



## DISARMAMENT AND LAYING DOWN WEAPONS: INTERNATIONAL CASES

### INTRODUCTION

In February 2015, Colombia's Sub-Commission on the End of the Conflict began joint work in Havana. This 20-member technical working group, with ten members chosen by the Colombian Government and ten by the FARC, is dedicated to defining strategies and mechanisms that will serve as input for the dialogue teams' discussions on the relevant agenda point, which includes DDR, a possible bilateral ceasefire, and other measures to bring an end to Colombia's conflict. The agenda point itself, titled "The End of the Conflict", utilizes very specific language to describe these processes. Among the terms used is "dejación de armas", roughly translated as "laying down weapons", which replaces the term "disarmament" in the FARC discourse. Yezid Arteta, an ex-FARC combatant and current analyst and journalist, wrote of the difference between the two terms:

*"Disarmament is a material act by which a combatant hands his weapon over to an organisation agreed upon by the two negotiating parties. In contrast, laying down weapons is a material and mental process that an ex-combatant goes through when he is certain that his political and social development is ensured and the use of a weapon has become obsolete and without meaning."*

Perhaps the most important part of this differentiation lies in the description of laying down weapons as a process, implying that weapons are not necessarily handed over in the moment that implementation of a final agreement begins. In addition, the process seems to be conditioned on implementation or at least assurance of implementation of other agreements, in order to ensure the political and social development of the ex-combatant.

This spotlight examines international cases of disarmament and laying down weapons to provide lessons for Colombia as discussions on this agenda point progress.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

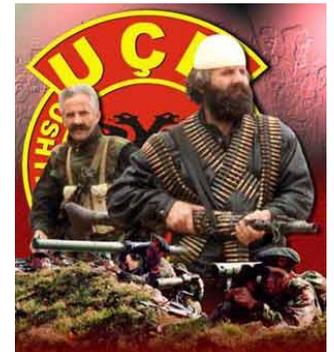
The 1998 Good Friday Agreement was signed by various Northern Irish political parties and the Irish and British governments to end decades of violence and initiate unionist power-sharing rule. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) had previously declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1994, which it broke in 1996 due to dissatisfaction with slow progress in the negotiations. The ceasefire was reinstated in July 1997, and provided momentum for the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>ii</sup>



The IRA avoided a ceasefire and maintained control of their weapons to encourage implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. They stored weapons in an IRA-controlled depot, to the anger of many in the multi-party government, some of whom refused to begin work while the IRA was still armed. An Independent Commission on Decommissioning was established to oversee gradual disarmament of the illegal armed groups, but the IRA did not participate in the decommissioning process.<sup>iii</sup> In 2001 the situation came to a hilt as high-level members of government resigned due to the IRA's failure to put its weapons "completely and verifiably beyond use". In August of the same year – three years after the Good Friday Agreement – the IRA agreed on a method to destroy its arsenal. Progress on this issue was nevertheless slow until 2005, when the IRA leadership ordered that all members hand over weapons and end the "armed campaign".<sup>iv</sup> This significant step forward was meant to show commitment on the part of the IRA, and encourage proactive implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>v</sup>

### KOSOVO

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) possessed significant military power when the conflict officially ended in June 1999. An agreement was made to incorporate former KLA members into the broad security and demilitarization scheme being structured by UN and NATO committees in Kosovo. Disarmament and demobilization of the KLA was designed to take place by means of a temporary emergency response corps: the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC).<sup>vi</sup> There were 5,052 available places in the KPC, of which the great majority was given to former KLA members.<sup>vii</sup>



The KPC was not meant to be a legitimization of the KLA but rather a temporary civilian entity whose mandate included the protection of citizens from natural disasters and support for reconstruction efforts. The KPC preserved the military structure of the KLA, and was incorporated into an arms control route by which 1,800 of its 2,000 KLA weapons were supposedly held in a facility, and the others were available for instances in which the KPC performed guard duties or was otherwise deployed.<sup>viii</sup> However, reports from Kosovo at the time indicated that the KPC maintained control over all 2,000 weapons. This lack of disarmament or laying weapons down, combined with the fact that the KPC maintained a similar structure, uniform, and camp format to the KLA, provoked the public

perception that the KPC was an army-in-waiting for ethnic Kosovo Albanians to support their independence efforts.<sup>ix</sup> Despite its objective of being a temporary short-term entity, the KPC lasted until 2007 when it transformed into the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF). As a result, some former KLA members have never fully disarmed or gone through the process of laying down weapons, instead continuing on as part of civilian security forces. This perceived continuation of KLA armed activity and identity—under the guise of the KPC—caused tensions between ethnic Kosovo Albanians and those who wished for their armed movement to end, and for weapons to be handed in to transform their armed identity consolidate and legitimize their supposed efforts at peace.<sup>x</sup>

