

COLOMBIA: COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Physical

Colombia is located in northern South America. It spans an area slightly less than three times the size of Montana. The climate is tropical along the coast and eastern plains, cooler in the highlands. It covers a terrain of flat coastal lowlands, central highlands, high Andes Mountains, and eastern lowland plains. Some natural resources include petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, and emeralds. Deforestation and soil damage from pesticides and chemicals are the nation's primary environmental concerns.

People

More than 39,000,000 people live in Colombia. They recognize Spanish as their official language. The ethnic make-up of the people is as follows: mestizo (58%), white (20%), mulatto (14%), black (4%), mixed black-Amerindian (3%), and Amerindian (1%). Roman Catholics compose the largest religious group in the country (95%).

Government

Officially, the country is known as the Republic of Colombia. Its capital, Bogota, is located approximately 250 miles east off the coast of the North Pacific. Colombia gained its independence on July 20, 1810. Its constitution was ratified on July 5, 1991. The president and vice president are elected by a popular vote for a four-year term in office. There are a number of political parties present in the country, including the Liberal Party (PL), Conservative Party (PC), and the National Salvation Movement (MSN). These parties and their supporters are spread throughout 32 departments (administrative divisions)

Economy

Currently, Colombia is recovering from a brief recession related primarily to former President Samper's political problems. The nation's 1997 3.1% GDP growth was the lowest in Latin America. Future leadership will inherit a variety of economic problems. Unemployment is at its highest level this decade (12.2%), exports and foreign investment face increasing risks as a result of the growth of guerilla violence, and the federal deficit has more than tripled since 1994. Its GDP may be broken down as follows: agriculture (20%), industry (27%), and services (53%).

Other

For more information, you may write to the chancery at 2118 Leroy Place NW, Washington, DC 20008; check with the U.S. State Department or CIA; or type in the country's name on the Internet using a broad-based world wide web search engine.

Source: CIA World Factbook

OVERVIEW OF THE COLOMBIAN ECONOMY

Poverty Levels

Colombia has the third largest population in Latin America and the fourth largest economy. In 1999 its GDP was \$245.1 billion (U.S.). Nevertheless, 56% of its population lives in “absolute poverty” earning less than \$500 annually. This is an 11% increase from 45% “absolute poverty” just ten years ago. In rural areas 88% of the population falls under the category of “absolute poverty”.

Unemployment and Brain Drain

Colombia has a total unemployment of 20.7%, and an underemployment level estimated at 57%. In 2000 Colombia’s growth rate was a minus 3% which caused the GNP per capita to fall from \$2,000 in 1999 to \$1,800 in 2000.

A recent poll showed that 79% of households in Colombia expressed fear of unemployment. This fear would not encourage many to speak out against unfair wages and labor practices.

The dire economic situation in Colombia has led to a severe “brain drain” in the country. In less than three years 1.1 million professionals have left the country. It is estimated that the cost of replacing these professionals would be close to \$5 billion. When it was announced that there were 30 job openings to clean the water pipes underneath the streets of Bogota, 15,000 people showed up to apply.

Inequality of Wealth and Land Reform

Colombia’s grave economic conditions are not attributed to a lack of wealth. Colombia is rich in oil, gold, emeralds and agricultural products. The problem is unequal distribution. The ratio of rich to poor in Colombia is 1:140. In Bogota the richest 10% of the population controls 56% of the resources. In the country as an aggregate the top 1% controls 55% of the resources.

In 1984, large landowners held 32% of the total land in the country. Today the figure is 46%.

As a result of the incredibly unequal distribution of wealth many poor Colombians are struggling to reclaim the land they once owned. The current Colombian constitution provides for agrarian reform and allows both Afro-Colombians as well as indigenous peoples to hold title to their traditional lands. Because of the violence however, it is primarily these two groups who are displaced and while they constitutionally hold title to the land the fear of death and oppression keeps them from living there.

Many believe that land reform is one of the key components in Colombia’s violence and necessary if a crop substitution program is to be successful. Until the root issue of inequality is addressed there will not be peace in Colombia.

Export Market and Illicit Economy

Colombia exports nearly \$11.5 billion (US) of goods and services annually. The country’s export partners include the United States (39%), European Union (24%), Andean Community (15%), and Japan (2%).

The country’s top export is petroleum which accounts for \$4.5 billion (US) annually, and totals nearly 700,000 barrels per day. Oil accounts for 35% of Colombia’s legal exports. Colombia is Latin America’s fifth largest oil exporter and sends 85% of its crude to the U.S. (Reuters). Transnational

corporations control the vast majority of the petroleum industry. Most of these profits therefore, do not remain within the country.

The second largest export is coal accounting for 7% of its exports. All of the coal market belongs to two outside companies, Drummond, and Exxon. In previous years Exxon was unable to realize a profit in the coal market and was heavily subsidized by the Colombian government. Exxon has not repaid any of this money to the government.

The third largest export in the country is coffee. The coffee industry was once the backbone of the Colombian economy but now only represents a fraction of its previous wealth. Ten years ago the country produced 16 million sacks of coffee annually. Currently Colombia grows only 9 million sacks per year. This dramatic reduction can be directly attributed to the collapse of the “World Coffee Pact” and is considered to be a contributing factor to the growth of the illicit economy within Colombia.

The legal economy also exports large quantities of natural goods. Bananas are exported from the Chocó region as well as cut flowers from the areas surrounding Bogotá. Colombia also exports some textiles and leather products, a sector of the economy which President Pastrana would like to see strengthened.

The illicit economy is booming in Colombia—estimates range from \$2.5 to \$3.5 billion (US) annually. Colombia is the world’s largest exporter of cocaine and it is heavily involved in the production and sales heroin and marijuana. However, only a small portion of the revenues generated by Colombian drug production remains within the country. 90% of the profits remain overseas in the consumer countries while a mere 1% of the total profits of all drug sales ever return to the peasant farmers. This money is dispersed among the millions of campesino families who depend on it for their only source of income.

Adapted from materials by Holly Miller, United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society

RESPONSE OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA TO THE ONGOING CRISIS OF COLOMBIA

A HISTORICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia had its origins with the arrival of Lutheran missionaries from North America in 1936. These missionaries first arrived to the rural areas of the States of Boyacá and Casanare. Most of the leaders who have worked for the church come from these areas.

