

**International Association for the Study of Forced Migration
- IASFM**

IASFM 15 Conference Report

*Forced Migration and Peace: 30 years of the Cartagena Declaration on
Refugees*

Juliana Vengoechea Barrios

Juanita Deperraz

Marco A. Velásquez Ruiz

(Senior reporters)

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Junior reporting team

Alejandra del Pilar Ortiz Ariza
Carolina Moreno López
Diana Carolina Moreno Pabón
Joaquín Garzón Vargas
Pilar Veloza Cantillo
Jimena Díaz B.
Andrés Felipe Oviedo Cifuentes
Cristina Hernández
Jorge Gil
Carolina Bejarano
Helena Catalina Rivera Cediel

Panel and round-table discussion moderators:

Pablo Gómez
Andrea Pacheco
María Angélica Prada
Carolina Olarte
Jorge Salcedo
Adriana Medina Carrillo
Juan Felipe García
Nicolás Rodríguez
Ranabir Samaddar
James Simeon
Nergis Canefe
Martin Gottwald
Sandy Gifford
Christina Carl-Kazak
Anne McNevin
Carla Suárez
Joaquín Garzón
Roberto Vidal
Beatriz Eugenia Sánchez

I. Introduction

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Instituto Pensar and Universidad de los Andes organized and held the 15th conference of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, which took place in Bogotá, Colombia, from July 15 to 18, 2014. On this occasion the conference focused on the theme *forced migration and peace, in the context of celebrating 30 years of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees*. The event truly represented a global discussion space: more than 300 participants from 25 countries including academics, activists, members of civil society organizations, officials from international organizations and forced migrants, were able to meet and discuss the world's current worldwide situation of forced migration.

II. Conference topics and objectives

The complicated relationship between peace and forced migration was the central theme of this event. The topic was examined in the context of two distinct and simultaneous processes: first, the celebration of 30 years of the Cartagena Declaration, an international rights instrument that proved a turning point in managing forced migration in post-conflict situations; and second, the peace talks between the Colombian government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), which, if successful, could put an end to more than 60 years of internal armed conflict in the country.

The first objective of the conference was therefore to establish a space for reflection and discussion, so that academics, activists and policy makers could revive the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration, and revisit the lessons that it—and the process it originated from—might offer for the Colombian peace process and the post-conflict period that will follow.

An additional but no less important objective of the conference was to deepen the horizontal dialog that has allowed members of the IASFM and the Global North and South to form peer relationships and address the study, debate and search for solutions related to the complex phenomenon of forced migration.

III. Conference structure

Following the model now established in the IASFM, the Conference was structured around plenary sessions, discussion panels for papers, and round-table discussions for academic projects currently underway.

There were five plenary sessions in total, involving invitees from the Colombian government, international organizations, civil society organizations and academia. These invitees analyzed central issues directly related to the relationship between forced migration and peace-building. It is important to note that all of these discussions included simultaneous English-Spanish interpreting.

The first of these meetings, titled “Voices of the displaced”, was dedicated to presenting and making heard the voices—testimonies and opinions—of a group of Colombian Idps who are leading organizations to defend their rights peacefully. The discussion revolved around the expectations that the peace process currently underway in the country has created for them, given their status as victims. Carmen Palencia, President of the National Association of Victims for Restitution and Land Access – Land and Life (*Asociación Nacional de Víctimas por la Restitución y el Acceso a la Tierra - Tierra y Vida*), Manuel Mercado, a member of the same organization, Sergio López, a displaced leader, and Elizabeth Calderón Galvis, president of the New Effort Association (*Asociación de Nuevos Esfuerzos*), all participated in the debate.

