



Days of Prayer and Action for Peace in Colombia

An ecumenical movement of solidarity and hope

Dear President Obama and Members of the U.S. Congress:

We write to you as leaders of religious communities and faith-based organizations who share a common hope — a just peace for all Colombian people.

We are greatly encouraged by the advances in negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas. Although points remain on the agenda, we are hopeful an accord will be reached which can help to end this brutal conflict. We appreciate that many representative victims of the conflict have had the chance to present their views to the negotiating table and encourage both parties to ensure that the voices of the collective organizations of Afro-Colombian and indigenous people are also heard.

We write in support of our Colombian partners as they begin repairing a social fabric that has been torn apart by half a century of war that saw more than 6 million people displaced, over 25,000 disappeared, and more than 220,000 people killed, over eighty percent of whom were civilians.

We welcome the recent decision of the Colombian government to engage with the remaining major guerrilla group in Colombia, the National Liberation Army (ELN), a step which Colombian churches and faith groups have long supported in order for peace to take hold throughout the country. We are grateful for the strong support the Obama Administration has given to the peace process with the FARC, and encourage the same support for negotiations with the ELN.

Over the next several years, it will be critical for U.S. policy makers to monitor the peace accords and exert diplomatic, political, and public pressure to ensure their full implementation. We strongly encourage a substantial "Peace Colombia" aid package this year, and for the next several years, to support peace accord implementation. This must be robust and rights-respecting aid which recognizes that "post-accord" does not mean "post-conflict." There are real risks that the human rights violations committed during the conflict will continue as the accords are implemented. The United States should encourage the Colombian government to investigate and prosecute paramilitary successor groups who continue to threaten and harm communities and our civil society partners.

Further, the United States should redirect assistance for the Colombian armed forces towards programs that will support the implementation of the peace agreement. Assistance should include strong support to civil society and United Nations agencies to monitor and verify the implementation of the accord, including to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia.

Finally, the U.S. should be a partner in supporting the efforts of Colombian civil society organizations to foster truth, justice and reconciliation, and to build peace from the ground up. This must include strengthening the voice and capacity of Afro-Colombian people, indigenous populations and women, who have been disproportionately harmed by the conflict but whose voices are too often ignored.

As one Colombian indigenous leader expressed, echoing a sentiment shared by many Colombians, "We have not lived a single day of peace...we want to give our children a chance to live in a country at peace." Only a peace accord which includes the participation of victims of the conflict and is fully implemented can stop this brutal war and help achieve the vibrant and inclusive democracy that all Colombians deserve. Our country can make the choice to stand with Colombia to take on the challenging but rewarding work of building peace from the ground up. As persons of faith, we call on our government to support the efforts of the Colombian people to build a just and lasting peace.

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