The 1948 and 1949 wave of violence ignited between the Liberal and Conservative Political parties also included religious violence when the Roman Catholic Church joined the Conservative Political Party to persecute both the Liberal Political Party and the Protestant churches that were being born. In order to save their lives, many of the Lutheran leaders were forced to flee to the cities of Sogamoso, Tunja, and Bogotá where new Lutheran congregations were born as a result of their Christian work and witness.

Lutheran schools also had their birth as a result of the religious persecution and as a way of providing education for Lutheran children who were discriminated in the public schools. Soon, these Lutheran schools were open to the whole community without any discrimination of politics, religion, sex or race.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia currently runs 5 schools that provide high-quality education at the levels of pre-school, elementary and high school education. It also runs a non-formal Evangelical Seminary of Theological Education by Extension.

Currently, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia has fourteen (14) organized congregations and 8 missions in the process of becoming congregations. As far as administration is concerned, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is organized in three departments: Department for Mission and Development, Department of Christian Communications, and Department of Education.

To live out the Christian faith, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia executes different programs of social development, education and spiritual formation. This work done by the Department for Mission and Development thus responds to its main purpose of being a tool for Christian service, witness and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From this holistic Christian perspective, our service and proclamation seeks to make flesh the redeeming love of God as needed response to human needs, particularly of the vulnerable communities of people both in the cities and in the Countryside as well.

CURRENT SITUATION OF COLOMBIA

Since 1948, Colombia has been engulfed in a guerrilla war of confrontation with the constituted government. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, is the oldest guerrilla movement. With FARC the Colombian government is currently holding dialogues in an effort to secure peace.

Colombia is a country invaded by insecurity, homicide, social injustice and corruption at all levels of society. This social deterioration of Colombia is reaching levels never imagined. The levels of poverty, misery and unemployment keep growing in alarming ways. New taxes to pay the public debt and the reforms being pushed by the Colombian government continue producing massive lay-offs of workers. Colombia is indeed closing the doors of this century with the worst of its economic crisis, the loss of ethical values and the worst stagnation of its economic production in the last 150 years.

All these situations combined keep making of Colombia a bleeding country. As long as the policies of the current neo-liberal economic system are in place there will be no peace. Peace means social well-being, cultural and economic development, education, health services for all, housing, food, public services and recreational opportunities.

Peace above all is the respect of all life and we are living in a country where death reigns and where the gross violation of human rights takes place every day. The main enemy of peace is the neo-liberal system and its enormous capacity to beget poverty and a strong weaponry industry that always needs to justify war to profit from it.

Human sin has taken deep roots in our institutions whose gods are money, power, justification of violence, selfishness and coveting. All of this is part of the diagnostic of this terrible illness that is destroying all that is honest, just, pure, and loving and that has been given to all by our Lord so that we may live as children of God.

ROLE OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA

Although without much advertising, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia continues to play its role in the peace process by:

- Its proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its emphasis of respect for life and for fundamental human rights
- Providing a formal model of education strongly grounded on ethic, Christian and human values as solid foundation for daily living
- Through programs of community development and support for internally displaced communities the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is contributing to the social and economic improvement of vulnerable social groups.
- Through ecumenical relationships with churches of recognized biblical integrity. This includes the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Mennonite Church among others. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia Participates in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and is member of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL) and of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI).
- Co-sponsoring with the Presbyterian and Mennonite Churches, through the Latin American Council of Churches CLAJ, a Peace Program for Colombia that now includes other churches as well.
- Through respect and appreciation of different religious practices with which we cooperate in common efforts and initiatives to further promote respect for life, social justice and peace. These are central elements of all the programs undertaken by the Department for Mission and Development and of our ecumenical relationships.
- Last but not least, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is contributing to the eradication of violence through its living out the Gospel in the daily rhythms and spaces of the family, congregational neighborhood life.

INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENT

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is well familiar with violence as it was immersed in the conflict and religious persecution that took place in the decade of the 1950s when many of its members were jailed, stoned, and murdered because of their witness to the Christian faith.

Currently, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is again living and doing its ministry in a country engulfed by rampant violence. Our congregations are located in rural and urban areas known as “Zonas Rojas” or Red Zones. Our pastors, social workers and other church personnel carry out their work amidst many dangers. Our holistic social and spiritual work and ministry in these communities is carried out without any partisan discrimination for civilians, armed forces of the government or other armed actors. Amidst the prevalent situation of violence exercised by the different armed actors of the Colombia conflict we the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia cannot and must not enlist or take sides with any armed actor in particular in order to serve social and spiritual human needs in those places where we have any presence.

Our activity and concern continues to be finding ways of serving, as much as we are able to, communities displaced by violence. To do this, we will further seek to assist them to organize themselves while accompany them in seeking the attention and resources of the government and those of non-governmental organizations and private individuals. As integral part of our work and ministry, we will offer moral, spiritual and material presence through small projects aimed at satisfying, not only their basic needs of food, housing, health but also to engage with them in a much long term sustainable economic development.

In this evangelical spirit of peacemaking, service to human needs and Christian witness, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia expresses its Christian, historical and social conviction against:

- War and the use of weapons and violence as a way to achieve social equality.
- The recruiting of children for the armed forces of the government as well as for all other armed actors in the conflict.
- The politicization of peace.
- The crushing and inhuman neo-liberal economic system that is sinking into poverty the countries of the 'third world' and advancing social injustice, hunger and war. The payment of the foreign debt of 'third world' countries and the interest of that debt have become impossible to pay. The reasons are the social burdens such debt imposes in those countries and also because most of those resources never reach their true beneficiaries and have rather remained in overseas accounts due to bureaucratic corruption.
- The commercialization of narcotics. We are well aware that unless the demand for narcotics outside Colombia is effectively addressed, we in Colombia will continue to suffer the consequences of human misery and death. The reason is rather simple: where there is a demand there is also a supply.
- Kidnappings, assassinations, disappearances of innocent people, indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, involvement of civilians in the armed conflict and the ongoing violation of human rights.

REQUEST TO SISTER CHURCHES AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES OF COOPERATION/DEVELOPMENT

Faced with this crisis of overwhelming proportions that we are living in Colombia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia invites and calls on our sister churches and international agencies of cooperation/development to express their solidarity through your moral, spiritual and financial means of accompaniment and support.

