could participate in the National Constituent Assembly, and facilitated the conditions for the promotion of their political project. The political development of the EPL, which was achieved through a democratic process, and led to their demobilization, was perhaps one of the most important aspects of the process. It signified a break with their orthodox political origins, with one section forming *Esperanza, Paz, y Libertad* (Hope, Peace and Liberty), and another section participating in the AD M-19. In Urabá, the EPL's historic home, antagonistic relations between the reintegrated guerrillas and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) developed. With the paramilitary expansion in the zone, the EPL became a target in the polarization between insurgents and counter-insurgents. Amid fear and accusations of being linked to the persistent war in Urabá, Hope Peace and Liberty maintained itself as an important local force, with a continuous link to social sectors.

Workers' Revolutionary Party

Enrique Flórez, ex vice-commander of the PRT, says that "the politicization of the PRT happened during the peace process with Barco". The accord provided for a spokesman at the Constituent Assembly, and administrative, judicial, and financial facilities and guarantees, security guarantees and guarantees to allow them to campaign, so that as a central part of their transition they could become a legal party. It also included a security plan, and support for human rights work and regional development. While the PRT did not become a political party, some of its members participated in the AD M-19, joined regional politics, and are still working with social sectors on human rights and peace promotion, especially in the departments of Sucre and Bolívar.

Quintín Lame movement

In the National Constituent Assembly, there was one Quintín Lame spokesman, alongside two other representatives from the indigenous movement. Since then the indigenous movement has been present in the various levels of political representation, and the most important and unprecedented achievement has been the recognition in the Constitution of their identity, and their rights derived from their own culture. The Quintín Lame movement always defined itself as the armed wing of an indigenous social movement, and with the peace

An all-member meeting of the National Constituent Assembly, 4 July 1991

Source: Felipe Caicedo / *El Espectador*

process that *raison d'être* remained, as there was a need for a political force as a mechanism for developing the indigenous movement. The Indigenous Social Alliance (ASI) emerged as a result, and remains an important political and social force.

Socialist Renewal Current (CRS)

The Socialist Renewal Current (CRS), a group who split from the ELN, agreed to the establishment of a mechanism of political favourability and they nominated two representatives to the House in 1994–8. They maintained their unity during their political transition, were active participants in building alternative political forces, and of all the demobilized movements, they have been the most dedicated to civilian peace initiatives.

A mixed legacy

Taken as a whole, the process was a piecemeal one in its achievements. It did not manage to end the war because important sectors of the guerrillas did not participate. The basic commitment was to bring about change in the political regime, deepening democracy and transforming political structures, in order to improve economic and social conditions. To this end, although rights, institutions, and foundations were established in the Constitution, the priority for the National Constituent Assembly was to promote the eradication of the political practices and institutions that sustained clientelism, exclusion and political authoritarianism.

The National Constituent Assembly completed its work in June and a new Colombian constitution was promulgated on 4 July 1991. It has since been criticized for its lack of democratic coherence on themes including the media, the control of monopolies, and the armed forces. However, it is meaningless to judge things out of context, from a perspective of what should have been, rather than looking at the conditions from which they arose: the 1991 Constitution was the result of a process where there were no winners or losers, a meeting of very diverse sectors and as such cannot be anything but a hybrid product. It reflected the crisis in the regime and was, from its inception, the expression of a new country: a country that until then had not been allowed access to decision-making spaces traditionally reserved for bi-partisanship. This in itself was a revolution. Recognition of fundamental rights was born here, something that might be taken for granted elsewhere, but in the Colombian case was a huge historic advance. A new institutionality was created: to deepen democracy; to create judicial mechanisms to make rights real, with a Court and People's Ombudsman to enforce them; to widen administrative decentralization; and to create mechanisms for fiscal and political control. Perhaps the development of the content and meaning of the new

Charter has been more significant at the cultural level than in the building of a new state. While a series of new institutions were established, sectors of the old regime have since persevered in their efforts to dismantle the Constitution.

The dissolution of Congress sitting at the moment when the Assembly was approved, should have contributed to the renewal of political leadership, but was truncated when the Gaviria government, co-sponsor of political change, opted to ally itself with traditional sectors with a political majority in the Congress to push through its privatization and economic liberalization policy. This contributed to preventing the drafting of the laws required by the new Constitution. Since then the defence and development of the Constitution with regard to social and democratic guarantees has really been an exercise in resistance and perseverance by progressive sectors in Congress, and above all the people.

The obvious lesson is that redefining the foundations of the state has to be linked to a long-term political agreement in order to guarantee that a new house gets built on those foundations. The Constitution reflects a new country, but this does not mean that the traditional leadership and its political culture have been defeated.

Peace: revolution within revolution

The peace process during this period also had a number of less tangible results. It signified paradigm shifts in the ideas of revolution and peacemaking in Colombia, where before it had been considered a heresy to disarm as it was associated with surrender. This was not a product of military defeat – although it does not mean that some political and armed sectors did not see it in this way. With the decision to disarm, peace ceased to be a negotiation and became a free and sovereign decision.