The second plenary session addressed the management of forced migration and guaranteeing rights to truth, justice and compensation for internally displaced people and refugees in Colombia’s current peace process. The debate included Iris Marín, compensation director for the Unidad de Víctimas (the Colombian state body responsible for guaranteeing the rights of victims of the conflict), Martin Gottwald, deputy representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Colombia, Marco Romero, Director of the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), one of the country’s main forced migration NGOs, and Martha Nubia Bello, professor from Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

In the third plenary session, participants took a step back from the Colombian situation to look at the displacement caused by development projects and subsequent resettlement processes. The panel, consisting of professors Michael Cernea and SHI Gouquin, focused on the experience in China, as an example where a methodology was applied to relocate those affected by the

execution of infrastructure projects. It is a method that offers interesting lessons, applicable in diverse contexts.

The fourth plenary session involved invitees Flor Maria Riggoni and Leonir Chiarello, two priests from the Scalabranian congregation of the Catholic Church, who shared their thoughts on the ethical principles that should govern migrations, whether they be forced or of economic origin. Elisa Montaña, an official for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), complemented this perspective by describing the humanitarian activities that her organization has undertaken for displaced people in Colombia.

The final plenary session analyzed the relationship between displacement and resistance. Germán Valencia, an indigenous leader from the Nasa community located in the south-west of Colombia, presented the strategy of peaceful resistance developed by his people, who have decided not to permit their ancestral lands to be taken away from them. Also participating was Flor Edilma Osorio, an academic from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, who offered her perspective on strategies of resistance that have been developed in the country during the armed conflict. Finally, Ranabir Saddamar, the Director of the Calcutta Research Group, reflected on resistance movements and forced displacement in India.

The panels, meanwhile, provided spaces for debating the presentations delivered at the Conference, in line with the themes set out in the call for papers, explained below. Over the final three days of the event, 50 panels were conducted (including seven with simultaneous translation). Additionally, five round-table discussions took place in which various participants presented research projects currently underway, in order to receive feedback from their colleagues.

Along with these spaces for academic discussion, the 15th IASFM Conference incorporated alternative settings for reflecting on the relationship between forced migration and peace through artistic expression such as cinema, photography and the performing arts. Accordingly, the Conference included four cinema forums, a photography exhibition and a performance (audio-walk).

Three documentaries and a fiction film were shown in the cinema forum, all dealing with forced displacement and resistance, and accompanied by commentary from the directors and producers. The films were subtitled in English and simultaneous English-Spanish translation was provided during the discussion to encourage audience participation.

The first production, *Wandering country*, was directed by Luis Sánchez Ayala, associate professor from the history department at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, and produced by Sebastián Mejía from Enlalucha Films, both of whom participated in the debate. This documentary, which presents four stories of forced migration, uprooting and resistance, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9gMfZtxNgo>

The second film was a work of fiction titled *Portraits in a sea of lies*, directed by Carlos Gaviria and starring Julián Román, both of who participated in the debate after the screening. The film, which has won awards at numerous international festivals, delves into the trauma that the armed conflict and displacement create for those involved, as well as the difficulties and dangers that these people must face to regain the lands they were forced to abandon. The film is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfSxRrkEI94&list=PL622D4DB28B3FDE1A&index=7>

The next film, *Until the last stone*, is the story of the peace community at San José de Apartadó, whose members have peacefully resisted displacement despite what it has cost them. The director, Juan José Lozano, provided comments about the production and engaged in debate with participants in the cinema forum. A short version of the film is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISye9IbR4vk>

Finally, there was a preview of the documentary *Tomorrow will come* with filmmaker Ricardo Torres and producer Juan Manuel Peña from the Chasquis foundation. Also present were the protagonists of the story: the leaders of the Buenos Aires Country Dwellers Association (Asocab). The film tells of the fight between these people and domestic and foreign companies involved in the large-scale oil palm farming, to avoid displacement. This film is not yet available as it is still in post-production.

As well as the discussion surrounding these films, a photographic exhibition was presented. *Volume 44* brings together the work of Else Oliveira on migrant women in South Africa who, voluntarily or involuntarily, work in the sex industry.