As one concrete response to the situation, we call on our sister churches and international agencies of cooperation/development to assist us in the establishment of a holistic effort by which we may be able to serve the needs of displaced children, youth and adults. Such efforts could include spiritual counseling, educational skills in conflict resolution, human rights and sustainable development. An immediate priority is to engage the displaced children and youth in their own healing process and to expand their participation in programs of preventive health and recreation. This we see is a needed contribution that the Evangelical Lutheran Church can make toward the reconciliation and restoration which is currently threatened by injustice, impunity and absolute poverty. We are committed to implement short- and long-term projects in support of concrete actions that will further a culture of dialogue, tolerance and peace.

As far as projects and plans to address the different problems caused by forceful displacement, we see it necessary that these projects and plans have the potential to affect the access to local services and include the development of productive alternatives aimed at improving the economic and social situation of the target population. The social group of internally displaced people thus become the most vulnerable sector of the population. Through its Department for Mission & Development, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia is working toward the establishment of a revolving fund to assist the development of such viable productive alternatives.

We see it necessary also that a comprehensive campaign of awareness about the law and all other issues relating to the internally displaced people must continue to take place among sister churches, agencies of cooperation/development and all institutions with whom we have relationships.

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia we too assume responsibility for carrying out a work of awareness and sensibility in our congregations and communities in regard to the diverse issues that the displaced communities face. Such a commitment we hope would prevent discriminatory behaviors toward the displaced and the too common practice to see them as a stigma to society.

We realize that only an inter-institutional work capable of avoiding the pitfalls of who gets credit and recognition is precisely the kind of work that can produce a real approach to the present reality of Colombia. In this regard, we see as a real sign of hope the network of Colombian churches that are sharing what specific work they are doing in their efforts to coordinate activities and resources, thus avoiding the duplication of efforts and initiatives. Such an approach maximizes the resources and therefore renders a much better service to the displaced community. This network of churches will continue to strengthen with governmental and private institutions in order to create spaces for information, consulting, and implementation of specific projects.

We also call the attention of our sister churches and international agencies of cooperation/development to give priority to the projects that our communities present to address the needs of displaced communities. As an example, we mention the Agro-industrial Association of Caquetá Project. The purpose of this project is to facilitate a sustainable exploitation of minor species along with the development of short-term crops. This particular project will make it possible for 45 displaced families, 300 people altogether, to become self-sufficient. This project was presented to the Lutheran World Federation of a year ago and so far we have had no answer at all.

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia, we will continue serving God and our suffering country of Colombia as much as our capacities and resources will allow us.

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia we want it to be known that we are deeply thankful to God, to our sister churches and international agencies of cooperation/development for the interest and support being shown to our country of Colombia in this our most serious national crisis.

Rev. Nehemías Parada, Bishop President Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia
Rev. José Benjamín Ojeda, Director Missionary Leadership XXI Century Project
Rev. Israel Martínez, Vice President Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia
Mrs. Martha Wilches Director-Department for Mission and Development
Ms. Zulma Ojeda, Representative for Colombia to the Lutheran World Federation

RESOLUTION ON PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN COLOMBIA

VOTED

GM98:3:15

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states in 4.02.c: To participate in God's mission, this church shall serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs; and in 4.03.g: To fulfill these purposes, this church shall lift its voice in concord and work in concert with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA in "An ELCA Churchwide Blueprint for Action on Central America and Caribbean Concerns" adopted by the Church Council in 1990 calls to: support regional initiatives for a negotiated solution to the conflicts and to develop and support public policies that encourage dialogue and negotiation to resolve these conflicts; and

WHEREAS, the international ecumenical community offers support to the growing efforts in Colombia toward a lasting peace with justice; and

WHEREAS, since 1987 more than 25,000 non-combatant civilians in Colombia have been murdered or have disappeared; and

WHEREAS, the Division for Global Mission is committed to accompanying our brothers and sisters in Colombia by affirming that the suffering of the Colombian people is our suffering, and their hope and desire for peace is our hope: Therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the board of the Division for Global Mission:

1. Request the ELCA to commend the efforts of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, the Latin American Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America to pursue, with the churches in Colombia, peace and reconciliation;
2. Encourage appropriate ELCA units to raise awareness among ELCA members and encourage advocacy on the situation in Colombia, including concern about continued grievous abuse of human rights by parties to the conflict and related economic issues;
3. Call on members of the ELCA to pray for an end to human rights abuses, improvement in the economic situation of the poor and for peace and reconciliation in Colombia.

“Plan Colombia”

Background. Earlier this year President Clinton signed legislation providing a \$1.3 billion package of assistance to Colombia to address a number of challenges facing that nation. These efforts include support for human rights and judicial reform, expansion of counter-narcotics operations in southern Colombia, support for alternative economic development (mainly to assist small farmers to engage in activities other than coca and opium poppy cultivation), expansion of U.S. and Colombia narcotics interdiction efforts, and assistance to the Colombian armed forces and national police. This aid is part of an overall strategy developed by Colombia which that government has called “Plan Colombia” and whose total cost is \$7.5 billion, of which \$4 billion will be covered by Colombia and \$3.5 billion is sought from the international community. (The U.S. contribution of \$1.3 billion comes within the latter \$3.5 billion figure.)

In late June as the U.S. Congress was considering this legislation, the ELCA, through the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA), joined more than 30 other religious, human rights and other groups in a letter to members of Congress expressing concern about the wisdom of this initiative. Among other issues the signers: 1) sought firm human rights conditions concerning the Colombian armed forces; 2) urged relatively higher levels of aid to internally displaced persons; 3) called for more focused targeting of human rights programs and a greater proportion of aid for social investment as compared to military assistance; and 4) raised deep concerns about the impact of the U.S. assistance program on the human rights and humanitarian situation in Colombia and lamented the lack of a broader debate about the best approach to Colombia’s crisis and the U.S.’ problems of drug-abuse and drug-related violence.

LOGA has also issued an Action Alert in July about human rights abuses committed by the guerrilla movements, the paramilitaries, the drug cartels and the government. It encourages letters to Members of Congress and the Administration about: 1) respect for international humanitarian law by all actors in the conflict; 2) urging the Colombian government to ensure the safety of human rights defenders; 3) support for judicial reform in Colombia; 4) enforcement of human rights conditions on U.S. foreign assistance; and 5) the need for immediate high-level delegations to visit Colombia. In these advocacy efforts LOGA (<http://www.loga.org/latinam.html#Colombia>) has been working with the ELCA’s partners such as the Latin America Working Group (<http://www.lawg.org>) and the Washington Office on Latin America (<http://www.wola.org>).