This can be reaffirmed as a good and brave decision when one looks at the current panorama of the armed confrontation in Colombia in its degradation, barbarity, and established functionality. It is a question of ethics, of being able to read the historical moment, and of understanding that being a revolutionary also means being prepared to change, to adventure into unknown territory, abandon old schema, and begin to use the logic of non-violence and non-exclusion. Thus the simple fact of having taken peace as a paradigm of change is in itself an achievement and confirms that this process was worth it.

NEGOTIATING AGENDAS WITH THE DEMOBILIZED GUERRILLA GROUPS

AGENDA	Accords		
	M-19 (March 9 1990)	PRT, EPL, Quintín Lame (Jan 25, Feb 15, May 27 1991)	CRS (April 9 1994)
'Political favourability'	<p>Special peace district</p> <p>Support for electoral reform</p> <p>Reaffirmed the need to reform the Constitution and widen democratic opportunities</p>	<p>Participation in the Constituent Assembly (delegates and spokesmen)</p>	<p>2 representatives in the House</p> <p>Forum in Urabá to explain the peace process with the CRS and present their proposal for the region</p>
Justice, human rights and public order	<p>Commissions to reform the justice system, to study the drug-trade, and study the ratification of Protocol II</p> <p>Publish information on paramilitaries under the responsibility of the armed forces</p> <p>Revision of the Statute for the Defence of Democracy</p>	<p>Commission on Overcoming the Problem of Violence</p> <p>Support to victims of violence</p> <p>Governmental Commission on Human Rights and offices of the Department in some regions</p> <p>Meetings to discuss analysis and diagnosis on Human Rights</p>	<p>Forum to analyse the human rights situation in Colombia (leading to a book)</p>
Social and judicial guarantees for ex-guerrillas	<p>Amnesty</p> <p>Reintegration Programme (without detail)</p> <p>Security Plan</p>	<p>Amnesty</p> <p>Reintegration Programme, specifying types of guarantees and stages</p> <p>Security Plan</p>	<p>Judicial benefits (including amnesty)</p> <p>Reintegration Programme (more specific and widened to include the nuclear family)</p> <p>Security Plan</p>
Regional and social development	<p>National Peace Fund, to run programmes in zones of influence</p>	<p>Programmes in zones of influences</p> <p>Inclusion of municipalities in PNR and negotiation of projects with other entities</p> <p>Regional plans consulted with the community</p>	<p>Social investment programmes in conflict zones, with community participation</p> <p>Promotion of participation mechanisms for citizens</p>
Socio-economic policies	<p>Measures for participatory planning on, income, salaries, labour issues, housing, health, food security, campesino production and marketing</p>	<p>No agreement</p>	<p>No agreement</p>
Verification	<p>No agreement</p>	<p>National: the Constituent Assembly, public figures, and the Confederation of Evangelical Churches</p> <p>International: Socialist Workers Party of Spain, Socialist International, the World Council of Indian Peoples</p>	<p>A commission comprising the National Government, the CRS and international organizations</p>

Source: developed by Mauricio García-Durán based on the agreements

Personal reflections

Alice Maria Salazar

A former M-19 combatant, Alice is part of a Women's Collective of reintegrated guerrillas who work nation-wide to defend the rights of women who were members of insurgent groups.



The State peace processes have always had this content, a ceasefire, an end to military confrontation, but they don't create spaces for all those excluded sectors. There are many more people outside this society for whom the state never works: the street vendors in the informal sector, a large section of the population outside the education system, the health system, housing provision.

So we shouldn't be talking about reintegrating those with weapons, but we should start to reintegrate all those who don't feel the presence of the state, unless it is pursuing them, judging them, putting them in prison. There are many who don't feel the presence of the state because there is no social policy that covers them.

I don't see much peacebuilding, I see a lot of talking and not much doing. I think that peacebuilding implies working for better living conditions for all, a political environment that includes all Colombians; when I see the peace demonstrations I feel that it is more opinion that is being built, but no work that really defends rights, and includes sectors that have always been excluded, and makes democratic demands. No, all they do is recite the word peace.

Jazmin Agudelo

Jazmin works with the Horizons of Freedom Foundation, defending the rights of prisoners in various Colombian prisons.

Sometimes I want to believe in the formal peace processes, sometimes I can't let myself lose faith, sometimes I want to understand them but I am sadly confronted with the real situation, with what I live with all the time, day and night and I realize that they are not working, that they continue to be marred, that they have no aim, that the motive is more selfish than we thought. The motive is more immediate, it's more a kind of political publicity. They're not managing the root of the problem experienced by the general population, and I think we need that. Many members of civil society are going to continue to suffer just so that some of the actors and participants in these dialogues achieve their own objective, because each one will continue seeking his own objective. They are going to continue managing the negotiations and the dialogues for their own interests and the civilian population will get a raw deal for sure.