Finally, Colombian artist Luis Carlos Sotelo, provided a sound installation titled *The most convenient way out*. Those passing through the university could hear the story of a young man who leaves a guerrilla group to seek an alternative for his own life and for the violent situation facing the country. The installation was offered in both Spanish and English.

By combining emotion and reason in these three settings, participants in the Conference were given new tools for understanding both the armed conflict and forced migration in Colombia. Overall, the results of the initiative were extremely positive.

IV. Topics of conversation and debate for panels and round-table discussions

The Conference focused on six subjects, all linked to the relationship between forced migration and peace. The debates, which took place on the panels and in the round-table discussions, revolved around these topics:

Topic 1: Peace-building and forced exodus

The topic of peace-building and forced exodus revolved around the idea that any agenda aimed at peacefully resolving conflict must include both management of internal displacement and refugee protection, and compensation for victims. This takes into account the fundamental experience of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, which allowed better ownership and handling of the situation and the expectations of victims of armed conflicts in Central America by recognizing the special conditions of forced displacement and shelter in such situations. As a main case—without excluding other relevant cases—the peace negotiations currently taking place in Colombia between the government and guerrilla groups was a central topic in the discussions.

The discussions that took place in both the plenary sessions and on the panels explored two fundamental issues. One of these was the role that international actors play in peace-building processes through the implementation of aid mechanisms. The other (which included the

presentation of related work) was the importance of internally displaced people and refugees participating in peace processes. It was highlighted that, accordingly, these people should be actively involved in the formulation of public policy related to the implementation and fulfilling of agreements reached, always with the goal of making the processes sustainable.

Topic 2: Justice and forced migration

The topic of justice and forced migration focused on the study and analysis of the role of justice systems—at national, regional and international levels—in recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of forced migrants, including victims of both armed conflicts and situations associated with undemocratic regimes. In other words, the topic looked at the possibilities these justice systems have for guaranteeing rights to justice, truth, and reparation. In this context, the discussions revolved around the challenges that transitional justice processes must face in cases where the victims are internally displaced people or refugees and, in particular, the need to think of new forms of reparation based on the particular dynamics of these phenomena.

Accordingly, participants analyzed processes of truth, empowerment of victims and the creation of lasting solutions through the actions of national and international justice in relation to a great variety of cases, such as those in Brazil, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Colombia. Within this analysis, emphasis was placed on the growing importance of transitional justice as a peace-building tool.

Topic 3: Regional responses to forced exodus

The discussion around this topic centered on the Cartagena Declaration, as an instrument for managing the pressing issue of shelter and forced displacement in the Americas. The celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Declaration allowed the participants to highlight three aspects of it. The first of these is its dual nature—it is not only a legal document but also a political one. This characteristic means it can be used as a mechanism for creating a new consensus, and for widening and providing greater depth for the protection of displaced people and refugees.

Secondly, participants analyzed the possibility that this instrument could offer protection to environmental refugees. On various panels, those present defended the need to strive for a wide interpretation of the term refugee for this instrument, in order to guarantee that victims of crises, such as that faced by Haiti, are covered and provided with care.

Finally, participants examined the lessons learnt from the process of creating the Declaration. The UNHCR and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights were very actively involved in this process, as were the states of the region. These actors made a commitment to participate in the peace process in Central America. Likewise, the process received important input from the debates about refugee protection that were taking place in Africa. Some panelists called to revive the spirit that guided that process and apply it to the peace negotiations currently underway between the Colombian government and the insurgent groups. Thus, it was stressed, a group of States must provide firm support and act as a guarantor during both the negotiations and the post-conflict period.

Topic 4: Lasting and sustainable solutions for overcoming uprooting

This topic focused on the need to develop sustainable solutions that allow displaced people and refugees to put their uprooting behind them, as well as the need to take a critical stance towards existing policies and programs to determine their impact, achievements, and the challenges faced in their implementation.

