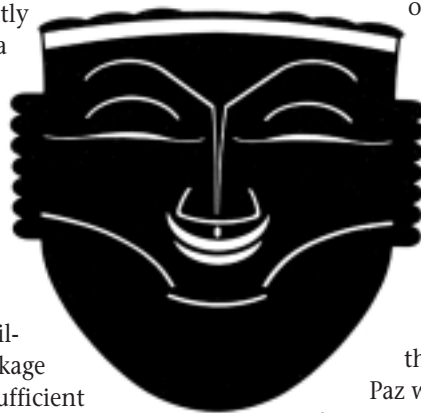


# Colombia Update

## Plan Colombia Poses Challenges to Peace, Human Rights

ON JULY 13, PRESIDENT CLINTON signed into law legislation to provide some \$1.3 billion to Colombia, mostly military assistance. While a majority of both houses voted for the aid bill, there was also dissent in the ranks of both Democrats and Republicans, in the form of large albeit losing votes for various amendments in committee and on the floor. These votes expressed opposition to the military component of the package and to the failure to earmark sufficient resources to fighting the drug problem at home. For much more detail, see the Center for International Policy web page on the subject, at <[www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid)>.

Much of this issue of Colombia Update is devoted to or makes reference to Plan Colombia. It includes an article by Alfredo Molano exploring the social and political dynamic that has unfolded in southern Colombia over the last 10 to 20 years, a reality largely ignored by the U.S. discourse about "narcoguerrillas" that justifies the military thrust of the plan. Researchers J. Bigwood and S. Stevenson describe the U.S.-driven effort to include a biological warfare component to the aid plan in the form of a poisonous fungus to be dropped from the sky. Policy analyst Adam Isacson examines five reasons why Plan Colombia will fail. And 75 U.S. veterans explain their misgivings with the U.S. policy of drug war in Colombia in a letter to Gen. McCaffrey, the drug czar.



From Colombia we feature an interview with Governor Jorge Devia, of Putumayo, about his region, targeted by Plan Colombia but not consulted by the central government in Bogotá. Communiques by the U'wa and Embera indigenous groups bear witness to their persistence in defending life and the environment in the face of adversity. Justicia y Paz writes of the latest attacks on the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, on July 8. Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Ana Teresa Bernal of Redepaz, and Ubencil Duque of the Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Program discuss issues facing the peace process. We also examine a few of the "U.S. angles" that have been in the news, looking in particular at certain U.S. corporations' interests in Colombia today.

### Freedom of expression and the work we do

Exiled journalist Ignacio Gómez describes how journalists are used and victimized by the armed actors as they pursue psychological warfare to the hilt, profoundly wounding freedom of the press. He had to flee Colombia after his investigative reports revealed earlier this year U.S.-trained Colombian Army units supported the paramilitary squads that perpetrated the July 1997 Mapiripán massacre. He also argued in a New York Times op-ed article (June 23, 2000)

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Colombia Update is published twice yearly by the Colombia Human Rights Committee of Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Colombia Human Rights Network. We seek to educate policy makers, the press, and the general public on human rights-related events in Colombia, while reaching out to support Colombian communities and organizations seeking peace and social justice by non-violent means. Visit our website at [www.igc.org/colhrnet](http://www.igc.org/colhrnet) to find out more about how you can become involved.

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that the continued killings and intimidation of Colombian journalists will make it difficult to monitor Plan Colombia, therefore increasing the likelihood of both corruption in the handling of the monies and continued abuses under the Plan. Human rights defenders, peace activists, and leaders of grass-roots social movements have as their principal weapon the ability to speak out and mobilize, not the force of arms. It is therefore all the more important that we continue to build our efforts, as human rights activists and as persons and organizations working for peace and social justice, to support our counterparts in Colombia and to help bring about a policy geared more to human rights and social justice than to creating military situations in which these values are the first to go.

Said Abraham Lincoln: "I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts." Applying this principle to Colombia today, the U.S. media get a mixed review at best. The broadcast media, in particular, have failed to raise the issue to the public in any meaningful and sustained way (ABC's Nightline, for example, hasn't covered Colombia since June 1991), ensuring that those who rely on the evening news for their information see little if any coverage; and what coverage exists sometimes sounds and looks more like an extension of the psychological warfare than a balanced effort to inform the public, usually providing little information from a human rights perspective. ■



# Pathology of Freedom of the Press

by Ignacio Gómez

AS IN THE GREEK TRAGEDY by Aeschylus, those in charge of informing society of its failures in building the nation end up stoned to death. The Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa ([www.flipcolombia.org](http://www.flipcolombia.org)) has documented 152 assassinations of journalists over the last 22 years. After examining the cases in depth, it also reported dozens of “traps” set by armed actors to secure favorable media coverage of their activities, which the journalists survived, though not always unharmed.

Although the Colombian press is already world-famous for the attacks directed against it, the analysts of the Inter-American Press Association, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, and the French organization Reporters without Borders all recognize that we are facing a different situation as regards the freedom of expression in Colombia.

There is no longer talk of columnists and reporters assassinated for informing society just how it had been fully penetrated by the drug traffickers. Though we have never gotten over the loss of Guillermo Cano and his followers during the years when journalists opposed the “narco-crazy,” we have entered the years of the “dark forces,” which human rights workers have suffered for several years.

While Guillermo Cano lay dying at the Clínica Santa Rosa, the radio news programs revealed that Pablo Escobar had ordered that crime. Seven years later, Escobar’s deputies acknowledged their role and explained their motives. Jaime Garzón was assassinated one year ago, and it is still not possible to determine whether state agents were involved in hiring the gunmen.

Garzón was one of seven journalists murdered in Colombia in 1999. That’s the average for the last 22 years, though in the first 12 years few fell victim to the paramilitary forces, guerrillas, and state security forces, who in the last three years have been behind most of the attacks on journalists in Colombia.

Two cases illustrate the point. Margarita Gómez Alvarillo, judicial affairs editor for the Ibagué daily *El Día*, was invited by the “Teófilo Forero” Front of the FARC to an interview to discuss the peace process. After she had been waiting two hours for the person who was supposedly to be interviewed, an armed man opened the windows and asked that they turn on the cameras to film the guerrilla takeover of the township of Gigante. After those images were aired, the reproaches from the paramilitary groups forced her to leave the country.

Arturo Prado Lima was recognized in the city of Pasto as one of the more objective journalists, and the office of the governor of Nariño had turned to him, given his reputation, as a guarantee in several negotiations involving hostages and peace processes. Last April 28 he received a new request to intercede, yet as he was on his way to carry out his mission, a patrol, possibly of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, intercepted and set fire to his car, with the television equipment inside. Miraculously, he survived, escaping amidst the flames.

Jorge Enrique Rivera, Richard Vélez, and others are journalists working in the interior and who left the country after attacks, in some cases in the wake of traps such as those described, and in which the alleged participation of members of the Army has never been refuted (or punished).

The factor common to these attacks derives from the fact that the “Western-style” military forces, the paramilitary forces, and the guerrilla groups in Colombia practice what they call psychological operations. Their organizational charts include complex structures, reaching up to their central command units, to develop the war through the media in propaganda, information, and counter-information actions which, despite the way in which they are defined in the official warfare manuals, attack our right, as Colombians, to

receive accurate, impartial, and timely information.

In the psychological war, which often becomes more important than the war waged using gunpowder, rockets, and propane gas, the combatants feel attacked when the press highlights their mistakes—even when the reports are accurate—because they think of the media as a platform from which to attack the enemy, and they are sure that the enemy does the same. Affected psychologically by the war that they themselves invented, they confuse the perpetrator of their defeats with those in charge of reporting them. And so they end up attacking the journalists, stealing their cameras, intercepting the trucks that distribute the morning paper, visiting the community radio stations to warn them that the only possible way to see Colombia’s reality is the perspective of them, who are armed, and not that of the others, who are also armed, as though all of society could be understood as a coin, with two sides; as if their triumph in the war were the only path to peace for those of us—97% of Colombians—who are not armed.

True, journalism isn’t always peaceful, nor is it violent in most cases in Colombia. The Colombian press is replete with initiatives to support a solution to the conflict based on dialogue and building tolerance, a peace process that makes it possible to rebuild the peaceful coexistence that more than 35 years of armed conflict have destroyed, making Colombia one of the most violent countries in the world. This explains the appearance of groups of journalists who constitute the “Peace Units” at *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*, specialized reporters in most of the news programs on TV and radio, and, in general, the intense interest on the part of the media in initiatives for dialogue and peace in Colombia.

Psychological warfare is the “science” of *farsa*. One of its fundamental principles is to keep the enemy from knowing your weaknesses, and that the enemy’s weaknesses be disseminated and magnified to the point of stirring up hatred in public opinion. This is exactly what the country has lacked during these years of war, unable to figure out the real thinking of the armed actors, not the image they project of themselves in the context of a frenetic psychological war. This is why it is now impossible to think of a solution to the war in Colombia without fostering respect for the professional work of journalists and the right of all Colombians to be informed by those who vie to be interlocutors in the dialogue. ■

# CONFLICT, PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

By Alfredo Molano, Colombian writer and journalist.

*Excerpted from the full-length article published by the Colombia Media Project, in English and Spanish, in "Voices from Colombia," an educational pamphlet published in July 2000 by the Colombia Media Project (New York). To order, send a contribution to Colombia Media Project, P.O. Box 1091, New York, NY 10116.*

THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION and the bipolar world did not bring peace to Colombia as one would have expected if the U.S. diagnosis about the causes of the conflict had been correct. No. Communism ended and Colombia's war worsened. The guerrillas, particularly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), rid themselves of Communist Party tutelage, which was reflected in greater political initiative. In addition, the deterioration of the economy -principally the agrarian crisis and skyrocketing unemployment- pushed the peasant population to replace their traditional crops by marijuana, coca and later poppy.

Historically, it was not drug production that created the demand, but the opposite. One of the most important sequelae of the disastrous war against Vietnam was the creation of a market of "white drugs", like heroin and cocaine, which, in the aftermath of the war, came to have a mass market, especially in the U.S. Even though the association between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the resurgence of drug trafficking has not been rigorously established by historians, the strategists of war found in this new phenomenon the demon they needed to take the place of communism. In Colombia, the thesis of the "narcoguerrilla," formulated and developed by the American Embassy, re-appeared the same year that the Brandenburg Gate ceased to be a frontier between two worlds, and the Latin American communists became, to the mainstream media, prehistoric animals.

Drug trafficking was practically unknown in Colombia until the mid seventies. Coca was used for rituals, marijuana was smoked in the jails and heroin was known only to a small group of intellectuals influenced by trends in France. It was U.S. investors who discovered the possibility of expanding the market to cover the increasing demand that resulted from the Vietnam war. Our geographic and climatic advantages were then combined with this market and capital, along with a strong contraband tradition, and above all, the easy corruptibility of the authorities. For our peasants, marijuana and coca "fell from the sky".

