

Lilia Solano¹



Scholar, human rights defender, peacebuilder based in Colombia. Philosopher from the Valle University in Cali and Political Scientist from the Xaverian University in Bogota. She has lectured at the Xaverian and National Universities in Bogota, and was the director of the Camilo Torres Restrepo Research Group at the National University, with a focus on Critical Thought for Liberation in Latin America. She is the founder and director of the Justice and Life Project, a non-profit organization that works for the rights of the landless and the victims of the armed conflict. The legal right to life, which is routinely violated in Colombia, is the centerpiece of her life's academic and professional work.

Working for the most vulnerable in Bogota, Lilia and the Justice and Life Project are a voice that denounces the atrocities that take place in the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia, a conflict that continues despite a failed 2016 peace deal that was never implemented. These atrocities include human rights violations and violations to International Humanitarian Law. Through scholarly and academic activities, the Justice and Life Project seeks to create spaces of dialogue in order to reduce violence, internal displacement, social inequalities, and foreign agendas that go against national sovereignty, striving for the beginning of the implementation of the 2016 peace deal.

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Lilia's activism has led her to take part in several initiatives and platforms for the defense of human rights, among them are the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) and the Colombians for Peace platform, that worked towards the beginning of peace negotiations in La Habana in 2012 between the government and then FARC rebels. Her struggle is also against impunity, particularly for the memory of crimes of paramilitary groups and the victims of crimes such as forced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence. This struggle began in 2003, when peace talks between the Colombian United Self-Defense Group (AUC), the country's main paramilitary group, and the government began. Then president Uribe was firmly opposed to amnesty for AUC fighters, and many AUC commanders were extradited to the US, where their testimonies were effectively silenced. 18 years later, the memory of the crimes of the AUC is all but lost.

These negotiations led to the Justice and Peace Law, Law 975 of 2005, which established a narrow interpretation of transitional justice in order to demobilize the AUC where neither memory nor the rights of victims to moral and financial reparation were taken into consideration. In order to confront this injustice, MOVICE was created. During the height of paramilitary violence in the early 2000s, Lilia organized hearings with the victims of the AUC and other groups, helping to send threatened activists abroad to safety. Tribunals of Opinion were organized in Brussels (2005) and Bogota (2007) in order to raise awareness of crimes being committed, lobby the international community to hold the Colombian government accountable, and put the victims in the center of the discussion. Also, a campaign was launched to pressure FARC rebels to free kidnapped victims, which was one of the government's prerequisites to begin negotiations.

After the signing of the peace deal, pressure from the international community to the Colombian government regarding the human rights situation was greatly reduced, and Lilia redoubled her efforts to raise awareness of the assassination of human rights defenders, among other crimes. From academic to media work, she has always placed victims and social movements in center stage. This work in a place like Colombia is high risk, and she has received threats on social media, phone calls, and paper leaflets, among other forms of verbal violence. Her devices have been hacked and stolen in suspicious circumstances.

These threats were most frequent in the aftermath of the signing of the paramilitary peace deal and in the beginning of negotiations between FARC rebels and the government, and in 2005, thanks in part due to international solidarity, the government granted her a security detail. And just as those outside Colombia have shown solidarity with her cause, she has participated actively in the World Social Forum, as an advisor for the UN Office Against Corruption and Organized Crime, and as a judge of the People's Permanent Tribunal.