Presentations at the Conference identified the need for statistics and methodologies that can measure the reach and impact of lasting solutions. With respect to integrating forced migrants and refugees into receiving communities, as well as resettling them into third states, major concerns were raised about the lack of safety guarantees for migrating populations, the economic barriers in financial resettlement, integration and return programs, and the strong social discrimination that these people are subject to both from receiving communities and state officials. Communication problems, unreceptiveness towards intercultural differences, and the language used to talk about migration, have all exacerbated the atmosphere of discrimination. Additionally, there were constant calls to question the way the media has handled different migratory phenomena, as this has been another factor that has increased discrimination by painting a negative picture of migrant communities. This dismal situation has been made worse by socio-economic exclusion due to low income and a severe lack of job opportunities.

Concerns about the sustainability of policies that are being implemented in the medium- and long-term also framed the debate. There is a call for a more humanitarian perspective, which takes into account the state of being uprooted and the associated trauma, when attending to

migrant communities. Papers were presented that addressed the need to centralize efforts to empower communities and involve them actively in the process of adopting lasting solutions, in order to convert these into tools of self-sufficiency. Emphasis was placed on education as a fundamental tool for long-term sustainable solutions. Likewise, in the context of health policies, a call was made to adopt interdisciplinary strategies to treat initial trauma, but also the physiological and psychological consequences. Participants reiterated the voluntary nature of return as its overriding characteristic, and brought attention to state practices in some regions where return has been forced.

Topic 5: Forced migration in times of peace

This was one of the innovative spaces of the Conference, as it focused on raising the profile of the increasing number of cases of forced migration in situations other than armed conflict. This is the case for environmental migration, which is caused by development projects and generated by mafias and criminal groups.

The debate primarily revolved around the need and desirability of a wider definition of shelter, and new categories for attending to these migratory phenomena. Some of the panelists did not agree with discussing this topic, as the current international framework offers alternatives for facing the issue. Others, meanwhile, pointed to the need to create such categories in order to provide an appropriate response to specific needs of people who have to abandon their homes due to climate change, natural disasters, and investment and development projects. A second stage of the debate considered whether this creating of new categories should be global, or rather regional, taking into account the differences of each particular regional context. In particular, participants mentioned the need to emphasize the characteristics, in specific areas of the planet, of the exodus caused by agribusiness, mining and development projects.

Despite the opposing positions in the two debates, there was consensus about recognizing that the categories have a political value that goes beyond their legal weight. Indeed, the Cartagena Declaration demonstrated that by widening existing categories and introducing others, it is possible to plan regional efforts to face the causes and symptoms of new migratory phenomena.

In terms of the specific issue of criminal groups and organized crime, the debate mainly focused on two situations. The first was that of criminal groups in Colombia. These groups, fed by the paramilitary demobilization process, are now expanding, and forced displacement currently represents one of their main strategies for coercion and influence. Likewise, references were made to the situation of groups and gangs in Central America, where displacement is the result of the violence they impose. Unlike Colombia, however, forced migration is not a method used directly by criminals.

Topic 6: Resistance and migration

The final topic took a leading role in the Conference. It was widely discussed in the presentations, the artistic works and documentaries. The common thread for this topic was that despite the lack of guarantees about their involvement and the lack of official forums, displaced people and refugees have shown their ability to create their own spaces and offer resistance.

The ways that they resist are many and varied. It is clear that the migrants have agency, and seek ways of using it. Papers were presented that demonstrated the wide range of situations under which they implement resistance strategies, and conference participants analyzed the role that women play in their communities to lead resistance processes, either by questioning gender roles, or exploiting and adopting these as a strategic posture. Likewise, the conference addressed methods of resistance used by indigenous communities that reinforce the differences and reaffirm and defend the specific cultures of these communities.

But despite the creativity of migrants to find new ways of offering resistance and defending their power of speech, there were repeated calls to guarantee spaces for direct participation in the decision-making processes that affect these migrant communities, thereby restoring political capital. To conclude, it could be said that there is an open invitation to reflect more deeply on social movements in violent settings, and related developments in different countries around the world.