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**United States Agency for International Development  
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance  
Office of Transition Initiatives**

Country: Colombia  
Program: Colombia  
Funding: \$6,000,000 in Transition Initiative Funds (of which \$2,000,000 would be obligated post-peace accords)  
Fiscal Year: 2015  
Program Areas: 1.6 Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation  
2.2 Good Governance  
6.1 Program Design and Learning  
6.2 Administration and Oversight

This report is being submitted pursuant to the Transition Initiatives (TI) provision of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2015. This provision directs the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to “submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations at least five days prior to beginning a new program of assistance” using TI funds.

Accordingly, USAID is submitting this report in anticipation of a new Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in Colombia using TI funds. This program will enhance U.S. Government (USG) policy goals and complement other ongoing USG programs in the country by supporting activities that promote an enabling environment for sustainable peace. Since 2012, the Government of Colombia (GoC) has engaged the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest insurgency organization in the country, in peace dialogues in Havana, Cuba. Polls suggest a majority of Colombians support the peace process, although large sectors of the population remain skeptical about an eventual agreement. Regardless of whether a final accord is reached in Havana, the GoC is committed to follow through with an agenda of transformational reforms around participatory governance, institution-building, and the rights of rural communities.

USAID/OTI activities will provide short-term support to the reform agenda by strengthening the GoC’s institutional capacity to ensure regional and local participation in peacebuilding processes. The initial program approach includes working with ministries, departmental governments, municipalities, and other public agencies, as well as community organizations and the private sector, to strengthen linkages between the different levels of government and ensure broader and more inclusive participation in peacebuilding activities. A more effective relationship between national and sub-national governments is key to achieve durable and sustainable peace.

USAID/OTI assistance will focus on areas of strategic importance for the GoC’s *Paz Territorial* policy and related peacebuilding efforts. While specific regions of implementation will be determined based on consultations with GoC and USAID/Colombia, USAID/OTI will implement generally in areas most affected by the conflict with a long history of limited state presence. As local attitudes and perceptions around peace negotiations evolve, USAID/OTI will consider possible shifts in programming that respond to opportunities to support USG policy priorities and the GoC’s peacebuilding effort.

Initial TI funding in the amount of \$6,000,000 will be used for the program and USAID/OTI anticipates the addition of future TI funds to be used.

### **Country Context and Background:**

Colombia has undergone an intractable and complex armed conflict involving illegal armed groups and the drug trade, resulting in six million victims, including 220,000 deaths and over four million displaced. At the origin are challenges to the effectiveness of state institutions and existing structural flaws generating significant inequality.

After ten years of successful counterinsurgency action under both Presidents Alvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia stands at a momentous time in its history. In 2012 President Santos opened peace dialogues in Havana, Cuba, with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to end the longstanding conflict. Two years later, analysts generally agree the Havana dialogues have produced outcomes unprecedented in previous peace processes. To date, accords have been reached on three of the six points in the agenda of the talks: comprehensive rural reform; political participation; and illicit crops. Discussions are under way on the remaining three points: victims; termination of the conflict; and implementation, verification, and ratification of the general agreement. Recent encounters in Havana between Colombian military leaders and FARC negotiators, as well as an accord on landmine removal operations, indicate that a final agreement may be closer than ever.

If an agreement is reached, it is anticipated the GoC will seek public ratification through a process of popular consultation, most probably via a referendum. Recent polls suggest a majority of Colombians support the peace process, yet large sectors of the population remain skeptical about an eventual agreement, particularly supporters of the Democratic Center, the main opposition party led by former President Uribe.

The timing of a potential final agreement remains uncertain. While some speculate it could take place as soon as July 2015 (and the popular consultation by October 2015), many anticipate it will take longer and well into 2016, if it happens at all.

Closely related to the peace process and under the rubric of *Paz Territorial* (Territorial Peace), the GoC has embraced an ambitious agenda of transformative social and economic reforms based on participatory local governance, institution-building, and the realization of the rights of rural communities. This agenda signifies a sharp break from centuries of neglect of the more remote regions of the country, which has led to recurrent social and political turmoil. The recently released quadrennial National Development Plan is the most visible attempt to institutionalize the tenets of *Paz Territorial*, providing a road map to transform the rural sector, increase citizen participation, and strengthen institutions.