In addition, an ELCA inter-unit working group on Colombia has been established to share information and coordinate advocacy activities with regard to U.S. policy toward Colombia. So far Lutheran World Relief has provided a \$30,000 grant to the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana in Colombia (IELCO) to develop an income-generating program among displaced people. The Division for Global Mission has provided \$30,000 to assist IELCO in working with displaced people, especially among the indigenous and the Afro-Colombian communities. Given the lack of information about Plan Colombia among ELCA members, participants in the ELCA Working Group have agreed to prepare education information and advocacy material which could be distributed to congregations and interested groups in the U.S. Specific attention will be given to efforts by the Administration and Congress to ensure enforcement of human rights conditions with regard to assistance provided to the Colombian military.

At their meeting earlier this month in La Paz, Bolivia, leaders of the Lutheran churches in the Andean region expressed concerns to the Lutheran World Federation about the effects of Plan Colombia on displaced persons and refugees in Colombia as well as the possible impact on the neighboring countries and churches. They pledged to stay in contact with one another and support efforts by the churches on behalf of the displaced and refugees.

VOTED

GM00:10:12

WHEREAS, the ELCA's social statement, "For Peace in God's World," encourages its members to promote respect for human rights, protest their violation and support effective ways to monitor and ensure compliance with them; and

WHEREAS, we have heard the appeal of our Christian sisters and brothers in the Lutheran and other churches in Colombia and, most recently, from elsewhere in the region about the adverse effects of the current crisis on the Colombian people; and

WHEREAS, we are called to express our love for our sisters and brothers by responding to this appeal through prayer, financial and material assistance, and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA's Division for Church in Society, especially through its Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, has undertaken advocacy on behalf of the people of Colombia; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Division for Global Mission:

- 1) convey its pastoral concern to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia and other churches about the situation in their nation and call on members of the ELCA to pray for an end to the conflict in Colombia;
- 2) consider ways in which it may provide financial and material assistance on behalf of the ELCA to the people of Colombia and the region through its partners, such as the Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service and Witness, and others;
- 3) undertake efforts to build better awareness among members of the ELCA of the situation in Colombia and its effects on the people throughout the region, including our sister churches and neighboring churches, in the region; and
- 4) encourage members of the ELCA to utilize the information and material available through the Division for Church in Society's Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs to advocate on behalf of the Colombian people before the U.S. Government.

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF: OP-ED ON COLOMBIA

This editorial originally appeared in the February 27, 2001 edition of the Baltimore Sun.

U.S. is Fueling Violence in Colombia; It's Time for a New Plan for Peace

By Kathryn Wolford, LWR President

Colombia is burning, and the U.S. aid package called Plan Colombia is adding fuel to the fire. It is aggravating an already serious humanitarian crisis that cripples Colombia and is now spilling into neighboring countries.

When President Bush welcomes his Colombian counterpart, Andres Pastrana, to the White House this Tuesday, he should seize the opportunity to douse the flames by changing U.S. strategy in Colombia.

The White House says the two leaders will discuss "the situation in Colombia and progress in implementing Plan Colombia." Unfortunately, "progress" with Plan Colombia is a notion the victims of the conflict in Colombia would not even recognize.

An ever-growing number of civilians there are being abused and killed by all parties to this conflict. A U.S. policy predicated on force is making matters worse. Plan Colombia targets coca plants, but incentives for peace and respect for human rights are being eradicated as well.

Three-fourths of the \$1.3 billion package pays for military and police activity. The focus of the program is the aerial fumigation of coca plants. However, in a decades-old conflict as complex as Colombia's, it is naive at best and unconscionable at worst to ignore the impact of increased military firepower on counter-insurgency efforts.

Plan Colombia strengthens the hand of a military not only guilty of gross and continuing human rights violations, but also closely tied to armed paramilitary groups identified with 75 percent of political killings of civilians.

Last month Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Washington Office on Latin America released a report detailing Colombia's failure to meet a single human rights requirement of Plan Colombia.

These stipulate suspension from duty and trial in civilian courts for members of the Colombian armed forces who are "credibly alleged" to have committed gross violations of human rights or aided or abetted paramilitary groups. The Plan requires Colombian military cooperation with civilian courts and deployment of professional legal investigators in the field. It also requires "vigorous" prosecution by the Government of Colombia of paramilitary leaders and their military collaborators. Despite violations painstakingly documented by the human rights report, U.S. policy has been to continue to send aid.

Escalating violence from all sides in the conflict is shredding Colombia's already tattered social fabric. Local church workers tell of communities caught in the crossfire and then denied the option of neutrality by the combatants. Their hopes shattered, more and more citizens join the ranks of the internally displaced -- now estimated at over two million women, men and children.

Spraying herbicide from the air will push these numbers ever higher as livelihoods and food crops are destroyed on the ground. This Plan Colombia strategy hits hardest at the small farmers at the bottom of the drug production chain. In the southern provinces, local officials and non-governmental organizations

alike question the viability of switching to other crops when coca eradication is done by force, communities are not involved in the planning and soil fertility is low.

They rightly ask why the U.S., contrary to its own market philosophy, denies that coca production will simply move elsewhere in order to meet the unrelenting demand from the north.

Moreover, Colombia's problems -- from weapons and warfare to drugs and dislocation -- are spilling over into neighboring countries. The regional conflict that critics of Plan Colombia predicted last year is already taking place. Unrest along the Ecuadoran border is increasing and that nation's government is now asking the U.S. for \$160 million (on top of \$20 million already included in Plan Colombia) to help police its border with Colombia and resettle people who have fled incursions by Colombian guerillas.

Less than one quarter of Plan Colombia funds have been designated for 'social' investments, including aid to the displaced, human rights work, law enforcement, and judicial reform. Unfortunately, the positive value of this support is undermined by the flawed objectives of the Plan and disproportionate mix of military aid in the package.

Our new President's goal of a new era of cooperation with Latin America calls for a new U.S. policy toward Colombia. The symbolism of a fresh start, plus money to make it happen, would douse the flames of Colombia's violence and rekindle the hopes of her war-weary citizens.

"Colombia needs and merits international assistance," says a statement signed by many of Colombia's most respected human rights and humanitarian groups, "but it must be a plan based on a profound, immediate and effective respect for human rights and international human rights law."

U.S. policy toward Colombia must be recast to demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to human rights, deliver solid support for civil institutions, and assure a firm focus on negotiated peace. Anything less will fan the flames of violence and innocent women, men and children will keep getting burned.