In the colonization zones, the ruin of the peasant economy was evident and acute. The peasant migrant settlers, *colonos*, worked for the cattle ranchers and merchants who, in a very calculated way -this was their business- exchanged peasant debts for "improvements." This led to the concentration of the large parcels of land or latifundia in the agricultural frontier, and kept the peasantry always on the verge of starvation. It was in this space that the coca plant found fertile ground and flourished. And it gave the peasantry the tools to defend themselves from bankruptcy, and the means to pay their debts, improve their farms, send their kids to school, build a more solid house, speak up to the mayor, and even pay "taxes" to the guerrillas, the police, the judge, and the army captain. The colonization zones experienced a new boom, more intense and more widespread than prior booms associated with rubber, gold and logging. Money was now seen walking down the streets. The merchants got rich without having to build their farms at the expense of the peasant economy. Sellers of the inputs for coca growing and government officials got rich, and peasants finally gained access to the consumer market....

Before the 1990s, the driving forces behind the migration to the zones of colonization were the concentration of land and the bankruptcy of the peasant economy. The failure of the agrarian reform policies and of employment plans have reinforced this migratory trend. At the same time, the closed two-party system, which was becoming stronger, degenerated into the most aberrant cronyism. Destabilization, initially dealt with by smashing the opposition, then re-emerged as accumulated destabilization in the form of the guerrillas .

With the advent of neoliberalism and free market economics, manufacturing and agriculture were dealt a hard, indeed irreversible blow. The cattle industry was sheltered from these effects, as it was able to impose high import tariffs to avoid competition from Argentinean and U.S. meats. So commercial agriculture was hard-hit, while extensive cattle ranching was defended. The peasant economy held up better, due to its own natural defenses, but basically became subsistence farming. The net result was growing unemployment, the transfer of capital to other sectors, especially real estate and urban construction, and the migration of peasants and other poor Colombians to the jungle areas where they finally settled.

Privatization compounded the hard times as it thrust thousands of workers into an already-flooded labor market. Many people saw coca as the only alternative. At the same time, and for different reasons, eradication in Bolivia and Peru allowed Colombia to supply what these countries had produced, and Mexico entered the industry with its 3,000 kilometers of shared border with the U.S. With these adjustments, fighting the Colombian cartels turned out to be pyrrhic, if not useless.

In the areas where the crops grow, the eradication and crop substitution programs have also failed, as they were placed at the service of the clientelistic political groups, and because the economic liberalization devastated any productive initiative as it reached the market. Eradication failed because aerial fumigation with herbicides provoked the growers and the crops to move.



Colonos then had several plots under production, thereby minimizing the risk of being fumigated. This also meant that even though the area under crops became more dispersed and less dense, they continued to produce the same amount or more. This spontaneous strategy by the colonos compounded the difficulties of fumigation, given limited government resources. Further, new varieties of the coca plant have been developed, such as the Tingo María, which produces three times as much as the traditional varieties. In sum, the neoliberal policies explain the strength of illicit crops, and the failure of State repression explains the current escalation of the war.

In a decade, the area under coca has doubled, output may have increased threefold, and the expenses to repress it may have jumped fivefold. The United States government, even though its experts know the origin of the illicit crops, continues to blame the guerrillas for these disastrous effects. It is clear though that the guerrillas and especially FARC have been strengthened militarily through their policy of extorting drug-traffickers, well-to-do peasants, and legal merchants, yet it is no less true that military repression has helped create an army that has dealt harsh blows to the regular military forces.

It is here where the hand of the United States re-appears. The United States is tending to participate more actively in the conflict given two main factors: first, the failure of the “low intensity” policy of eradication, and second, the strengthening of an armed force that questions the privileges that the government has given foreign capital. Instead, these forces threaten to impose a policy at odds with neoliberalism, which in the end could change the political base of the system. It may be that the election year more clearly reveals the escalating U.S. involvement in the Colombian conflict. Nevertheless, this policy does not appear to be reversible in the short term.

The principal objective is to hit the guerrillas not only -as the Department of State argues- because they have become the main obstacle to the eradication of coca, but also, no doubt, because of the guerrillas’ Marxist background. In its fantasy world, the idea persists that the “narcoguerrilla” -its necessary and useful demon- will transform the system into a “narco-state”, even more, into a totalitarian “narco-state”. There is no doubt that the political and ideological function that this fable accomplishes has increasingly come to take the place of the communist phantom....

Today, the guerrillas represent a good argument for war that yields electoral advantages to

political parties in both the U.S. and Colombia. This money is basically directed at improving the mobility and intelligence of our Armed Forces, and, of course, at making these advantages more effective by training elite battalions, which is a way of saying two things: first, that they do not trust Colombian Armed Forces at all, not only in terms of military effectiveness, but also from the administrative point of view; and second, that the Pentagon is not ready to leave the command of the military operations in the hands of Colombian officers....■

## Plan Colombia: Military Response Fails to Address Social Problems

by Adam Isacson

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THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION’S \$1.3 BILLION AID PACKAGE for Colombia is explained in a 17-page document, dated February 2000. Though its style is dry, bureaucratic and boring, reading the proposal can nonetheless set your pulse racing. The document (readable online at [www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid/aidprop4.htm](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid/aidprop4.htm)) offers a chilling look at our government’s plan to spend nearly \$2 million per day on Colombia’s security forces. Vague about goals and objectives, it also reveals little concern about possible consequences for human rights and Colombia’s peace process, or about potential involvement in a decades-old conflict.

The document’s prose becomes a bit livelier, and more alarming, in its discussion of the aid package’s centerpiece, an operation breathlessly referred to as the “Push Into Southern Colombia.” Under this plan, the United States will create three battalions in the Colombian Army, equipped with expensive Blackhawk helicopters and trained by U.S. Special Forces and private contractors. These units’ mission will be to “secure” Colombia’s southern departments of Caquetá and Putumayo so that Colombia’s police can carry out U.S.-aided drug eradication in the area. Caquetá and Putumayo, which together are roughly the size of Pennsylvania, have been a stronghold of Colombia’s largest guerrilla group, the FARC, for decades.

There are at least five reasons to be concerned that this plan not only will not work, but that it risks making the situation a lot worse.

1. The strategy is unclear about its goals. Clinton Administration officials have so far failed to articulate what they want to achieve with the “Push Into Southern Colombia” and the rest of the aid package (beyond a vague reduction in coca cultivation). Is the “push” aimed at coca cultivators, or at the guerrilla fronts that protect them? Yet as Sen. Patrick Leahy scolded hearing witnesses in February, “Nothing in the materials I have seen describes the Administration’s goals with any specificity, what they expect to achieve in what period of time, at what cost, and what the risks are.”

This is a serious concern because the mixture of counterinsurgency objectives with counternarcotics goals risks pulling the United States more deeply into Colombia’s forty-year-old conflict without debating

what could be a potentially large military commitment. The lack of clarity about goals also defies the axiom that any military strategy, like the “push,” must be guided by clear political objectives if it is to avoid failure.

2. The military outlook is mixed at best. Concerns about failure are very justified given the situation on the ground in Putumayo and Caquetá. The “Push Into Southern Colombia” will eventually require about 2,800 Colombian troops with a few months of U.S. training to confront a seasoned guerrilla army with a better knowledge of territory and terrain and far more lines of communication with the local population. Soldiers patrolling in small groups may find themselves quite vulnerable to attack while their fleet of helicopters, centralized in a small number of bases and requiring expensive maintenance and fuel, may be fat targets.

Though the counternarcotics battalion strategy is intended to deal a blow to the guerrillas, it is impossible to dismiss the possibility that the exact opposite might happen. Should this plan fail, a currently unthinkable escalation in U.S. military assistance and involvement might follow.

3. The “push” continues a failed anti-drug strategy. Even in the unlikely event that the “Push Into Southern Colombia” is wildly successful, putting an end to coca cultivation in Caquetá and Putumayo, the net flow of cocaine from Colombia will not be seriously affected. As long as little is done to reduce demand in countries like the United States — where more than half of hard-core addicts who want drug treatment cannot get it — coca producers in Colombia and elsewhere will ensure that it is met. Even if the “push” somehow clears drug production from its Pennsylvania-sized zone of operations, coca growers can easily relocate elsewhere in Colombia’s California-sized Amazon basin plains, or over borders into remote areas of Ecuador, Peru, Brazil or Venezuela. Coca cultivation would be displaced and inconvenienced, but not reduced.
4. The strategy will add to Colombia’s crisis of displacement. According to information gleaned from discussions with U.S. government officials, the “push” will seek to secure a zone in central Putumayo where soils are of better quality and peasant families have been present for some time. Many peasants from surrounding areas may be relocated to this “secure” zone, which U.S. planners are careful not to refer to as a “strategic hamlet” or “development pole.”

Those who are not relocated to this area will add to the 1 million Colombians involuntarily forced from their homes since 1995. The administration’s aid proposal estimates that the “Push Into Southern Colombia” will forcibly displace 10,000 Colombian peasants. A May report by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Delaware), a leading supporter of the aid package, estimates that 30,000 to 40,000 will be forced to flee, while

humanitarian organizations worry that this number could rise to more than 100,000. While most displaced persons tend to migrate to urban areas, those displaced by the “push” will probably be unable to do so, as they may fall prey to the paramilitary groups that dominate Putumayo’s town centers.

5. The strategy risks damaging an already fragile peace process. President Pastrana’s talks with guerrilla groups have made little progress over the past year and a half, but remain the best option for ending the country’s conflict. U.S. weapons and training could weaken this effort by escalating the violence and encouraging hard-liners on both sides who want to keep fighting.

Contrary to the claims of some of the aid package’s supporters, more aid did not bring El Salvador’s FMLN to the negotiating table. Talks began in 1990, ten years after U.S. aid was first increased and shortly after aid levels went down.

Why is the administration pushing this high-risk strategy in a neglected, jungle-covered area that is home to a tiny sliver of Colombia’s population? The choice of a “Push Into Southern Colombia” is best explained by looking not just at the drug trade, but at several U.S. interests that intersect in this remote area. Of course, the drug trade cannot be discounted: “Drug Czar” Gen. Barry McCaffrey has said several times that, due to a very rapid increase in coca cultivation during the past few years, about 50 percent of Colombian coca is now grown in Caquetá and Putumayo. (Some Colombian analysts dispute this number, arguing that U.S. figures drastically underestimate even more rapidly increasing coca cultivation in paramilitary-controlled areas in the north of the country.) This increase is partly a consequence of the United States’ failed anti-narcotics approach. Almost every day since 1996, U.S. aircraft have been spraying herbicides in the department of Guaviare, to the northeast of Putumayo and Caquetá. While this aerial eradication program helped reduce coca cultivation somewhat in Guaviare, it was never accompanied by any effort to provide economic alternatives to affected peasants. With no other viable economic alternatives, many Guaviare coca-growers moved out of the spray planes’ range into densely jungled, FARC-controlled Putumayo and Caquetá.

