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The Conflict in Colombia and Chocó

Introduction
This chapter provides a historical contextualisation of the conflict in Colombia and particularly in the region of Chocó, where the massacre of Bojayá took place in 2002. The first section provides a description of the analysis of the violence that has affected the country in the last 60 years and the transitional justice mechanisms that have been implemented since 2005, after the alleged demobilisation of the paramilitary army. The second section presents a description and analysis of the conflict in the region of Chocó, where the massacre of Bojayá took place. It explains how the violation of territorial and ethnic rights has influenced the conflict in the region. Understanding the social and political characteristics of the Colombian conflict permits to explain the challenges to a political and social transition in the country.

A history of violence(s)
Multiple situations of violence have often overlapped in the history of Colombia, making the Colombian conflict the longest contemporary conflict in the Western hemisphere. The history of violence in Colombia started even before its birth as an independent state; during its existence as a Spanish colony, the indigenous population was decimated and the exploitation of African slaves was a strong component of the economy of the colonisers. Violence continued throughout the wars of independence; later, the young country experienced nine civil wars from 1832 to 1902; these wars contributed to the definition of a two-party system consisting of the Liberal party and the Conservative party.
On the one hand, liberals considered that the Catholic Church obeyed a foreign power that could threaten the supremacy of the secular state.
They also defended freedom of thought and aimed for reduction of the temporal power and the influence of the church, which was considered the main obstacle for the political, social and economic modernisation of the country (De Roux, 2004). On the other hand, conservatives had the political support of the Catholic Church, since they saw in the church a source of stability in society.

A climate of intolerance spurred the civil war known as ‘La Violencia’, from 1946 to 1953. The murder of the liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitán created violent unrest in urban areas. The intense confrontations between conservatives and liberals found a fecund terrain in the rural villages, where political affiliation was bonded by blood and place of birth. Additionally, it motivated the persecution of Protestants, who were identified as supporters of the Liberal party, and sometimes as communists (Abel, 2004). The agreement that brought an end to ‘La Violencia’ is known as ‘the National Front’ (El Frente Nacional) (1958–1974), which demanded a sharing of power between the two parties each term. This agreement meant the exclusion of parties that were alternative to the oligarchic elite and the banning of the communist party.

The emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1960s was motivated by feelings of inequality, exclusion and the inadequate distribution of land, which have been chronic problems in Colombia. At the end of the decade, inspired by Marxist, Maoist and post-Cuban revolution ideals, the following guerrillas were created: The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC-EP, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN), the Popular Army of Liberation (el Ejército de Liberación Popular – EPL), the 19 April Movement (el Movimiento 19 de Abril – M-19), the Indigenous Guerrilla Armed Movement (el grupo guerrillero indígena Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame), the Workers’ Self-defence (la Autodefensa Obrera – ADO) and their dissident groups (Pizarro, 2006). The rise of these subversive movements led to the official approval of the creation of self-defence citizens’ groups in 1965. This decision opened the gate for the birth of organised auto-defence forces, later formed as paramilitaries: extremist right-wing illegal groups. These laws were suspended in 1989.

The paramilitaries claimed to be a self-defence force supported by a social base of local stockbreeders, farmers, local politicians and emerald traders that decided to take justice on their own right with the support of the official army (Baron and Gutierrez, 2006). These were a product of the Doctrine of National Security that was adopted across Latin America,