“PLAN COLOMBIA” AND THE “ANDEAN COUNTERDRUG INITIATIVE”

By Lisa Wright, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A./Church World Service, Washington Office (with thanks to Lisa Haugaard, Latin America Working Group and Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy)

When Colombian President Andrés Pastrana came into office in 1998, he proposed something called “Plan Colombia,” calling on foreign governments to collaborate with him on a "Marshall Plan" of economic aid for Colombia’s neglected countryside in order to promote peace. His plan received practically no international response. In 2000, however, due to increased concerns about drug production, the stability of the Colombian government and the potential failure of the peace process, the Clinton Administration proposed a massive US assistance package for Colombia. Also called “Plan Colombia,” this initiative supported by the United States bears little resemblance to this initial suggestion. Although the new "Plan Colombia," is supposed to spend \$7.5 billion – \$3 billion from foreign contributions – on a variety of economic initiatives, it also includes a significant military component, which was not in President Pastrana’s original request.

The initial US contribution, which began in 2000, to this initiative totaled over \$1.3 billion, although only 65 percent of that amount -- \$860.3 million -- was assistance for Colombia. The rest was assistance for neighboring countries and increases for U.S. agencies' Andean region anti-drug operations. Seventy-five percent of the original assistance (\$642.3 million) was scheduled to go to Colombia’s security forces.

An overview of Colombia's \$860.3 million for fiscal years 2000 and 2001:

The initial aid package provided Colombia's army, navy and air force with **\$519.2 million** in new assistance, mostly for the purchase of expensive military equipment including helicopters. Of this, \$416.9 million funds a program called "Push Into Southern Colombia," a Colombian Army operation in which three newly created battalions were to create secure conditions for police anti-drug activities (especially aerial fumigation) in the guerrilla-dominated southern departments (states) of Putumayo and Caquetá. The remaining \$102.3 million funds the armed forces' air, river, and ground interdiction operations.

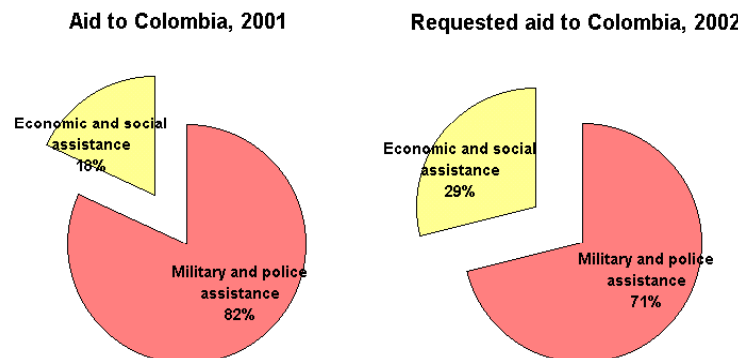
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|-------------------------|----------------|
| Military assistance | \$519.2 |
| Police assistance | \$123.1 |
| Alternative development | \$68.5 |
| Aid to the displaced | \$37.5 |
| Human rights | \$51.0 |
| Judicial reform | \$13.0 |
| Law enforcement | \$45.0 |
| Peace | \$3.0 |

The aid package was to provide Colombia **\$68.5 million** in new funding for alternative development and crop substitution programs. The aid package also includes in its "alternative development" section **\$22.5 million** in aid for the more than 1.5 million people who have been forcibly displaced by Colombia's conflict. An additional **\$15 million** will provide emergency assistance to the more than 30,000 people who are being forcibly displaced by the U.S.-funded "push into southern Colombia." However, although fumigation began in December 2000, the funds for alternative development only began to trickle into the region as of May 2001. The "Plan Colombia" aid package provided more alternative development funding to Bolivia (\$85 million) than to Colombia. The aid package also includes **\$61 million** for programs to streamline Colombia's judicial system, combat money laundering and corruption, and support ongoing peace talks. The "peace" funding is a **\$3 million** grant to offer conflict-resolution training seminars to government negotiators.

Next Step - Expansion of the Initiative:

When President Bush proposed his budget for fiscal year 2002 at the beginning of his Administration, “Plan Colombia” no longer existed as a separate line item. The initiative has now expanded to incorporate all the countries surrounding Colombia, and is being referred to as the “Andean Counterdrug Initiative” (ACI). The ACI will distribute \$731 million in 2002 not just to Colombia, but also to Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama.

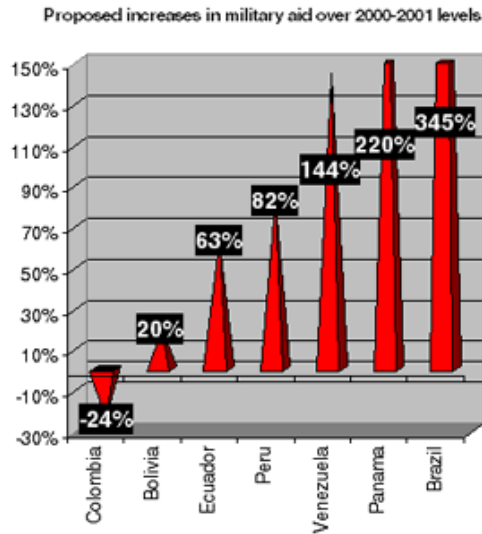
The Administration has argued that it has reduced its proportion of military assistance to Colombia in the foreign aid bill considerably for fiscal year 2002, in proportion to development assistance. **However, if you combine aid from the foreign operations bill with likely aid in the defense bill, aid to Colombia remains 71% security assistance, while all aid to the Andean region is 54% security assistance.** This total excludes any additional funding from other, classified sources, such as intelligence-agency budgets.



Source: Latin America Working Group/Center for International Policy

Total assistance to the "Andean Initiative" countries will be about 54 percent military.

This package represents a marked escalation of security assistance to all of Colombia's neighbors—Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama—ranging from a 20% to a 345% increase over the previous year. It includes military aid for border areas in Ecuador and Brazil: \$7.9 million in "assistance to the Ecuadorian military to strengthen its capacity to secure Ecuador's border with Colombia" and \$14.2 million to "reinforce Brazil's border with Colombia" and other activities. The implications of this sharp increase in military aid to Colombia's neighbors have not been debated.