The very large FARC presence in this zone is at least as important as the drug trade in any calculation of U.S. interests in Colombia. Many influential U.S. analysts see Colombian guerrilla groups (but not paramilitaries, curiously enough) as a threat to the stability of the entire Andean region. “For the past three years,” House International Relations Committee Chairman Rep. Benjamin Gilman wrote in the June 2 Washington Times, “the FARC has used profits from cocaine and Colombia’s new-found heroin industry to destabilize a wide swath of Colombian territory from Venezuela to Panama to Ecuador.” By dealing a blow to the FARC, many U.S. policymakers reason, the “Push Into Southern Colombia” will help bring the regional stability they so strongly desire.

U.S. economic interests also explain the choice of a

"Push Into Southern Colombia." Colombia is now the seventh-largest source of U.S. oil imports, and currently represents, as analyst Michael Klare wrote in April, "the largest untapped pool of petroleum in the Western Hemisphere." Oil has been found in Putumayo department, and further exploration may find more; indeed, Occidental Petroleum is currently pumping oil out of Ecuador's Sucumbios province, less than 25 miles south of the border with Putumayo.

Certainly, most U.S. voters would support a plan that would keep drugs away from their kids, stabilize South America and guarantee cheap gas for their SUVs. But the "Push Into Southern Colombia," which assumes great risks but fails to address either domestic demand or the reasons desperate peasants grow illegal crops, is simply not that plan. ■

## Governor of Putumayo: "I've learned about the Plan Colombia through the media"

THE CENTRAL EMPHASIS OF THE PLAN COLOMBIA is fumigating and gaining military control over the department of Putumayo to eradicate the illicit crops. Second, and representing a much smaller part of the Plan, the Government proposes to invest in alternative development. It is noteworthy that President Pastrana has visited the U.S. more than 10 times to discuss Plan Colombia, yet has never met with the local authorities in Putumayo nor with the local population.

Jorge Devia Murcia, Governor of Putumayo elected by popular vote, visited the United States in late May to inform members of Congress, government authorities, the media, and U.S. public opinion in general as to the situation in Putumayo. Governor Devia was invited to Washington by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, accompanying Gloria Flórez, director of MINGA and one of four Colombians to be awarded the Center's annual human rights prize in 1998. (For more information on the RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights, call 202-463-7575.) Olga B. Gutiérrez, on behalf of the Colombia Human Rights Committee, spoke with him to hear his opinions and proposals with respect to Plan Colombia and the reality of Putumayo.



Governor Jorge Devia Murcia  
with Gloria Flórez  
<<http://JeremyBigwood.net>>

**Colombia Human Rights Committee:** What do you think of Plan Colombia?

**Jorge Devia Murcia:** Plan Colombia has not been developed in conjunction with the region. The governor has not been taken into account, nor the mayors or the communities themselves. The President has not heard the proposals from Putumayo. Though we have sought an audience with President Pastrana on several occasions, he has yet to receive us. I myself, the governor of Putumayo, have learned what I know about Plan Colombia through the media, from the declarations of Colombian authorities, and from the debates on the Plan in the United States Congress.

**CHRC:** What is the impact of coca leaf cultivation on Putumayo?

**JDM:** Putumayo has a population of 314,000 permanent inhabitants, some 135,000 of whom live directly from the coca crop. Therefore the figure of 10,000 inhabitants which according to Plan Colombia will be displaced by the fumigation campaigns is gratuitous. Coca is the main factor giving rise to violence in the department of Putumayo. To achieve peace in Putumayo, it is necessary to bring an end to the coca crops. The coca first took the people of Putumayo into prostitution and uprootedness, a short-lived boom and then guerrilla and paramilitary forces. Of course we want to end the coca crops, but we want a Plan Colombia for peace and development, not for war.

**CHRC:** Yet ending the coca crops, in general, is not at issue; rather, the differences lie in the method. Plan Colombia proposes military control and fumigation. What do you think?

**JDM:** What we need in Putumayo is social investment to eradicate the coca crops and the coca CULTURE. Violent eradication doesn't work. With just the test fumigations done in late 1999, the growers' response was not to abandon their way of life, but instead to lay waste to more jungle, to push further into the jungle to grow their crops. The figures show this. In 1976, there were 17,000 hectares of coca crops, in 1999, 40,000, and this year, 2000, approximately 52,000 hectares are planted in coca. In addition are the harmful effects of the fumigations. With the test fumigations alone, the consequences have been disastrous. While these tests have eradicated some hectares of coca, they have also displaced people who go on to grow in new areas, they have damaged the basic food crops, animals, and endangered the lives of the people of Putumayo: 13 deaths have been reported due to the fumigations. If they could see Puerto Guzmán after the test spraying, they'd think twice about fumigation. It's as though there's been a fire. Everything was burned. So much harm is caused, yet the coca culture continues intact. We believe that instead of fumigating, the important thing for controlling the cultivation and transport of coca is investment for alternative development, and interdiction and control of the inputs.

**CHRC:** What do you propose with respect to Plan Colombia?

**JDM:** To end the coca crops it is more economical, effective, democratic, and respectful of the life of the people of Putumayo if the aid money were invested in the road network, rural electrification, health, and education, and on re-orienting the market, both national and international, for products that can be grown in Putumayo. The failures of previous government efforts to eradicate the illicit crops can be explained by several factors. Both the alternative development plan and later Plante [the government crop substitution program] were organized with no consultation whatsoever with the people of the region, there was neither professionalism nor knowledge of the basics of Putumayo, there was corruption on the part of some government officials, and promises made to the peasants and settlers were broken. The proposal to change the resources from military aid and indiscriminate fumigation of the small growers to support for replacing coca through alternative development and social investment, is that with the latter approach there is consultation with the population, they are offered real economic alternatives, and they can be won over. The use of force will not only impose a war without quarter, it will also kill people of hunger. The growers are being surrounded. The reality they face at this time is: fumigation, annihilation of their few hectares of coca and of basic food crops, hunger, and pressure from the armed groups. The reality they face is that they have no option other than to flee further into the jungle, clear land, grow coca, and try to make sure they get a good price to be able to survive, or join the ranks of the guerrillas or the paramilitary groups.

This is an urgent call for life from an entire department of Colombia. We don't want more war.

**CHRC:** After the meetings you've had in Washington, what opinion will you take back to Colombia?

**JDM:** I think the most important thing I'm taking back is one copy of the Plan Colombia in Spanish, and another in English. ■

## Fungi for Colombia?

*Jeremy Bigwood and Sharon Stevenson*

PERHAPS THE MOST UNNOTICED PART of the Plan Colombia Bill sailing through Congress is the proposed use of "tested, environmentally safe mycoherbicides" – fungi developed with an aim to killing drug crops. Upon first glance, the concept of using such a method may be perceived as a benign solution to the US's "drug problem," an easy way to wipe out the "scourge" at its source.

And like so many aspects of the US position on Colombia, the origins of the mycoherbicide program harken back to the Vietnam war period, a period when the toxic chemical Agent Orange was widely used against "enemy" crops and cover-foliage, and the beginning of Nixon's war on drugs. It was then that the idea of using some kind of living organism to attack drug plants was researched. At various times proposals included plant-eating bugs, viruses applied through even more bugs, and, most promisingly, fungi.

Certain fungi – mainly rusts and molds– have been known to infect and kill plants by secreting toxic chemicals into their root cells, replacing these with their own fungal cells, until the target plant dies or is harvested – sometimes causing a deadly intoxication of animals and humans who feed on it. Most of the research on these fungi has attempted to find a way to kill

these plagues or at least protect agricultural crops from them. Some research, however, has been a little more devious: it was to extract the toxic chemicals from these fungi so that they could be used as biological warfare agents, relevant here only in that some of these biowarfare toxins are produced by the same species being proposed to be used as mycoherbicides against drug plants. And yet other research by USG entities –both classified and unclassified– has been designed with the aim of killing crops, in this case, drug crops.

US classified research stems from the 1960's, when an outbreak of a fungus started to kill off the coca at an experimental research station in Hawaii. This appears to be the result of a native Hawaiian fungus mutating, –moving from a traditional host to the imported coca. More coca was planted, and more died. In the 1970's and 1980's, US government scientists eventually isolated strains of *Fusarium oxysporum* from the diseased coca. The most important of these lethal strains was called EN-4 and isolated by a Dr. David Sands.

Other strains of the same species were developed and formulated to attack marijuana and opium poppy. Last year, Dr. Sands, who by now was an entrepreneur marketing the mycoherbicide teamed up with Florida Drug Control Office head Col. Jim McDonough, formerly of General McCaffrey's ONDCP. They proposed to douse the state of Florida with the fungus to kill off Florida's outdoor marijuana crop, an idea that was met with strong opposition from Florida's Department of Environmental Protection under the leadership of Dr. David Struhs, who noted that *Fusarium* has a tendency to mutate and attack crops other than the target crop, as well as the ability to lie dormant in the soil for years. Struh's warnings alerted Florida's news media and citizenry into action, and the plan was noisily nixed. Indeed McDonough was not even allowed to test the fungus on a few plants in an environmentally-secure research site!

Dr. Sands then set his sights on Colombia. He went there last March after convincing Colombian President Pastrana to arrange a meeting with top Colombian scientists in Bogotá. At the meeting, he presented himself as a scientist, but all of his literature bore the seal of his company, Ag/Bio Con. During the meeting he threatened one English-speaking Colombian scientist not to talk to the press.

Scientists in Colombia who attended Sands' presentation then investigated *Fusarium oxysporum* and found out that apart from environmental problems and toxicity issues of contaminated



products, that there is a clear and present risk to immunocompromised humans. According to peer-reviewed medical and scientific literature, the rate of death from *Fusarium* infection can be as high as 76%. This would be especially pertinent under a Plan Colombia counterinsurgency setting, where displaced campesino families will be fleeing our escalation of their civil war. Such populations will be, by definition, worn out and immunocompromised, not just from the bad food that one must live on in jungle hamlets, but from nights of fasting, walking, stumbling, and being eaten alive by the insect life of the area. Under such circumstances, spraying massive doses of a mycoherbicide that has been associated with a 76% kill rate in hospitalized human patients would be tantamount to biological warfare.

After Dr. Sands left Colombia, Colombian officials and scientists came up with a counterproposal to study natural pests and plagues that attack coca, apparently to ameliorate or slow down the US attack by taking it into their own hands and finding less dangerous native pathogens to kill coca and poppy.

Even before Sands' visit, the US had been pressuring the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) to conduct a mycoherbicide project in Colombia. In fact, Madeleine Albright herself wrote an "Action Request" to UNDCP head Pino Arlacchi to set up testing for "large-scale implementation" of *Fusarium* on coca in Colombia. Why did the US want the UN to do it? For political cover. The US did not want to appear as the pusher behind the project. The US also handed over all of its mycoherbicide technology to the UNDCP, as well as a large amount of money. Coincidentally, Arlacchi, the UNDCP head, needed money at the time. His office was small, with little influence. However, others within the UN were less than happy with this idea. If UNDCP was seen to be a part of US/Colombian counterinsurgency strategy, then how could the UN possibly mediate a negotiated solution to the Colombian civil war? And, if not the UN, then who? So, it was without great zeal that the UNDCP office in Colombia proposed to the Colombian government that they sign on to this project.

