

USF HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY

2019 FEBRUARY REPORT

When the USF's Colombian Peace Process Observatory started its press analysis and media search around peace dialogues in Colombia, it was evident that the ELN was not an important protagonist in the news about peace in the country. Since the new president Ivan Duque took office, uncertainty with regards to a peaceful future in Colombia has governed the nation. Without clear policies and with harsh pronouncements about the armed groups continuing their operations, the new administration in Colombia disregarded the conversation table established with the ELN. The media had been stagnant due to the lack of new facts or events about the fate of the dialogues that began with the guerrilla group. This, however, changed dramatically.

On January 17, 2019 an ELN guerrilla group became the main actor in the country's news due to an attack they perpetrated on the Police School General Santander that left 21 dead and 60 injured.

After this, newspapers, radio and television were flooded with images and stories about the car bomb that exploded in the Police school.

The country was polarized again and the news about this situation focused on how this attack caused a step backwards in the attempts to negotiate peace with the ELN and at the same time endangered the agreement already established with the FARC.

The media expressed how these events evidenced that Iván Duque's government, which did not impel the negotiations until now, would possibly end them and concentrate on hardening the repression to the guerrilla leaders. At the same time, news revealed how tension was building between Norway and Colombia due to the protocols that were established if the negotiations were broken.

The press wasn't the only agent revolutionized around the facts: academics and columnists also made several pronouncements about the meaning and consequences of this attack in the context of the peace process and at the end it was easy to conclude that the actors most harmed after the attack "were the people that fought to achieve peace in the country".

Another very relevant topic that also arose in Colombia's press during January was the security of Social Leaders in the country.

Before the start of 2019, there was already a toll of 400 social leaders that had been murdered.

These deaths were related to the peace dialogues with FARC, but it was not being discussed in the media; now, several press outlets are releasing news about this concerning situation. The Observatory intuits that these pronouncements and the awakening of the media about this topic may be linked to the current moment that the country is living after the ELN attack. Both this peak in violence and the murders of social leaders are factors that put at risk the already vulnerable and incomplete peace that Colombia has after the signing of agreements with the FARC.