Proportion of Military and Police Aid to Social and Economic Aid Varies:

Source: Latin America Working Group/Center for International Policy

| Country | Military and police aid (millions of U.S. dollars) | | | Social and economic aid (millions of U.S. dollars) | | |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|----------------|--|-------------------------------|----------------|
| | 2000-2001 average (% of total aid) | 2002 request (% of total aid) | Percent change | 2000-2001 average (% of total aid) | 2002 request (% of total aid) | Percent change |
| Colombia | \$475.83 (82%) | \$363.04 (71%) | -24% | \$108 (18%) | \$147 (29%) | +36% |
| Peru | \$49.18 (30%) | \$89.45 (34%) | +82% | \$116.65 (70%) | \$177.03 (66%) | +52% |
| Bolivia | \$51.23 (31%) | \$61.25 (36%) | +20% | \$112.44 (69%) | \$108.24 (64%) | -4% |
| Ecuador | \$19.43 (52%) | \$31.76 (36%) | +63% | \$18.09 (48%) | \$56.80 (64%) | +214% |
| Brazil | \$3.68 (21%) | \$16.36 (59%) | +345% | \$13.59 (79%) | \$11.18 (41%) | -18% |
| Venezuela | \$5.46 (94%) | \$13.33 (96%) | +144% | \$0.33 (6%) | \$0.58 (4%) | +76% |
| Panama | \$4.36 (49%) | \$13.97 (62%) | +220% | \$4.60 (51%) | \$8.50 (38%) | +85% |
| Total (\$1,098.49) | \$609.17 (62%) | \$589.16 (54%) | -3% | \$373.70 (38%) | \$509.33 (46%) | +36% |

Source: Latin America Working Group/Center for International Policy

For more information see: <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aidprop.htm>

THE PLIGHT OF THE DISPLACED IN COLOMBIA

“From the moment that we began to evacuate our land, the children cried from sadness because we were leaving behind all that we had acquired and worked for with so much effort.” - Eliseo

The increasing violence in Colombia, which disproportionately targets the civilian population, has forced millions to flee their homes since 1985. This displacement has caused many Colombians to leave their country and many others to be displaced, sometimes repeatedly within their own country. Colombia’s displacement phenomenon has developed within a complex social context, and has evolved from the flight of individuals to the exodus of families, groups and entire neighborhoods.

Since 1985, 1.9 million people have been internally displaced in Colombia. In 2000 alone, 300,000 people were displaced by violence. Thousands of families have been forced to abandon everything they own: land, farms, crops, livestock, after a lifetime of dedication and work. Disproportionate numbers of women and children have had to flee and find refuge in the “belts of misery” that now surround the large urban centers, because of massacres, threats and intimidation by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and members of the armed forces.

In the urban centers, displaced families search for a better life, but instead find more violence, poverty and discrimination. They are met with indifference to their suffering, and are often wrongly accused of having contributed to their own displacement because they helped one armed band or another. Unaccustomed to the big cities, many families meet frustration and tragedy. A substantial number of displaced children are unable to attend school and many live without access to health and social services. These conditions mean they are often accused of contributing to delinquency, prostitution, unemployment and other social ills. Because the internally displaced have not crossed any borders they are not considered refugees and do not meet the requirements of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to receive any of their services. Many faith-based organizations including Lutheran World Relief provide funds to meet many needs of these internally displaced in both urban and rural communities. But the needs are so overwhelming that most of the displaced struggle simply to survive from day to day.

Pope John Paul II calls on Christians to demonstrate solidarity with the displaced. He reminds us that: “Taking the Gospel as its starting-point, a culture of solidarity needs to be promoted, capable of inspiring timely initiatives in support of the poor and the outcast, especially refugees forced to leave their villages and lands in order to flee violence.” Forced displacement constitutes an offense to all people and a challenge to all Christians.

Adapted from materials by Catholic Relief Services

The following organizations provide additional resources about the plight of the displaced and refugees:

United States Committee for Refugees; 1717 Massachusetts Ave. NW; Suite 200; Washington, DC 20036; Tel. (202) 347-3507
<http://www.refugees.org/world/countryindex/colombia.htm>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; 1775 K Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006, USA; usawa@unhcr.ch;
<http://www.unhcr.ch/world/amer/colombia.htm>

Norwegian Refugee Council; Grensen 17; P.O. Box 6758 St. Olavs plass; 0130 Oslo, Norway;
 Tel: (47) 23 10 98 00; nrc-no@online.no; <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wCountries/Colombia>

CHILD SOLDIERS

According to United Nations, the use of under-aged fighters persists in 25 conflicts, with international agencies estimating the worldwide number of child warriors at 300,000. The use of child fighters in Colombia's 36-year-old guerrilla conflict is nothing new. But, international and Colombian agencies that track the use of child fighters say the combatants may rely on children to a larger degree than originally believed. In December 2000, thirty-two of the 77 rebel fighters captured by army troops during a protracted military engagement were below the age of 18, and 19 of those were 15 and under. Of the 46 killed, 20 were children. According to UNICEF, some 6,000 Colombian children are members of rebel groups or right-wing paramilitaries.

The statistics reflect both the age of the children drawn into this conflict and they also reflect the social conditions that helped trigger Colombia's war. The Institute for Family Well-Being, a Colombian government agency, estimates that as many as 70 percent of the youth who join the insurgents do so voluntarily. In much of rural Colombia, there has never been consistent government presence, or investment in any kind of economic infrastructure. A nationwide recession has pushed urban unemployment above 20 percent, so rural youngsters have little hope of escape to the cities. In rural communities where families do not have money for education and there are no jobs, young people have few alternatives.

Guerillas and paramilitaries recognize the value of recruiting children. A Colombian military official explains, how "the child doesn't have that sense of danger. Even when there's firing, they don't have that vision that they're going to get shot." Children of poor villagers are impressionable, easy to recruit, and prized as efficient and remorseless killers. They are frequently forced to commit atrocities or sent as cannon fodder ahead of older troops, experts say. "The violence they see isn't easy to forget," says a psychologist with UNICEF in Colombia. "War is hard enough for adults, but imagine how it is for children, who don't have the experience or the development to deal with what they've seen and done." Increasingly in violent conflicts throughout the world, children have been recruited or forced to become armed combatants. From Cambodia to El Salvador, Sierra Leone to Colombia the long-term consequences can be devastating. In many countries now formally at peace, high rates of homicide and juvenile violence remain serious legacies of earlier conflicts. Colombia's long-term hopes for peace must involve putting an end to the use of child soldiers.