The draft contract and the "Action Request" between the State Department and the UNDCP also alleged that Dr. Sands' strain of *Fusarium*, EN-4 had already been "found" in southern Colombia and was spreading north, thereby obviating the need to pass through the international legal hoops of exporting a new pathogen to

Colombia. How convenient! In a copy of the draft contract — which was a photocopy of the one the USDA's Agricultural Research Service had sent around their office, one of their top researchers had scribbled a note doubting EN-4's presence in southern Colombia.

We decided to check this out, since it was a critical point: if the State Department and the UN were lying, and there was no EN-4 in Colombia, Sands' product could not be legally applied in Colombia. In late March we went to southern Colombia. We asked the FARC, we asked agronomists, we asked the Catholic church. Back in Bogotá, we asked the spraying expert recommended by the Embassy, we asked Klaus Nyholm, the head of the UNDCP in Colombia, Ministries of Environment and Dangerous Drugs (Estupefacientes), NGO personnel, and the answer was a resounding "no" — there had been no outbreak of *Fusarium* of any kind on coca in southern Colombia. No EN-4 in Colombia. This meant that Sands' product could not be legally imported and used in Colombia.

The final version of Plan Colombia signed into law on July 13, 2000, indicates that the Colombian government has agreed to use, among other things, "tested, environmentally safe mycoherbicides" to eradicate drug crops.

For more information and updates on the *Fusarium* controversy, go to [www.mycoherbicide.net](http://www.mycoherbicide.net). ■

## Vets to McCaffrey: Military Emphasis is Wrong

*Following are excerpts from a news report by Narconews (<http://www.narconews.com/>) introducing the letter written by 75 retired veterans to the Drug Czar, Gen. Barry McCaffrey (Ret.), urging reconsideration of the escalation of US military involvement in the Colombian civil war.*

**Washington, D.C., April 25, 2000:** The letter by the 75 military veterans noted the lack of clear goals behind the Colombia aid package, the inadequate definition of victory, the inability to differentiate between rebels and drug traffickers, the lack of an exit strategy and the fact that the aid package punts on the question of whether a long-term occupying force will be needed to prevent poppy and coca cultivation.

The letter was signed by veterans from every branch of the services and from every US war since World War II. It includes 2 colonels, 1 commander, 8 lieutenant colonels, 7 lieutenant commanders, 6 majors, 4 captains, 9 lieutenants and 38 enlisted veterans. Under the banner of Veterans for More Effective Drug Strategies, the group has published its own page on the internet at <http://www.vetsformeds.org/>

In addition, they pointed out that escalation of US military involvement will derail the peace process and result in more drugs being available in the US. The letter urged emphasis on demand reduction within the US rather than militarism abroad. Lieutenant Commander Sylvester Salcedo (Ret.), one of the organizers of the letter who returned a medal to President Clinton to protest the Colombian escalation, noted: "The US is embarking on a very dangerous course that will trap us in a foreign entanglement due to fundamental miscalculations being made by advocates of the drug war." Lt. Cmdr. Salcedo served as an intelligence officer for the Navy on drug enforcement operations. The letter follows:



*San Vicente del Caguán, March 2000*  
*"In Colombia there are neither rights nor humans"*  
<<http://jeremybigwood.net>>

Dear General McCaffrey:

We are military veterans from a variety of backgrounds who join together in recognition that the anticipated escalation of U.S. military involvement in the four-decade-old Colombian civil war will do more harm than good. It is likely to derail the peace process in Colombia, entangle the United States in a military quagmire and make drugs more available to Americans. We are writing to you to respectfully request a meeting to discuss these matters and urge you to reconsider your advocacy for this military aid package.

To give you more of a perspective on our concerns:

1. **Military analysis:** There has been a lack of military analysis of the Colombian civil war. Entering the Colombian civil war would once again involve U.S. military personnel in a civil war against a well-armed, well-financed and motivated indigenous army that blends easily with the surrounding population. The Andes jungle plateau is several times larger than South Vietnam which we were, for ten years, unable to control effectively with 500,000 armed American combatants, hundreds of helicopters and total air superiority, compared to the handful of "advisors" and less than a hundred helicopters in Colombia. The planning is painfully unrealistic.

The normal questions of military engagement have not been asked: What is the goal of our

military involvement? What would we consider victory? How many additional resources are we willing to provide to this civil war? How are the Colombian troops on the ground supposed to differentiate between drug traffickers and insurgents (since the US funding is not supposed to be used for counterinsurgency, doesn't this create confusion)? How will the US military avoid being labeled as a human rights violator by being closely associated with the Colombian military? What is the end game or exit strategy for this military entanglement? If we are successful would an occupying force be needed to ensure that cocaine and heroin trafficking does not resume? It seems that because we are calling our involvement "drug control" the discussion of military analysis has been ignored. The lack of a military review increases the chance of failure.

2. **Peace process:** Recently representatives of both sides of the Colombian civil war completed a European tour that greatly advanced the peace process. Representatives of the tour noted that progress toward peace was being made at a rapid pace. However, the one thing they said could derail movement toward settlement of the civil war was the massive increase in US military aid. Have you considered that our involvement may do more to prolong the civil war and undermine the movement toward a peaceful resolution of the issues between Colombians?
3. **Drug control:** We have closely examined the history of interdiction and eradication efforts over the last 35 years. The consistent result of these policies is to increase the drug supply in the US by encouraging new source countries, developing new trafficking routes and creating new drugs. Indeed, after spending \$250 billion on drug control since 1980 the price of cocaine and heroin are one-fourth of what they were in 1981 and purity of both drugs is at record highs.

The inexpensive availability of high purity heroin and cocaine is causing severe health problems in the US with record high overdose deaths and emergency room mentions of drugs. Yet, 57 percent of those who need treatment are unable to get it. The RAND Corporation estimates that treatment is 10 times more cost effective than interdiction in reducing cocaine consumption. Wouldn't it make more sense to focus our resources on reducing demand rather than on military policies that while intended to reduce availability have consistently increased drug availability?

The Colombian drug policy is confused further because all sides of the conflict - including the ones we are allying with - have been tied to drug trafficking. Can you point to any successful interdiction or eradication program in the last three decades that has not resulted in new source countries, new trafficking routes or new drugs coming into the US market? Do you recognize that drug control efforts in Colombia are likely to spur production in other countries and increase the use of man made drugs (e.g., stimulate the marketing of methamphetamine)?

We believe it is important that there is an open discussion on these issues before we become entangled in another foreign military mission based on a "fundamental miscalculation" like the Vietnam War. A meeting between your office, us and our allies would be a first step toward such a dialogue. Thus far the discussion of this issue in the legislative process seems to be avoiding these important issues rather than reviewing and analyzing them.

For more information, contact the above web pages or: Lieutenant Commander Sylvester Salcedo, USNR (Ret.) at 142 Montague Street, 4R, Brooklyn, NY 11201, 718-643-3552 or [ssalcedo98@aol.com](mailto:ssalcedo98@aol.com). ■

## Private Corporate Interests, "Public Opinion," and Political Expediency

JUST AS THE GOVERNMENT WAR EFFORT and human rights violations in Colombia have been largely "privatized" through the use of paramilitary groups, the military involvement of the United States as well as "public opinion" have been privatized, in part, by the role of military contractors and other corporate lobbyists.

This spring, Newsweek reported (4/3/00) that the White House decision to step up U.S. involvement in Colombia was motivated by public perceptions that drug use was on the rise and that the Democrats would be blamed, hurting them in the November elections. This perception was reported by Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. He was hired by the giant defense contractor Lockheed Martin, which manufactures the P-3 radar planes used to track drug shipments.

Other corporations lobbying for the aid package include helicopter manufacturers Textron (Bell Huey helicopters) and United Technologies (Sikorsky Aircraft), which between them account for the 60 helicopters to be provided to Colombia; Occidental Petroleum, which has sizeable investments in Colombia and is at loggerheads with the U'wa people; and Philip Morris, the tobacco giant, which reportedly lobbied for the aid in the hope of forestalling a lawsuit by the Colombian Government in federal court in New York, in which Philip Morris is alleged to have worked with Colombian drug dealers to engage in cigarette smuggling and money laundering (Legal Times, 6/26/00).

In addition, the Dallas Morning News reported (2/27/00) that six U.S. firms are poised to receive contracts under Plan Colombia, mainly to support the 60 helicopters. "Probably, it is more costly to send an active-duty general to be present full-time in Colombia than it is to send a retired officer," working privately, said Colombian defense minister Luis Fernando Ramírez. A former deputy assistant secretary of defense told the Morning News that the use of retired military personnel under contract, in dangerous places like Colombia, provides a higher level of expertise with lower overall costs and minimal political risks. ■

# Plan Colombia in Europe

ON JULY 7, 2000 OVER 27 NATIONS gathered at a donors meeting in Madrid to decide on the amount of aid the European Union countries, Japan and Canada would commit to Plan Colombia. Unlike the \$1.3 billion proposal considered in the United States and consisting of mostly military assistance, the proposals introduced in Europe included primarily development assistance.

Although certain governments such as the United States and Spain lobbied other EU members to commit to the requested proposals amounting to \$1 billion, only Spain, Norway and Japan committed funds in the end.

According to a July 10 Irish Times article, the Colombian government only received \$621 million, including \$300 million from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Andean Development Corporation and \$131 million from the United Nations.



Unlike the debate in the United States, Plan Colombia met direct opposition from European governments who saw major contradictions between the U.S. military based package and the European development package. At a June 19 pre-donors meeting in London, EU government officials and a few NGO representatives expressed concern over the Colombian government's continued failure to meet basic human rights standards laid out by international organizations. In addition, many criticized the Colombian government for excluding NGOs and the communities that Plan Colombia will affect in the design and planned implementation of the proposals under consideration.

In fact, European and Colombian NGOs were almost totally excluded at the official donors meeting in Madrid. However, NGOs held an alternative meeting (Mesa Alternativa) in Madrid on July 5, where over 150 delegates representing development, human rights, social, environmental, and solidarity organizations as well as academics, rejected the Colombian government's plan, and proposed alternatives based on environmental safety, community needs and involvement, and political negotiation rather than further conflict. Participants agreed that Plan Colombia coupled with the U.S. aid package, would only exacerbate the armed conflict, the human rights and humanitarian crisis, and the failure of past centralized development programs that have reinforced economic disparities.