At the request of the USAID Mission in Colombia, USAID/OTI participated in a three-week in-country assessment in February 2015 exploring the GoC's efforts and capabilities to plan and implement programming in different scenarios stemming from the peace process. The team held meetings with GoC officials, regional and local government representatives, think tanks, and members of the international community. During the assessment it became evident that, with or without a final peace agreement in Havana, widespread, uniform commitment exists within top levels of the GoC to follow through with an agenda of long-term transformational reforms.

### **Justification for a TI-supported program in Colombia:**

A window of opportunity exists for USAID/OTI to assist Colombia in a successful transition to stable and durable peace. Regardless of whether an agreement is reached, Colombia is on a path out of conflict toward greater stability and development. Violence stemming from the insurgency is at historic lows; for the first time in many years Colombia dropped to second rank after Peru in terms of cocaine production; and the economic prospects of the country are solid.

As negotiations in Havana advance, the GoC is engaged in preparations for a variety of potential scenarios and ensuring that the strategy, structures, mechanisms, and resources necessary for transformational reforms are in place for a decade-long peacebuilding effort. A critical factor is the capacity to generate confidence as the GoC attempts to implement large, structural reforms that guarantee a sustainable peace and strengthen Colombian State presence in remote rural areas.

The USG has been an active supporter of stability and reform in Colombia since Plan Colombia, a large-scale assistance package supporting GoC efforts against narcotics and terrorism, was launched in 2000. The possibility of peace accords is widely viewed as a culmination to a stabilization process that benefitted strongly from US support. President Obama and Vice President Biden have repeatedly voiced their support for the Havana negotiations. The recent appointment of Special Advisor Bernard Aronson as Peace Process Envoy is also indicative of USG prioritization.

The fluid and uncertain short-term environment of the peace process requires a quick and flexible response. USAID/OTI is positioned, structured, and staffed to provide nuanced and flexible assistance in Colombia based on decades of transition expertise and relationship building, including through previous years of programming (2008-2011) partnering with the GoC to promote a peaceful transition to GoC presence in areas previously controlled by the FARC. By closely coordinating with other USG in-country efforts, USAID/OTI's activities are designed to leverage momentum for change within and outside of the GoC to help ensure durable peace even if a peace agreement is not reached. With a programmatic focus based on the short-term political context, USAID/OTI programming differs from traditional development through its operational modality, wide geographic presence, flexible resources, cross-sectoral focus, and tactical approaches.

### **Proposed Activities:**

Recognizing the fluidity of the Colombian political environment, USAID/OTI will remain flexible in order to most effectively respond to USG policy priorities. Initial USAID/OTI programming will include more in-depth assessments of needs and piloting of activities to inform programming considerations.

The proposed funding will be used for activities aimed at strengthening the Colombian government's institutional capacity to ensure regional and local participation in peacebuilding by:

- Helping the GoC to design and stand up the institutional architecture necessary for short-term peacebuilding programming (including mechanisms for the participation of sub-national governments and local communities);
- Launching pilot projects in areas critical to participatory peacebuilding; and
- Providing punctual, coordinated technical assistance to the GoC on an on-demand basis.

Illustrative activities include:

- Providing technical assistance support, such as facilitating access to expert consultants, to key GoC institutions and sub-national government structures focusing on peacebuilding efforts;
- Supporting the efforts of GoC agencies to customize processes and mechanisms to the realities of rural municipalities;
- Conducting small-scale projects testing community participation and trust-building methodologies in diverse locations;
- Conducting small-scale conflict mitigation projects in specific conflict-prone regions;
- Supporting the role of local oversight committees monitoring the implementation of public projects; and
- Supporting municipal-level planning for peacebuilding priorities.

The initial USAID/OTI approach in Colombia includes working with ministries, local municipalities, and other public agencies, as well as community organizations and the private sector, to strengthen linkages between the different levels of government and ensure broad and inclusive participation in peacebuilding activities related to the negotiations. Initial USAID/OTI activities will be conducted primarily through assistance to key non-government actors or in-kind assistance to public entities and will inform subsequent strategic planning and the most appropriate mechanism for more robust peacebuilding programming in support of a larger USG effort, should this be deemed appropriate.

USAID/OTI assistance will focus on geographic areas of strategic importance for the GoC's *Paz Territorial* policy and related peacebuilding efforts. These are areas that have been most affected by the conflict, that have a long history of limited state presence, a dearth of licit economic opportunities, and where illegal armed groups, violence, and human rights abuses converge. As these areas pose multi-dimensional challenges, USAID/OTI will coordinate closely with other USAID programs and initiatives to ensure that activities are mutually reinforcing.