### PHILIPPINES

In October 2012, the Philippine government and insurgent Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). This agreement establishes the autonomous Muslim region of Bangsamoro for which the MILF had fought for decades, and defines terms for a transition to and normalization of power sharing between the Bangsamoro and Philippine national government.<sup>xi</sup> Some experts recommended that DDR measures be agreed in order to de-activate the MILF and consolidate reconciliation and peace. However, DDR in the Philippines is associated with counter-insurgency efforts, so was not included in the agreement with the insurgency. In addition, the MILF wanted to maintain weapons until the Government had made clear its commitment to de-militarizing the Bangsamoro.<sup>xii</sup>



After some instability in FAB implementation, and more negotiations between the MILF and national government, another agreement was reached in March 2014, and discussions on disarmament began in September the same year. Rather than hand over all weapons simultaneously, the MILF agreed on a phased decommissioning process that saw monitoring and verification activities carried out by an international commission formed specifically for this function. Each phase of the decommissioning was made dependent on fulfillment of a series of conditions by the Government, so that MILF could ensure that its demands were met.<sup>xiii</sup> However, violence continued and it was only in January of 2015 that the MILF began the phased decommissioning process with a largely symbolic ceremony of handing over 75 weapons to be stored under lock and key. This process is still being implemented, and results have yet to be made public.<sup>xiv</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Although Colombia saw a number of collective demobilizations of guerrilla groups in the 1990s and paramilitaries in 2003-2006, it has not yet contended with

a challenge similar to its current situation, in which a group reiterates its refusal to disarm. The earlier Colombian cases followed the traditional DDR model and saw the demobilizing combatants enter temporary camps where they handed their weapons in and received short-term benefits before entering society once again and starting the reintegration process.

In the current case of the FARC, the group has said that it will not disarm but rather lay weapons aside, which implies a process that could be conditioned on the GOC's fulfillment of conditions included in a final peace agreement. The Northern Ireland case demonstrates the possible motivations of the group maintaining its weapons – to encourage implementation of a final peace agreement, thereby relating to the “political and social development” mentioned by Arteta. This example also shows the possible repercussions of allowing the FARC to keep their weapons, and the political tensions that could arise if this route is chosen. Similarly, the KPC shows the public opinion implications of allowing the group to keep its weapons, as in Kosovo the population thought of the KPC as a continuation of the KLA and its armed activity. This perception in Colombia could undermine public trust in the peace process and put the legitimacy of final agreements at risk. Finally, the MILF in the Philippines are currently in the process of implementing a phased approach to decommissioning. Similar to the IRA in Northern Ireland, and to current FARC objectives, the MILF laying down of weapons is dependent on government fulfillment of conditions defined in the agreement between the two sides. This case could provide an important model for Colombia in the near future, but the results of its implementation in the Philippines remain to be seen. What is certain is that the GOC is confronting a great challenge in balancing FARC objectives with public hopes and expectations, and should take lessons such as these into account when planning the historic laying down of weapons by this guerrilla group.

<sup>i</sup> Arteta, Y. *El Acuerdo De Paz El Grano Y La Paja*.

<https://yezidarteta.wordpress.com/2013/09/29/acuerdo-de-paz-el-grano-y-la-paja/>

<sup>ii</sup> Irish Republican Army (IRA) Ceasefire Statement, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1997. <http://bit.ly/18Nlrs6>

<sup>iii</sup> De Chastelain, J. “The northern Ireland peace process and the impact of decommissioning”

[http://www.ucd.ie/ibis/filestore/wp2001/08\\_chast.pdf](http://www.ucd.ie/ibis/filestore/wp2001/08_chast.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement on the Ending of the Armed Campaign, July 28<sup>th</sup> 2005.

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira280705.htm>

<sup>v</sup> “I.R.A. Renounces Violence in Potentially Profound Shift”. NY Times, July 28<sup>th</sup> 2005.

<http://nyti.ms/1Dcgc2j>

<sup>vi</sup> Berns, H., Colletta, N., & Samuelsson Schjorlien, J. (2008) “Interim Stabilization” Folke

Bernadotte Academy. Stockholm, Sweden. <http://bit.ly/1BuQwf0>

<sup>vii</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2001) “Reintegration Strategy for the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) Reservists” IOM: Kosovo.

<sup>viii</sup> Petersen, Erik; “The Kosovo Protection Corps in Search of a Future”, Center for European Studies, September 2005 and Pp. 34, Berns, H., Colletta, N., & Samuelsson Schjorlien, J. Op. Cit.

<sup>ix</sup> Tiron, R. *Former Kosovo Liberation Army Morphing Into a National Guard*. National Defense Magazine. <http://bit.ly/18XW4rM>

<sup>x</sup> Clewlow, A. (2010) Op. Cit.

<sup>xi</sup> *Framework Agreement On The Bangsamoro*. <http://bit.ly/1MHlisk>

<sup>xii</sup> “The Philippines: Dismantling Rebel Groups.” International Crisis Group, June 19<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<http://bit.ly/1bdXxfm>

<sup>xiii</sup> “Moro: Disarmament Starts after Successful Negotiations with Filipino Government.”

October 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. <http://unpo.org/article/17570>

<sup>xiv</sup> “Philippines, Moro rebels ink protocol on disarmament” January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015, UCA News.

<http://bit.ly/18DxOv3>