For more information on the Alternative Donors Meeting, please visit <http://www.nodo50.org/usocolombia/mesa> ■

# Washington Seminar Explores Peace Process

The seminar "Building Peace in the Midst of War: Civil Society Initiatives in Colombia," was held at George Washington University, in Washington, D.C., on May 3, 2000. Organized by the Washington Office on Latin America and the Andean Seminar of George Washington University, the event featured three Colombian speakers all actively engaged in peacemaking from different angles. Ana Teresa Bernal is currently the national coordinator of Redepaz, a network of grassroots peace initiatives that has been active in the No Mas! anti-violence movement. She is also the civil society representative to the negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). She discussed "Bringing Civil

Society into the Negotiations." Monsignor Hector Fabio Henao is the director of Social Ministries for the Catholic Church. He presented "Integrating Local, Regional, and National Efforts for Peace." Ubencil Duque is the Regional Coordinator for the Middle Magdalena Program for Peace, a project financed by the World Bank to foster social consensus through participatory development in one of the most conflictive regions in the country. He addressed "The Complexities of Overcoming Local Violence: Lessons from the Middle Magdalena." For copies of the full seminar report, please contact WOLA at 1630 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009; 202-797-2171; [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org). ■

## "Planning for War Will Not Bring Peace"

Ana Teresa Bernal, of Redepaz

THOSE OF US IN COLOMBIA who are convinced of the need for international assistance for peace believe there is an extremely high risk that Plan Colombia, the current U.S. aid package, could escalate the war.

One troubling sign that I personally saw a few days ago was at a seminar for the Colombian armed forces at the Tequendama Hotel in Bogotá. Besides the participation of the President and the Defense Minister at the closing ceremony, there were Colombian generals and colonels, Spanish and Chilean officers, and U.S. generals actively involved throughout the several days of the conference. The seminar produced some very worrisome conclusions. For example, the first decision was to use international assistance to strengthen and modernize the Colombian armed forces for the purpose of militarily defeating the guerillas. They also discussed linking civilians to the military for assistance in intelligence and linking up with the press to shape public opinion in favor of the military's efforts to defeat the guerillas.

The Defense Minister closed the event by saying that in 1997 when President Pastrana began the peace process, he had been in a defensive position relative to the guerillas. That year 79 percent of the public believed the guerillas could defeat the armed forces. In contrast, two years later 49 percent considered victory by the Colombian military possible. There was a transformation of public opinion that changed how the peace process was conducted. Our concern is that a peace process subjugated to the war effort, in which each actor has a peace plan and a war plan, quickly deteriorates. I think changing the logic is fundamental if we want peace. The peace process cannot be maintained under the logic of war, which is based on amassing more military force

to defeat the enemy. This does not contribute to peace.

The FARC has strengthened itself militarily. Three or four days ago it launched the *Movimiento Bolivariano* political movement with a spectacular show of force as thousands of combatants participated in the public event.

The FARC has displayed two faces. FARC leader Mono Jojoy advocates war and aggressive offensive operations, calls for strengthening the FARC militarily and taxes businesses. The other face of the FARC is represented by Alfonso Cano, who was named director of *Movimiento Bolivariano*. He believes a strengthened political movement can help the peace process succeed.

I believe both the government and the FARC have a Plan A and a Plan B. It's our responsibility as Colombian civil society to help strengthen Plan A – the peace effort – because it is the only way we will make any progress.

Regarding the ELN, there are major difficulties with the zone that has been chosen for demilitarization. It is important that the government has made a decision, but it did so after much opposition to the zone had already been organized. One group that opposes the peace process and the demilitarized zone is the self-defense groups. The FARC also want to intervene because they have fronts in the region chosen for the demilitarized zone. They have complicated the process with the ELN by requesting a voice in decisions regarding the objectives of the negotiations with the ELN.

Just as citizen mobilization contributed to the decision to initiate negotiations, active citizen participation is necessary to maintain, broaden and strengthen the process. Peace in Colombia will only be possible if peace, human rights and democracy organizations succeed in establishing a common strategy. ■



# Churches Oppose Military Build-Up

By Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao, Director of Social Ministries, Catholic Bishops Conference

I WOULD LIKE TO SUMMARIZE the position and activities of the Bishops Conference of Colombia regarding the conflict. I refer not only to the Catholic Church, but to all the churches of Colombia that are committed to peace. In fact, a number of churches have formed a coalition to take a common position and work on these issues. We have identified three major areas where we think we can have an impact in Colombia today. One is citizen peace-building. This means not only supporting negotiation, but organizing different groups and sectors of the population to build a new country. The second is human rights, and particularly the issue of the internally displaced, which requires the attention of both Colombians and the international community. The third area is poverty, which I will only briefly discuss.

When I come here or go to Europe, I get the sense that people see Colombia as a complete catastrophe. I think there is a big difference between the internal and external visions of Colombia. Those of us in Colombia see both the complexity and the hope in what is happening. We do not believe the war will continue indefinitely or that it's inevitable.

*I think there is a big difference between the internal and external visions of Colombia.*

Moving on to the second issue, I would like to tell you about the last time I was here, with Bishop Jaime Prieto. We met with a U.S. Senator who began by telling us he was Catholic and very open to the opinions of different people. With this in mind, we sat down to talk to the Senator. It turned out that the Senator hardly let us speak. Though he was so open and so Catholic, every time we proposed an alternative, he immediately said, "No, that won't work, we've already tried that." We said that maybe the peace talks would advance, and he said no, that had been tried and it failed. After an hour like this, Bishop Prieto said to the Senator, "I don't speak English, but when I was a child I learned English songs. I only remember two words: try again."

This is our message to the United States. You have to believe that it is possible to resolve conflicts in this world without violence. The world does not need anyone to inject war into every conflict. Instead, in these difficult situations, we need people to inject hope, build bridges, and create reconciliation....

This leads me to my next point: human rights. Three years ago, I went to Panama with four or five organizations. We went to talk about a group of Colombians who had gone there to escape bombings in the region of Chocó. The Panamanian government took a very hard line in our meetings. They claimed that the Colombians destabilized Panama because they were looking for work rather than fleeing the war.

I went to the Darien Gap to visit these people and found them working the land. They had been welcomed by the Afro-Panamanian community. At this time I realized the impact and the depth of the problem of forced displacement. With over one million people displaced, it is a humanitarian and political problem. Politically, it represents a loss of citizenship. The internally displaced feel rejected in their own country, and do not feel accepted

in new communities because of their displaced status. Those who leave Colombia have no citizenship because no country recognizes them as refugees. They are told that there is not a war in Colombia, and that they could live peacefully if they move to another region of the country. No one is aware of the magnitude of the problem.

We have a combination of problems with human rights and with civil and political rights. The tremendous suffering in the communities and the political assassinations are increasing at a troubling rate. There is a great risk for those who think outside the establishment or are not allied with a traditional political party. Last year we had a higher rate of political assassina-

tions than ever before. Civil society and the civilian population cannot make any progress if we say that we will resolve the human rights question once we have peace. Instead, human rights must be included on the agenda of current concerns in Colombia....

We need to globalize hope. For hope to be possible, it must be a reality for all of humanity, rather than confined to people in a few safe countries. Our only option is to consider ourselves part of the human family. Thank you. ■



# Seeking Peace through Participation in Magdalena Medio

– Ubencel Duque, Regional Coordinator, Middle Magdalena Peace and Development Program

GOOD AFTERNOON ON BEHALF OF ALL THE RESIDENTS of the Magdalena Medio. As you are all doing in different ways, we are striving to make dignified life a possibility, not just in this region or Colombia, but throughout the world. I'm going to share with you the experience working on the Development and Peace program since it began in the Magdalena Medio in 1995.

We began by uniting various efforts to build an inclusive civil society rooted in local community projects. The diocese of Barrancabermeja has also played an important role, in part because of its efforts to mediate negotiations between the Colombian oil company, Ecopetrol, and its union. They founded the Human Rights Committee of U.S.O., the union. The Committee addresses political violence and includes human rights on

a marginal and selective government presence in the region. The primary state presence is through the armed forces, and in some cases through the state petroleum company. The region lacks other state representation, such as social services, education, and health care. The municipal administrations are thought to suffer from the exclusion that plagues the rest of the country, and don't receive support from the national state.

We have also identified a high level of corruption exercised through the clientelistic management of the state. Public administrators and political parties believe that the state belongs to them and should serve only themselves and their families. We have also seen that traditional political groups in the region contribute to the violence and make it an instrument for maintaining their

The primary state presence is through the armed forces, and in some cases through the state petroleum company. The region lacks other state representation, such as social services, education, and healthcare

the agenda in the annual negotiations between the company and the union. They asked a question that has been pondered for several years. Oil is one of the foundations of the national and regional wealth, yet only a fraction of the profits remain in oil-producing regions. The question is then: Instead of generating political violence and displacement, can oil contribute to development and peace in the region? This is the origin of the Middle Magdalena Peace and Development Program. The current national interest in the program developed later. ...

The Magdalena Medio consists of 29 municipalities in five departments, in Bolívar, Antioquia, Santander, Norte de Santander and Cesar. According to our assessment, 500,000 of the 721,000 people in the region are poor and over 50,000 people in this region are unemployed. This calculation is based on the level of satisfaction of basic needs and family income. There are 48,000 peasant families in this highly varied region. This region also has a large population of fishermen, 15,000.

We have identified several reasons for the high levels of violence and poverty. There is only

political cause locally, regionally, and nationally. Another problem is the nature of economic development in the region. The oil economy is extractive, and does not support secondary industries and wider economic development.

Land use and agricultural production is also a problem in this region. Land concentration and new forms of industrial farming have led to unemployment, because the number of day laborers has dropped. Land buying in this region has been used to launder drug trafficking profits. Increase in land prices following the construction of the Troncal de Magdalena Medio, a section of the Pan-American Highway, has led to violence and forcible displacement. Another key element in this region is coca. Coca contributes to the war. We calculate there are almost 20,000 hectares of coca in this region. Another factor is government planning, which has exacerbated poverty and violence. The development and peace program aims to secure a dignified life for all Colombians....

Our first step is to form volunteer teams of residents in each municipality. The team should be an inclusive and participatory space for citizens to make proposals regarding their local and

regional situation, so they can promote collective proposals for the municipality. The teams hope to achieve peace and development on the local level through participation in local planning processes. Currently, the program is developing about 78 productive initiatives for the region.

This has led us to believe that war is only an option when no other alternatives are apparent. People do not want war when they see they can construct alternatives based on their own experiences.

This is a very complex region with the presence of different armed actors. There are guerrilla forces, both the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), as well as paramilitary groups. There is a permanent struggle among the armed actors for territorial position and control.

We believe the war in this region is motivated by the desire to control the municipal budget, the coca industry and future political power. In this case, they seek power over the peace negotiations and territorial control in general, because of its national strategic importance. It is located six hours from Bogotá, and also provides access to Medellín and the Atlantic coast. The routes that connect northern Colombia to the rest of the country pass through Magdalena Medio. There is a serious struggle to control coca production, and

the paramilitary groups are increasing their control over this region. Santa Rosa del Sur, Simití, San Pablo, Cantagallo, and Yondó are the municipalities with some coca production.

On the eastern side of the river, in Agua Chica and Río Negro, there are laboratories for the first step of processing coca. There is also a heavy paramilitary presence in these towns, including paramilitary bases. In some towns, government prosecutors have attempted to remove some laboratories, but many remain. Coca fuels war in the region.... As a result of these projects, the people in these municipalities are meeting together to think about what we can all do to build up this region. And we have found that trust is a fundamental element in this exercise. The other foundation of our project is the fact that people want real change. The people do not want war – and this should be said loudly. The people search for other ways to overcome violence and find other solutions besides coca cultivation.