Adapted from materials by Catholic Relief Services

Use the following resources to learn more about the use of children in armed conflict:

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: PO Box 22696; London N4 3ZJ. UK; tel. (44)(0) 20 7274 0230 http://www.child-soldiers.org/reports_latamr/colombia.html

Human Rights Watch Advocacy Director, Children's Rights Division, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, NY 10118-3299, tel. 212 216 1236; fax: 212 736 1300 www.hrw.org

HUMAN RIGHTS

Colombia is enduring the worst human rights crisis in the hemisphere today. In a context where all parties routinely commit violations of international humanitarian law, the average number of victims of political violence and deaths in combat has risen from twelve per day in 1999 to fourteen per day in 2000 (Human Rights Watch, 2000 Report). While Colombia's guerrillas and armed forces have continued to be implicated in serious human rights violations including numerous killings and kidnappings, in recent years the majority of peasant massacres have been attributed to paramilitary groups with alleged ties to the military

Despite this threatening environment, the Church and human rights defenders have struggled to protect the population and challenge rampant impunity in which over 90 percent of all crimes go unsolved and unpunished. Since 1989, dozens of priests, bishops and nuns have been threatened and 22 religious workers have been killed by right-wing paramilitaries and guerrillas. The killings, plus several kidnappings and scores of assassination threats, led the National Bishops Conference in the United States to warn in a declaration that “being a priest in Colombia is becoming a high-risk job.” A larger number of human rights defenders, journalists, labor leaders, academics and Protestant clergy have likewise come under attack in their attempts to reach out to the suffering.

Throughout this crisis, the international faith community has stated that it must support the ultimate foundation of human rights. At their 2000 Plenary Assembly, the Colombian Bishops reaffirmed their demand that the actors in the conflict assume the standards of International Humanitarian Law and that the government put forth all efforts necessary to guarantee victims and their families the right to justice and judicial investigation. A National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (February 21, 2001) called for “the prosecution in civilian courts of all instances where military personnel have been implicated in human rights abuses” as well as the support of programs “for the protection of threatened human rights defenders.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia in its response to the ongoing crisis in Colombia Colombian as expressed its “Christian, historical and social conviction against: kidnappings, assassinations, disappearances of innocent people, indiscriminate attacks on the civilian populations, involvement of civilians in the armed conflict and the ongoing violation of human rights.”

Adapted from materials by Catholic Relief Services

The following organizations provide additional resources about the human rights crisis:

Amnesty International USA; 322 Eighth Avenue; New York, NY 10001; phone: (212) 807-8400; fax: (212) 627-1451; <http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/colombia/>

Colombian Human Rights Committee; Suite 200; 1630 Connecticut Ave. NW; Washington, DC 20009; tel. (202) 232-8090; fax. (202) 232-8092 <http://www.igc.org/colhrnet>

Human Rights Watch; 1630 Connecticut Avenue, NW; Suite 500; Washington, DC 20009; tel. (202) 612-4321, fax:(202) 612-4333 hrwdc@hrw.org <http://www.hrw.org/>

United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights; 8-14 Avenue de la Paix; 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; tel (41-22) 917-9000; fax (41-22) 917-9016

Latin American Working Group; 110 Maryland Avenue, NE Box 15; Suite 203; Washington, DC 20002; tel. (202) 546-7010; fax. (202) 543-7647; <http://www.lawg.org/>; lawg@lawg.org

Session 3-A is not available in electronic format.

Please contact the LWR Office of Public Policy at 202.626.7947 or kanderson@lwr.org if you would like a copy.

HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Putumayo, a region renowned for its rich biodiversity but impoverished by decades of government neglect, is also one of the most violent states in Colombia. As the guerrillas and paramilitaries fight for control of the region's resources, the Colombian government (with U.S. government funds and support) is employing a military and aerial fumigation campaign to eradicate coca, the plant from which cocaine can be produced. Unfortunately, as negative impacts of the strategy become prevalent, the government's effort to end drug production and pacify this region has included only minimal safeguards to protect its people and environment.

The people of Putumayo, alongside churches and independent experts have expressed several concerns over the government's policy. Chemical herbicides used in fumigation threaten the delicate ecology of the Amazon basin. Military accompaniment of fumigation heightens the conflict between the government and guerrillas by threatening the human rights of the people caught in the middle, and adding thousands to Colombia's already swelling displaced population. Additionally, in spite of increasing amounts of resources spent on overseas drug interdiction efforts, such as aerial fumigation, drug consumption in the US has continued to increase. Overall, fumigation has been ineffective in reducing drug consumption and threatens the people and the environment in its wake.

In regards to fumigation, Archbishop Giraldo Jaramillo speaking for the Colombian Catholic Church, has been clear that "the solution to the eradication of the coca and poppy cultivation is not fumigation, which clearly brings with it harmful effects, both for the environment and for human beings." The Archbishop's statement recognizes that drug trafficking in his country has become one of the main causes of social destruction, but that without serious attempts to promote socioeconomic alternatives, fumigation may simply push illicit cultivation deeper into the rainforest and neighboring countries. The Archbishop believes that "it is necessary to establish supportive structures for those involved in illicit cultivation to substitute these crops and gain access to transportation and commercialization of alternative products." Only in this way may these peasant farmers, "be able to lead dignified lives and become integral parts of the country's system of economic productivity."

The US Catholic Conference's International Policy Committee statement of March 2000 recognizes that "It is our country that is the source of much of the demand for the illicit drugs grown and processed in Colombia. The crisis in Colombian civil society is, in good measure, due to illegal drug use in the United States." This issue manifests itself in how both drug producing and consuming countries promote education and facilitate just social and economic development.

Adapted from materials by Catholic Relief Services

Use the following resources to learn more about the use of fumigation and alternative means of drug eradication:

- Amazon Alliance; 1367 Connecticut Ave., NW Suite 400; Washington, DC 20036-1860 tel. 202 785-3334, fax. 202 785-3335; amazon@amazonalliance.org www.usfumigation.org
- Washington Office on Latin America; 1630 Connecticut Ave., NW Suite 200; Washington, DC 20009; tel. (202) 797-2171; fax. (202) 797-2172; <http://www.wola.org> ; wola@wola.org
- Center for International Policy; 1755 Massachusetts Ave NW; Suite 312; Washington, DC 20036; tel.202 232-3317; fax. 202 232 3440 [cip@ciponline.org](http://www.ciponline.org); <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid/>

LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP
Report: Visit of the governors of Putumayo, Tolima, Cauca and Nariño
to Washington, DC , March 11-16, 2001

On March 11th, four governors from the southern provinces of Colombia came to Washington, DC to speak out against forced fumigation and propose an alternate plan to address the drug trade and related problems in their region. Hosted by the Latin America Working Group and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, the governors had a variety of successful meetings with policy makers, NGO representatives, and members of the press.

