

America. In 2016, Colombia doubled its contribution to the IACHR to help it overcome its financial crisis. But it has not made any recent voluntary contribution to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, which in a 2017 decision found the Colombian Government guilty of collusion with paramilitaries which resulted in the enforced disappearance of 12 people in 1996.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda visited Colombia in 2017. The ICC expressed four main concerns over the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP): the definition of command responsibility, the definition of “grave” war crimes, the determination of “active or determinative” participation in the crimes, and the implementation of sentences involving “effective restrictions of freedoms and rights”.

Republic of Ecuador

Ecuador has made good progress on social and economic rights over the past years, nevertheless, developments on fundamental freedoms, independence of the judiciary and shrinking space for media and civil society have been sources of concern since 2013. After President Lenín Moreno took office in May 2017, positive signs have been observed, especially towards civil society and the media. The administration has also made good will gestures towards indigenous populations. Another positive sign is a new law aimed at reducing the high number of femicides in the country.

The main objectives of the EU's action in the area of Human Rights in Ecuador include engaging with the country's authorities and civil society on the promotion of the work of human rights defenders; on support to civil society's participation in the elaboration and monitoring of public policies; on safeguarding freedom of expression; and improving protection of minorities and vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, migrants, women and children.

The EU-Ecuador Trade Agreement, which entered into provisional application on 1 January 2017, also contains an essential clause on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as a chapter on sustainable development and labour and environmental rights, whose first year of implementation seems encouraging.

The EU and Ecuador held their fourth high-level political consultations on 28 November 2017 in Quito. The EU, inter alia, proposed the establishment of a regular dialogue addressing issues related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Locally, the EU Delegation in Ecuador monitors the evolution of the human rights situation throughout the year. Ad hoc meetings are held with government counterparts, human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

The EU Roadmap for engagement with Civil Society, adopted in 2014, has been updated in 2017 with 3 new priorities for the period of 2018-2020. It continues to attract considerable interest from civil society organisations, which are actively participating in its implementation. The roadmap and the work done by the EU and civil society organizations in Ecuador have been chosen as a good example informing EU action in other countries.

The EU Delegation in Ecuador is currently managing 36 contracts funded by 4 EU Development Cooperation Thematic Lines, including support to local authorities, civil society organizations and human rights defenders, totalling almost € 25 million.

Ecuador is a member of the HRC for the period of 2016-2018, and has undergone a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) review in 2017. Many UN members acknowledged Ecuador's positive achievements in the areas of health, education, women's participation in public life and welcomed the ambitious goals set out in the country's development plan. At the same time, the review reflected significant human rights challenges in the country, especially restrictions of fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the lack of a fully independent judiciary and the ongoing discrimination against vulnerable groups, including women and girls, children and LGBTI persons. Out of the 182 recommendations, Ecuador accepted 159.

Republic of Paraguay

Paraguay has a good legal framework for the protection of human rights and has been active in international human rights fora. Since 2014, the legal framework for access to information has been improving and in 2016, a new Ombudsman was elected and a law on protection of women against violence was adopted. However, the implementation of the national plan for human rights is lagging behind, often limited by institutional weaknesses and capacities. The challenge remains to ensure that the human rights related legislation is implemented systematically and effectively, also by mobilising the necessary budgetary resources.

Paraguay will hold general and departmental elections on 22 April 2018. Moves to change the constitution to allow President Cartes to stand for re-election sparked riots in March 2017. A member of the opposition liberal party was killed in the party headquarters, and four opposition activists have sought asylum in Uruguay. On April 26, the Chamber of Deputies rejected a bill to amend the country's Constitution to allow former and current presidents to run again. Mr Cartes' subsequent announcement that he would not stand for re-election defused tensions.

Further to the deployment of an Election Exploratory Mission at the invitation of the Paraguayan Government, the EU is pondering whether to deploy an EU Election Observation Mission for the 2018 elections. Even though only 9 out of the 49 recommendations from the 2013 EOM had been totally implemented by 2015, some positive developments can be noted, in particular the introduction of the law on simultaneity of political party's primary elections and the passing of the law on access to public information. Some progress has also been achieved with the administrative procedures of the Electoral Tribunal for women, youth, indigenous voters and voters with special needs.

Human rights concerns in Paraguay include in particular violence and discrimination against women, child labour, forced labour and the weak functioning of the justice system, including poor conditions in prisons and pre-trial detention and discrimination and violence against indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons, people living with HIV; and trafficking in persons. Widespread corruption continues to be a concern.

The protection of the rights of the indigenous minority needs to be strengthened. Indigenous Peoples continue to be denied their rights to land and to free, prior and informed consent on projects affecting them despite rulings and recommendations by the Inter-American Human Rights Court. In 2017 a group of indigenous groups have launched the first online platform mapping ancestral Indigenous territories in Paraguay which are either formally recognised or for which recognition has been requested.