For more information (in Spanish), visit the Program's website at <[www.pdpmm.org](http://www.pdpmm.org)>. ■



## Is Drug Czar a War Criminal?

AN ARTICLE BY INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST Seymour Hersh in the May 22, 2000 issue of the New Yorker, "Overwhelming Force" suggests that Gen. Barry McCaffrey, the nation's drug czar since 1996, may have committed war crimes upon the conclusion of the 6-week Gulf War in early 1991. The cease-fire was announced on February 28, yet on March 2 the 24th Infantry Division, under McCaffrey's command, carried out a massive attack on retreating Iraqi troops. According to McCaffrey, the action was in response to enemy fire. Dozens of others who were there saw it differently. One soldier confessed he felt guilty after the attack: "guilty that we had slaughtered them so; guilty that we had performed so well and they so poorly; guilty that we were running up the score.... They were like children fleeing before us, unorganized, scared, wishing it all would end. We continued to pour it on." The article raises serious questions as to Gen. McCaffrey's fitness for public office, yet no major media outlet has bothered to verify or refute the accounts reported in the article. ■

## Fall Tour of Peace Brigades International Colombia Volunteer

This fall, PBI Colombia volunteer Lizzie Brock will embark on a speaking tour from October through mid-November. Lizzie will speak about her experiences accompanying threatened human rights leaders in Colombia. She will begin her tour in Washington D.C., then travel through the South and up the West Coast. A tentative itinerary calls for her to travel through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington.

If interested in sponsoring this tour in your community, contact Pete Stanga (at [pbiousa@igc.org](mailto:pbiousa@igc.org))

Peace Brigades International/USA  
1904 Franklin Street, Suite 505  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 663-2362 (phone)  
(510) 663-2364 (fax)

# Two Situations, Two Million Lives: Drama of Displaced Continues

## New Massacre of Peace Community in Urabá

ON JULY 8 AT LEAST SIX PEASANTS WERE KILLED in the hamlet of La Unión in north-west Colombia. The killings, carried out by members of paramilitary groups that operate unimpeded in the Apartadó area, forced all 63 families living in La Unión to flee for their lives. The religious organization Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace (Justicia y Paz), has worked closely with the Comunidad de Paz, or peace community, of San José de Apartadó. On July 9 Justicia y Paz sent the following open letter to President Pastrana and six other leading government figures to denounce the latest massacre:

Dear Sirs:

Today, July 8, in the vicinity of the hamlet of La Unión, part of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, several members of the army were present. At 3:00 p.m., approximately 20 hooded men entered the hamlet where there were members of the Armed Forces while a helicopter from the 17th Brigade was flying overhead.

The hooded men entered the missionary house, where they destroyed the community's telephone. They later went house by house and took the inhabitants to the center of the hamlet. There they asked who the leaders were. The community stated that they were all leaders, that their experience in the Peace Community was to be neutral, and they upheld their principles in order to defend life. In response, the hooded men stated that it was "a community of guerrillas, not a peace community."

One of the women religious from the Catholic church told the hooded men that she was accompanying the community, and when she testified to the community's neutrality, they forcefully threw her aside. The assailants then ordered the women and children to one side because "otherwise we'll kill you." They proceeded to shoot at the group of men with AK rifles. They later threatened the entire community, saying: "you have 20 days to abandon the area, because we're going to put an end to this." Before leaving the village they set fire to the community house, where the telephone was.

Initially we can state that six peasants from the hamlet of La Unión, members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, were assassinated. The peasants are RIGOBERTO GUZMAN, ELODINO RIVERA, DIAFANOR CORREA, HUMBERTO SEPULVEDA, PEDRO ZAPATA, and JAIME GUZMAN. There are others whose whereabouts are unknown.

While this was taking place in La Unión, some peasants were stopped by the Army on the road from Apartadó to San José. Two were threatened and the members of the Army told them: "We're going together and we're going to finish off everything."

Another peasant WILLIAM ORTIZ, was detained by the Army while traveling along the road from Apartadó to San José. A man in civilian dress from the paramilitary groups participated in that operation. He was released several hours later.

The military units around the urban center of San José de Apartadó stated several times that afternoon that there were guerrillas in the district.

Two days before the massacre, at 11:00 a.m. in a cacao grove belonging to the Peace Community, military units left two fragmentation grenades.

The peasants who witnessed this sought an explanation, to which they answered that "the Peace Community is a community of guerrillas. We're going to go in with the paramilitaries."

As in the massacre perpetrated last February 19, the oversight agencies and organs justice will initiate "exhaustive investigations" and will indicate that they couldn't make sufficient progress because the community did not collaborate, because the witnesses to the facts refused to testify, because our Commission did not provide the evidence. Perhaps it will be forgotten that in 12 years of our existence, many of the witnesses to human rights violations have been assassinated or are in exile; perhaps it is forgotten that justice is covered up under the veil of the military criminal justice system, to keep the military from acknowledging its responsibility; perhaps it is forgotten that not even have the Commissions of Clarification, created at the urging of the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, succeeded in breaking down the major obstacles to justice in our country....

What is stated here is what we have seen, it is what we have experienced, we men and women religious of the Colombian church and of the church of the world. We hope that the truth written here will make it possible once again to create the conditions for justice. Given the evidence, the truth of the victims and of those of us who have been witnesses to these new acts, we must warn that lies will now be brandished as truth, the perpetrators and persons responsible were not them, but their opponents in the armed conflict; that what is written here is slander and lies against the lawfully constituted institutions.

In view of all that has happened and all the foregoing, we express to you our profound Moral Censure.

With profound pain in the face of this new sign of the erosion of the rule of law in Colombia,

**Intercongregational Commission  
for Justice and Peace**



## Displaced Continue to Occupy Red Cross HQ in Bogotá

ON DECEMBER 14, 1999, some 1,370 displaced persons occupied the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to protest the failure to address their needs. To this day, 350 remain at the ICRC offices, of all ages and mostly rural backgrounds, from all over Colombia. Specifically, the protest raised the issue of the failure to provide for their rights pursuant to Law 387 of 1997, on the Social Solidarity Network. Negotiations began on January 4, but broke down in mid-April; in mid-May official forces sought to enter the headquarters by violent means; and then the displaced occupying the offices agreed to withdraw from those offices that do not actually belong to the ICRC.

In a May 31 communique released in Bogotá, the displaced issued the following petitions:

1. "That the Pre-Agreement signed on January 14, 2000, be fully implemented, as a guarantee for being able to continue the conversations with the government. This pre-agreement makes reference to the minimum conditions of survival and the emergency humanitarian assistance for the persons at the ICRC offices.
2. That the Church, in the person of Monsignor Alberto Giraldo, come to the negotiating table, so as to resume the dialogue that was unilaterally cut off by the government on January 18, 2000.
3. To discuss, as the key issues, the solutions for (1) housing and (2) productive projects."

The displaced went on to state: "We reaffirm our will to withdraw peacefully from the ICRC offices so long as the government carries out its obligations in the framework of the negotiations proposed and with the signature of a Final Act of Reciprocal Commitments.

"Finally, we raise our voice of protest and profound concern in the face of the imminent threat of forced eviction by the official forces planned for the coming days, and we ask that you send this communication to the international community so that, in solidarity, you may join our just struggle and so that together we can avoid a tragic outcome.

"Of the 1,370 persons who occupied the ICRC offices in December, 350 of us remain, many of us children and women heads of household who have no resources, housing, or support whatsoever.

"We invite you to come to the offices of the ICRC and to verify, first-hand, our situation, and then provide support and spread the word as you deem appropriate."

*This article is excerpted and translated from documentation provided by the Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, based in Bogotá. ■*

## Colombia Human Rights Network Spring National Tour

### Civilians Under Fire: Colombian Labor Leaders Under Threat, March 17 — April 5, 2000

MORE LABOR LEADERS ARE KILLED in Colombia than any other country. According to a 1999 Colombian Commission of Jurists report, over 2,500 trade union activists and leaders have been murdered since 1987. Because of the growing violence directed at Colombian unionists, the Colombia Human Rights Network and U.S./Colombia Coordinating Office chose to feature leaders of Colombia's largest union federation, the CUT, in its recent Spring 2000 national tour. The tour visited 10 cities across the United States.

The CUT, Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, is the largest union federation in Colombia. Since it was founded in 1986, more than 8,000 organizations have affiliated with the CUT. However, its members, like many other union representatives in Colombia, have had to work under the intimidating tactics of Colombia's armed actors.

The ongoing struggle of the CUT has resulted in the deaths of many of its leaders and activists, as well as the displacement of many more. CUT statistics show that in 1999 alone 179 of its members were assassinated. In October 1998, Jorge Ortega, the director of the CUT's Human Rights Department, was murdered. Following his assassination, numerous labor activists have applied for asylum abroad.

The tour featured Patricia Buriticá Céspedes, director of the Department of Women and member of the CUT's National Executive Committee, and Luis Alfonso Velásquez Rico, Director for the Department of Judicial and Labor Affairs. Patricia and Luis Alfonso visited grassroots organizations, churches, and universities, and union offices, and attended labor meetings, in Washington D.C., Pittsburgh, PA, Reading, PA, Morristown, NJ; New York City; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, IL; Iowa City, IA; Seattle, WA; Los Angeles, CA; and San Francisco, CA to address the complex conflict in Colombia, the challenges and threats union activists face, and their efforts to defend the rights of unionized workers. They also addressed the role of U.S. multinational corporations and the impact of a changing U.S. policy on human rights and peace in Colombia.

The AFL-CIO's international division and Latin America Solidarity Center assisted the CHRN in contacting labor councils and other labor groups in each city helping the CHRN to reach yet another potential constituency in the United States interested in Colombia's human rights crisis. They also gave Colombian labor leaders the opportunity to meet with AFL-CIO executives and build networks with U.S. labor groups.

To learn more about future national tours and how to get involved, please contact the U.S./Colombia Coordinating Office [agiffen@igc.org](mailto:agiffen@igc.org), tel: 202-232-8090. ■

# U'wa Struggle

## U'wa Continue Peaceful Resistance to Occidental, Government

THE U'WA HAVE BEEN BLOCKADING the road to a site where Occidental Petroleum plans to begin drilling for oil for months. The nonviolent blockades are the latest phase in a nine-year campaign by the U'wa to stop drilling on traditional lands which they hold sacred.

