

Notre Dame News

Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos to deliver Notre Dame's 2023 commencement address

📅 February 27, 2023

👤 [Dennis Brown](#)

Nobel Peace Prize recipient Juan Manuel Santos, the president of Colombia from 2010 to 2018, will be the principal speaker and receive an honorary degree at the University of Notre Dame's 178th University [Commencement Ceremony](#) on May 21, Notre Dame's president, [Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.](#), announced today.



Juan Manuel Santos

“President Santos honored us with his presence on campus last fall as a distinguished policy fellow in our [Keough School of Global Affairs](#), and we look forward to welcoming him back in May,” Father Jenkins said. “His courageous leadership and resolute commitment ended a half-century-long civil war and put his nation on a path to peace and prosperity.”

In 2016, President Santos was the sole recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his pivotal role in ending the longest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere, Colombia's 52-year civil war between the government and, most notably, the Revolutionary Armed Forces in Colombia (FARC).

In accepting the peace prize, President Santos underscored the importance of a constructive, sustainable peacebuilding process.

"A final victory through force, when nonviolent alternatives exist, is none other than the defeat of the human spirit," he said. He urged, instead, "dialogue ... based on respect for the dignity of all" and accepted the prize "above all — on behalf of the victims, the more than 8 million victims and displaced people whose lives have been devastated by the armed conflict, and the more than 220,000 women, men and children who, to our shame, have been killed in this war."

Before being elected president of Colombia, President Santos served his nation as minister of foreign trade and was elected to the Colombian Congress as the presidential designate (similar to the role of vice president in the United States). He also served as minister of finance and minister of defense.

Prior to entering government, President Santos was a deputy publisher and journalist with the Colombian publication [El Tiempo](#). He won the King of Spain Prize for Journalism for a series of articles examining corruption amid the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.

President Santos taught last fall in the Keough School's Master of Global Affairs and undergraduate programs and delivered the 29th annual [Hesburgh Lecture in Ethics and Public Policy](#).

President Santos' relationship with Notre Dame began in 2012, when he turned to Notre Dame's [Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies](#) for insight and assistance as he began exploratory talks with the FARC in an effort to end the long civil war.

He was aware of the groundbreaking work Kroc Institute faculty had undertaken in examining dozens of recent wars around the world and determining that almost half of the peace accords created to end violence had failed within five years.

To understand why, Kroc faculty embarked on the arduous task of researching, coding and interpreting data, ultimately finding that peace processes failed because they were flawed — leading to equally flawed accords — or peace accords were never implemented or were implemented partially or unfairly. Using the data they had collected, Notre Dame faculty created the [Peace Accords Matrix \(PAM\)](#), which provides diplomats, negotiators and others around the world with information on what works and what fails.

Four years after initiating talks with the FARC, the peace accord in Colombia was finalized and shortly thereafter, the Kroc Institute was given primary responsibility for technical verification and monitoring of the accord. This is the first time a university has been given responsibility for real-time monitoring of a peace agreement.

In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo in December 2016, President Santos said: “You must properly prepare yourself (for peace making), and seek advice, studying the failures of peace attempts in your own country and learning from other peace processes, their successes and their problems.”

He then added: “The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States has concluded, based on careful studies of the 34 agreements signed in the world to end armed conflicts in the past three decades, that this peace agreement in Colombia is the most complete and comprehensive ever reached.”

In the years since, the PAM team has provided annual reports on the progress of the agreement, finding that nearly 50 percent of its provisions have been either completely implemented or are at the intermediate stage. The most recent report called for an increase in the pace of implementation in order to complete all commitments by 2031.

Today the PAM program is home to the largest existing collection of implementation data on intrastate peace agreements, and PAM team members regularly provide research support to ongoing peace processes around the world on issues of peace agreement design and implementation.

In 2016, Santos was featured in a University [What Would You Fight For](#) segment.

The 2023 University Commencement Ceremony on May 21 will be held in Notre Dame Stadium beginning at 9 a.m. with the academic procession.

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