On Saturday, June 24 some 300 anti-riot police and soldiers made a surprise, early morning attack against 200 peaceful U'wa people blockading a road near the town of Cubara in northeastern Colombia. The police and soldiers removed the U'wa through the use of tear gas and physical blows. U'wa spokespeople report that twenty-eight people were injured, with some requiring medical attention. One U'wa man received bullet wounds, according to the attending physician Dr. Quinones (a facsimile of the doctor's statement available upon request from RAN: 415/398-4404). Following is a communique released by the U'wa on June 29. For more information, contact U'wa Defense Working Group through any of the following:

Carwil James, Project Underground  
510 705 8981 • [www.moles.org](http://www.moles.org)

Lauren Sullivan, Rainforest Action Network  
415 398 4404 • [www.ran.org](http://www.ran.org)

Atossa Soltani, Amazon Watch  
310 456 1340 • [www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)

*"We have decided to unite in our desire to live, and therefore we have begun to convince an elder spirit to protect Ruirá (oil) to take care of our Kera Chicara (sacred land) and to save us all from the final destruction when instead of water we'll drink oil, when the earth will have been completely bled dry and the heart, in which our people live, doesn't beat anymore, and when we will no longer be there singing and dancing to the sound of those heartbeats."*

– U'wa People, August 1998

Saravena, Arauca, Colombia June 29, 2000

## Communique to the Public

*General strike in solidarity with the U'wa people against the excessive and arbitrary use of the Armed Forces and National Police, genocide, ethnocide, and ecocide promoted by the Colombian national government and Occidental Petroleum against the U'wa indigenous culture.*

We have completed with dignity the second day of our general strike, where the truth, wisdom and sovereignty of our people rises above intolerance and the barbarity of tyranny; Where the true value of liberty is upheld with the unbending promise to defend our culture, our sovereignty, our nature, and environment before the threat of destruction by Occidental and the government.

As we begin this third day, we reiterate our mission and commitment to support the U'wa people. We inform the public of the following:

1. Our 33 companions who were detained arbitrarily by the police in Cubará have been released, which shows the honesty and transparency of our leaders and legitimacy of our protests even in the face of unjust criminalization, by the military forces, of the conduct of our community and social leaders.
2. The mobilized community has decided to take over the Saravena-Pamplona road in the wake of the permanent sabotage by more than 30 dump trucks working for Occidental, the peaceful civil strike that we the social organizations and indigenous people organized, and the constant psychological intimidation by the National Army at the blockade site, with more than six war tanks loaded with heavy artillery, as if it were a conventional war. We recall that it is our right to peacefully protest.
3. We announce to the general public that if the civic strike is drawn out, due to the negligence and inaction of the national government, that we will maintain our blockade, but have decided to normalize and resume inter-municipal commerce and transport on Saturdays and Sundays. We are also doing this as a show of our good will and as a result of the concrete actions, like the release of our 33 community members, along with the promises and gestures of good faith by the Peace Commission, the Ombudsman and the regional government attorney for internal review. Following that break, we will resume it with our same intensity and discipline.

It is necessary that the central government, with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of the Environment in the fore, and the Procurador General, or director of Internal Review, come to Cubará and listen to the U'wa people so that a solution may be found to this problem.

**U'WA TERRITORY IS SACRED , CULTURES WITH PRINCIPLES DO NOT HAVE A PRICE**

Social Organizations of Arauca Province: [signed]  
ADUC CUT FEDEJUNTAS ASOJER CRIA ASOU'WAS ■

# Indigenous People Affected by Colombian Dam End Occupation

by Monti Aguirre, International Rivers Network. For more information, contact the author at <monti@irn.org> IRN is working with the Embera-Katío and communities downstream from the Urrá dam. You can also contact the Embera-Katío Awareness Campaign, based in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal, through its website, <<http://rideau.carleton.ca/~sahaddad/embera/>>.

AFTER YEARS OF PRESSURING the builders of the 340MW Urrá I Dam in Colombia to properly address the project's impacts, the Embera-Katío indigenous people reached an agreement with the Urrá S.A. Company and the government on April 19.

"We are pleased that we came to an agreement, but this is just the beginning of the negotiations, since we did not get all we wanted," said Kimi Pernia, an Embera spokesperson. "We are glad we are back on our lands, people were very distressed over this situation."

The Embera have proposed that the company pay them for the contribution their watershed lands make to the project. They feel they are strategic partners of Urrá, since an estimated 40 percent of the waters that supply the reservoir come from Embera land. This element of the agreement remains unresolved at this time.

The Embera also demanded that they be involved in the planning of decommissioning the dam in the future. Although this point is vague in

Peasant Communities of the Greater Lorica Wetlands (ASPROCIG) went to meet with officials from the Swedish Parliament, the Swedish company that built the Urrá dam, project funders, and others. The purpose of the trip, sponsored by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, was to seek support for affected peoples' decommissioning campaign.

Skanska, the Swedish firm that built Urrá was unrepentant about the problems caused by the project. "Urrá is history for us," said Skanska's general manager. He added that the project's consequences could not be forecast in 1992 when the company signed the contract. Representatives of the Swedish Export Credit Agency, which provided loan guarantees for the dam, said at the meeting that Urrá would have found no support from them today, due to its now well-documented impacts.

Juan José López Negrete from ASPROCIG, which represents affected people downstream of the dam, said he did not wish to embarrass the

"We are pleased that we came to an agreement, but this is just the beginning of the negotiations, since we did not get all we wanted," said Kimi Pernia, an Embera spokesperson. "We are glad we are back on our lands, people were very distressed over this situation."

the agreement, it is perhaps the first time in history dam-affected peoples have gotten language about future decommissioning into an agreement with project authorities, even as the reservoir is still being filled up.

The agreement states that the company restore fisheries in the reservoir and watershed; and that the Embera oversee plans for resettlement, for basin restoration and management, and to improve their livelihoods. Harm to the river's fisheries has been extensive.

International pressure to support the Embera has been building recently. While the agreement was being signed, Embera representative Neburuby Panesso and Juan José López Negrete from the Association of Fishing and

dam-builders, but instead came to talk about the eventual removal of the dam. "We didn't come here to pose moral questions to your company because you built Urrá," he said. "We came here to let you know that the construction of Urrá signifies the slow death of our culture. What we are asking is that you learn from the experience of Urrá and reform your environmental policies so you don't make the same mistakes in other parts of the world. Even though you think Urrá is history, we are counting on your support for the decommissioning of the dam, given your technical knowledge," he added... ■



# Plan Colombia or War Plan?

~Patricia Buriticá, Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, June 2000

THE U.S./COLOMBIA COORDINATING OFFICE invited Luis Alfonso Velásquez and myself, Patricia Buriticá, both members of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, to visit the United States. We traveled to more than 17 states, where we met with citizens' groups, including many Colombians, who, organized in community-based committees, are working for human rights in Colombia.

What struck us most about these committees and the people is their commitment to solidarity, their condemnation of widespread violence, their constant reporting of human rights violations, their rejection of Colombia's internal war, and their radical opposition to policies which, like Plan Colombia, designed in the United States, do not contribute to peace, but spur on the war.

Colombia has experienced 50 years of internal armed conflict, with guerrilla groups; paramilitary groups that operate with the acquiescence of the state; more than 1.8 million persons forcibly displaced from their homes (5% of the population); the highest unemployment in the Andean region, at 20%; a high concentration of wealth in which 20% of the households account for 80% of income; 76% of the population living in poverty or indigence; and violence of all types takes 30,000 lives per year, including a large number of political assassinations and killings of trade unionists, with 78% of human rights violations directed against grass-roots leaders and other civilians.

In other words, Colombia has a political crisis that dates back many years, due to the failure of democracy to develop and consolidate; the absence of the state from large areas of the national territory, and its weak performance of its task of protecting citizen rights and carrying out its constitutional obligations. Colombia today finds itself amidst its worst economic crisis ever, as a result of the implementation of IMF policies, the neoliberal model, and the demands of a process of globalization that does not allow us to enjoy the benefits, but to the contrary forces us to buy agricultural goods from the United States, for example, while our fields are abandoned and thousands of peasant farmers—400,000 in the last few years—have found themselves unemployed and without any other means of livelihood.

Plan Colombia, recently adopted by the U.S. Congress, authorizes the spending of \$1.3 billion, 70% of which is for weapons purchases, military training in the United States for the Colombian Armed Forces, investment in the judiciary, and the fumigation of illicit crops. In other words, it poses the threat of military, police, and judicial confrontation over the next six years, under the guise of fighting drug trafficking.

This plan was not discussed or approved by the Colombian Congress, the local governments, civil society, or the peasants; in other words, those of us who are most affected have not even been consulted. The peasants oppose fumigation due to the effects on the persons who live in the targeted zones, and because of the damage it causes the earth; we the workers suffer the consequences of the commitments made by the Colombian Government to the Government of the United States to win approval of the Plan, while the Plan requires that the Government comply with IMF demands regarding fiscal adjustment, reform of the pension system, and transfers to the departments and municipalities on which the health and education of the people depend in large measure today.

One example that it is possible to combat crops by other means is recalled by Colombian writer and journalist Alfredo Molano. In 1985, the price of coca leaf dropped from 300,000 pesos to 85,000 pesos because the peasants in the Macarena decided to grow corn, the State bought the crop, and a high tariff was placed on imports. Today, the U.S. Department of Commerce, with the acquiescence of the Colombian Government, has imposed a reduction in the tariff, which is approximately 20%, and the peasant farmers are no longer able to compete with the imported corn, which comes in at a low cost: There are other ways of helping Colombia.

So the problem is not fighting the illicit crops and drug-trafficking; the objective of the United States is to hand over money for Colombia to step up its military actions, with a view to winning the war, all with a view, no doubt, to having a country safe for its purposes and investments.

We also want the war to end. But it shouldn't have to cost more lives than have already been lost; Colombia needs social investment, productive development, strengthening of democracy, and a strong state capable of guaranteeing the rights and lives of its citizens, for which we do not need weapons or an Army well-trained for war.

The tour revealed to us that the people of the United States do not want to see their tax dollars financing the war in Colombia; this is the feeling we came away with, and we feel sure that the citizens of the world who believe in peace, not war, are with us. I would like to emphasize the importance of the committees and the support of those who turned out to hear our message in the United States, for we know that what has changed thus far in the debate over the Plan Colombia is due to the campaigns, the solidarity, and the messages sent to members of Congress. But we also understand that the work for peace and justice in Colombia done in the United States is an expression of the social responsibility and the humanitarian bent of the people of the United States, and their deep-seated belief in democracy. ■



# Open Letter from Colombia Vive, Boston

*We reproduce the following letter, circulated by Colombia Vive, as an expression of the philosophy that has guided the work of the Colombia Human Rights Network since it came together ten years ago, a philosophy that is all the more relevant as political violence and U.S. intervention escalate in Colombia.*

May 31, 2000

Dear Friends,

In response to an anonymous angry telephone phone call to Colombia Vive received on May 18, we felt it was time to remind people of who we are and what we do. It is sad to know that some people intend to portray us as part of the violence instead of considering the possibility that we are working for peace. We, however, will continue to believe that there are many more peace loving Colombians than those who want to add to the already extremely polarized situation.

Colombia Vive is an all-volunteer organization of Colombians and U.S. citizens who support peace and human rights in Colombia. Like all human rights organizations we reject any and all violence as a response to the problems in Colombia. We are in no way associated with any of the violent actors in Colombia: the guerrillas, the paramilitaries or the military.

We are supportive of civilian institutions working for peace: nongovernmental organizations, including human rights and community organizations in Colombia, in the U.S. and international organizations. We also are supportive of organizations within the Colombian government working for peace: the human rights offices of both the Fiscalía (Attorney General's Office) and of the Procuraduría (Prosecutor General's Office), the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo), the High Commissioner for Peace, and all efforts by the Colombian government to work for peace. We support the many courageous members of the Colombian Judiciary working to restore the rule of law, one of the biggest necessities in Colombia.

Since 1988 when Colombia Vive was founded there have been an average of 10 political murders in Colombia every single day. In addition, every two days a person is "disappeared" and every day several people are kidnapped. Every hour at least six families are forced to abandon their land and become part of the 1.6 million displaced Colombians, forced to live in absolute poverty on the outskirts of the cities. Since 1988 the entities responsible for committing the violence have shifted somewhat. The guerrillas continue to commit about 20% of the political murders, but the army now commits only 2% of the murders. The paramilitary death squads, which are well documented to have direct and indirect support from the military, now commit 78% of the political murders, and cause most of the displacement. The guerrillas are responsible for about half of the kidnappings in Colombia (and by their example encourage more kidnappings) and for some of the displacement.

In light of these terrible statistics, it is impossible for human rights groups to denounce every single act of violence.

However, for different reasons, some events do attract more attention. Last year we decided to hold a memorial service for three U. S. citizens killed in Colombia by the FARC as they traveled to support the U'wa indigenous tribe. We held the memorial service because the killing of three international supporters of the U'wa strikes at the heart of the kind of work we do as human rights activists. Our only power is to bring international solidarity to the people of Colombia. We held the memorial not just for three U.S. citizens, but also for the people they were trying to help, and for the many Colombians who have been killed.

One week ago we read about the horrific murder of a woman in Colombia with a new device, a necklace bomb. This murder shocked people around the world, and raised fears that the violence in Colombia would increase even more. It is morally necessary to condemn this murder, no matter who committed it. At this moment, the Colombian government is saying the FARC did not commit this murder, and the woman's family says it was not the FARC. However, until this murder is investigated, we simply will not know, just as we do not know who killed Jaime Garzón, who killed Professor Henao, who killed Elsa Alvarado and so many others. We must continue to denounce atrocities against civilians, and violations of international humanitarian law against combatants as well.

We feel that escalating the war in Colombia will not solve any problems and will instead bring more suffering. It is frightening to consider what will happen if all the armed actors increase their violence against the civilian population even more. The Colombian government denies that there is a civil war. Whatever we call the war that is raging, the over 35,000 people killed since 1988, the 1.6 million people displaced and every person living in fear today demand that we work towards a peaceful resolution to this conflict as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Cathy Crumbley, Co-Chair  
Father Gerry Kelly, Co-Chair  
Martha Soto, Member

Colombia Vive, Boston  
59 Fenno St., Cambridge, MA 02138

phone: (617)868-7770  
colombiavive@mindspring.com

# URGENT ACTION

## An Urgent Call from Colombia to the Churches in the North for Reflection and Action for Life

Bogotá, Colombia - July 1, 2000

*For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this? - Esther 4:14*

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, the gospel invites us to know how to "interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3). For this reason, "with fear and trembling", I dare to write to you in this moment of confusion and pain that the Colombian people are suffering, in search of solidarity and fraternal discernment.

The government of the United States of America, the most powerful hegemonic force in the world at the moment, has turned its eyes upon our small country of Colombia. The US Congress recently approved an "aid" package to the Colombian government for \$1,300,000,000, of which almost 90% goes towards military support for the army, in other words, to escalate the war....

In the last 15 years, the problems of this social conflict have been augmented by the terrible drug-trafficking business, which is financed by international mafia and carried out by Colombians. It is a business that takes advantage of many people's greed, the government's weakness, the corruption of many politicians, and the displaced and unemployed people's hunger and misery. It flourishes in this country of deep jungles, wide-spread mountain ranges and extensive coasts along two oceans.

Now drug-trafficking has become a source of financing for the guerrilla groups, paramilitary and self-defense groups, and is becoming an excuse for the USA to intervene in Colombia, disguising these actions as a war against drugs, when perhaps really they are looking for the "external enemy" that they lost at the end of the cold war.

The bias in the media's presentation of scarce news about Colombia shows the violent actions pornographically, as if they were produced by drug-trafficking, presents the Colombian conflict as a diabolical struggle between mafia cartels, and hides the real basis of social injustice that produced the drug-traffic business in the first place. This bias has robbed other nations, such as the USA, Canada and European countries, of the opportunity to feel solidarity towards the pain of the Colombian people. They are blind when their respective governments use tax-payer money to increase the unfortunate situation of the Colombian people by escalating the war.

Just as lighter fluid among flames produces more fire, more arms produce more war in the middle of social

conflict. This military "aid" will not put an end to the war nor eradicate drug-trafficking. It will only increase the number of deaths and the suffering of the Colombian people. People displaced by the war increment coca cultivation in order to survive, such that more and more drugs reach the USA. This ominously vicious cycle increasingly involves more and more foreign powers, enriches the mafia, takes away the government's legitimacy and gives more power and authority to the guerrilla groups....

What the North is sending to the Colombian people through this military "aid" is a message of death and destruction, amplified by a profound silence from many of the brothers and sisters from the North that belong to the great global faith family.

For this reason we are sending out this message to the churches in the North that come from countries where their taxes paid to their governments are economically supporting, in their name, the annihilation of the Colombian nation and people.

We are asking you, just as Mordichai desperately pleaded with Esther regarding the threat of annihilation of the Jews, to not remain quiet at this time, but to unite your voices with ours in order to denounce the perverse nature of this kind of "aid" and the ever-closer danger that this war-like conflict may affect your homes and produce the death announced in the Biblical passage....

We invite churches and local congregations in the north to join Colombian churches and local congregations, strategically located throughout the country. Through interdependent fraternal relationships, we can create "Churches as Sanctuaries for Peace". These Sanctuaries can, by holding a broad vision, incarnate the intervention of the Holy Spirit through specific actions.

From these new "Churches as Sanctuaries for Peace", particularly those located in Colombia, we can bring the Colombian people a message of "abundant life" (John 10:10) and peace as promised by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. We live out this message through training, consolation, humanitarian aid to displaced people, pastoral support, integral projects to reconstruct lives and other creative forms of relating.

We ask you for support to transform this vicious cycle of death and destruction that military aid produces,

into a virtuous cycle of abundant life and peace. In this way our people can receive an alternative message from the people of the north, sent by the churches there. This message would show that life, respect and solidarity can also come from the north.

Perhaps, brothers and sisters, it is precisely in order to support the Colombian churches in turning the governmental message of death from the North into life that God has placed you there in the nations of the North at this time, just as God did with Esther.

May God bless you and may God's peace stir you.

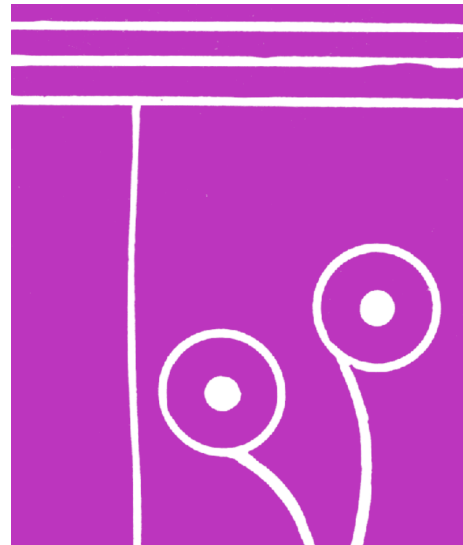
Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas  
Member of the Mennonite Church of Colombia, Director of Justapaz,  
Director of the Peace Commission of the Evangelical Council of  
Colombia - CEDECOL

Peter Stucky  
President, Mennonite Church of Colombia  
Address: Av. Calle 32 No. 14-42, Bogotá, Colombia  
Tel. 285-6315, 571-0010, 570-6150  
justapaz@colnodo.apc.org ■

*The following statement of solidarity with the urgent call from the Colombian Mennonite Church is being circulated for endorsement by individuals, congregations, denominational leaders, etc. Endorsements are sought by September 30, 2000. If you would like to add your name to the list of endorsers, please do so by sending the endorser's name and address (city and state or province) to "rschlabach@mcc.org," or by calling 202-544-6564, ext 6. The list of signers will be circulated to the Colombian churches, and possibly to the U.S. Congress.*

## STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

"We, as members of the North American faith community, wish to express our solidarity and support for the churches of Colombia. We recognize that Colombian churches have borne the heavy burden of responding to the needs of the poor and cultivating peace in a culture of violence. We lament, along with our Colombian brothers and sisters, the recent decision of the United States government to send more than \$1 billion to Colombian security forces. We pledge to advocate, in the tradition of Esther, for government policies that will support peace and human rights in Colombia, not a continuation of war."



## U.S. Policy & Human Rights in Colombia:

### Where Do We Go From Here?

#### When?

November 3 and 4, 2000

#### Where?

Chicago, Illinois  
DePaul University

#### Why?

To change U.S. policy towards  
Colombia

#### Initiating co-sponsors:

Chicago Colombia Committee, DePaul  
University International Studies  
Department, U.S./Colombia Coordinating  
Office

For more information on how you can participate in this meeting, which is intended to generate not only debate, but also resources useful to activists around the country, please contact:

Chicago Colombia Committee  
773-489-6279, chrc@juno.com  
or  
U.S./Colombia Coordinating Office  
202-232-8090, agiffen@igc.org

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from the *Los rostros del pasado* by Antonio Grass

# Internet Resources

Visit the many websites mentioned throughout this issue of Colombia Update, and their many links:

Alternative Donors Meeting - [www.nodo50.org/usocolombia/html](http://www.nodo50.org/usocolombia/html)  
Amazon Watch - [www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)  
Center for International Policy - [www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid)  
Colombia Human Rights Network - [www.igc.org/colhrnet](http://www.igc.org/colhrnet)  
Colombia Labor Monitor/Chicago Colombia Committee - [www.prairienet.org/clm](http://www.prairienet.org/clm)  
Colombia Support Network - [www.colombiasupport.net](http://www.colombiasupport.net)  
Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa - [www.flipcolombia.org](http://www.flipcolombia.org)  
Mycoherbicide.net - [www.mycoherbicide.net](http://www.mycoherbicide.net) or <http://mycoherbicide.net>  
The Narco News Bulletin - [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)  
1world media, Colombia news - [www.1worldcommunication.org/colombia.html](http://www.1worldcommunication.org/colombia.html)  
Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio - [www.pdpmm.org](http://www.pdpmm.org)  
Project Underground - [www.moles.org](http://www.moles.org)  
Rainforest Action Network - [www.ran.org](http://www.ran.org)  
Veterans for More Effective Drug Policies - [www.vetsformeds.org](http://www.vetsformeds.org)  
Washington Office on Latin America - [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org)

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