In planning the visit, the governors of Putumayo, Tolima, Cauca and Nariño hoped to expand the debate on fumigation, drug policy and US policy toward Colombia. The visit coincided with a State Department briefing on fumigation; the viewpoints put forth in this briefing were directly contradicted by the governors' denouncement of forced fumigation policy. The visit also came at a time when congressional committees were actively discussing their priorities in regards to US aid to Colombia. In this sense, the governors' alternate plan, which included a shift to manual eradication and an emphasis on social pacts and alternative development, was released at a critical period in the legislative process.

The governors attended a variety of meetings with government representatives while in Washington. The congressional briefing, which took place on Tuesday, March 13, was a great success. Sponsored by Reps. Pelosi (D-CA) and Baldwin (D-WI), the briefing was attended by Rep. Pelosi as well as Reps. McGovern (D-MA) and Schakowsky (D-IL). In addition, some 60 congressional aides attended from all the relevant committees in the House and Senate. In total, 80 people attended the briefing.

On separate occasions, the governors met with Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) and Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX). They also met with the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the World Bank, the State Department, USAID, and the National Security Council.

Throughout the week, the governors emphasized their firm commitment to ending illicit crop cultivation. However, they maintained that forced fumigation was an ineffective and harmful means of addressing these issues. Communities and local governments had not been adequately consulted in the planning of the program, and the current eradication strategy lacked the on-the-ground support necessary to be effective. Furthermore, the pressing issues of community displacement, the adverse health effects of fumigation, and the slow delivery of aid for alternative development were proving catastrophic to the local population. As an alternative, the governors promoted social pacts and manual eradication, as well as increased funding for social and economic development programs. They emphasized that coca cultivation was, at its core, a social problem: without crop substitution programs and a solid local infrastructure, the problem of the drug trade would simply move to a different area, while the underlying problems of poverty and a lack of opportunity for small farmers would remain unsolved.

In the course of the week, the governors reinforced each other's messages and grew as a team, formulating proposals and planning future work. Their meetings with NGO representatives solidified important ties between organizations in the United States and those on the ground in Colombia.

**A RESOLUTION
of the
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA
475 Riverside Dr.
New York, NY 10115**

Resolution on Peace in Colombia and U.S. Counter-narcotics Policy

(Adopted by the NCCC Executive Board, February 27, 2001)

The Policy Statement on Human Rights, of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA affirms that “Christians believe... that every person is of intrinsic worth before God, and that every individual has a right to the fullest possible opportunities for the development of life abundant and eternal.” Viewed through this lens, current U.S. counter-narcotics policies are detrimental for the people of Colombia, and may be a loss for those suffering from drug addictions in the U.S. as well.

Funding for international narcotics control and law enforcement activities is one of the fastest growing foreign aid programs. The dramatic increase in counter-narcotics assistance is troubling, particularly because a considerable portion will be channeled into national security forces in countries with severe human rights violations, such as Colombia.

Over the last decade, the United States has spent over \$25 billion in international drug control efforts. These efforts have at times temporarily succeeded in curbing production in a particular country, but have failed to stop the tide of drugs. Diminished cocaine production in Bolivia and Peru, for example, resulted in dramatic increases in Colombia.

Meanwhile, drugs remain readily accessible within the United States. The number of people who die from drug-related causes has increased every year since 1979. The availability of drugs to high school students has increased. Moreover, mandatory minimum sentencing laws result in nonviolent drug offenders serving longer jail terms than violent criminals. These laws have contributed to making the United States the country with the largest per capita incarcerated population. Racial and economic disparities in enforcing drug laws have torn apart the very families and communities hardest hit by drug-related violence. At the same time, persons with drug addiction, desperate for support services, cannot get treatment.

Colombia and the Andean region need and deserve the support of the international community in confronting their myriad challenges, which include not only eliminating drug production and trafficking, but fostering fragile democratic institutions and addressing profound economic inequality. The situation in Colombia is tremendously complex. It is compounded by Latin America's longest running internal conflict -- one that is involving an increasing number of child soldiers. In this instance, despite its protestations, US policy has combined counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency efforts into a single package, with potentially disastrous results.

In the last fifteen years, Colombia's internal conflict has produced over 2.1 million internally displaced persons, more than in Kosovo or East Timor. An increasing number of persons are seeking refuge in Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela.

The U.S. has responded to this situation by allocating \$1.3 billion to Colombia and the Andean region for

an initiative called “Plan Colombia,” most of which will support the building of the military apparatus in Colombia and aerial fumigation.

The honest and creative people Colombia, whether in poverty or comfort, are hoping to improve their situation, and are tired of suffering from or fearing human rights violations and the consequences of corruption. Colombians want peace, and the Colombian churches are calling on the churches of the US for assistance.

Whereas, the US decision to focus on military force to combat narcotics, in the context of an existing civil war, will undermine efforts for peace;

Whereas, the “Plan Colombia” aid package will draw the U.S. deeper into Colombia’s civil war, potentially intensifying the conflict, undermining democracy and the rule of law, and making the U.S. complicit in human rights violations;

Whereas, “Plan Colombia” includes plans for intensive aerial fumigation that will displace many thousands more from southern Colombia, forcing them off of their lands and deeper into the fragile rainforests or to city slums, causing great human suffering in addition to potentially incalculable environment damage;

Whereas, according to international law the destruction of food crops – in this instance by aerial fumigation -- is a human rights abuse;

Whereas, this policy is unlikely to reduce the flow of drugs into the U.S, but is rather more likely to displace drug production in Colombia to remote areas or to neighboring countries at tremendous financial, environmental and human cost;

Whereas, we are deeply concerned about the threat that illegal drugs and drug violence pose to children and communities in the US;

Whereas, in the United States, an emphasis on law enforcement strategies has failed to reduce demand or minimize the harm associated with drugs.

Therefore be it resolved:

That CWSW and NCCC and their member communions advocate with the U.S. Administration and Congress for policies and programs that would

1. Support drug treatment and prevention programs to reduce the demand for drugs in the U.S.
2. Reject an increased U.S. military involvement in Colombia and the Andean region;
3. Support a negotiated peace process in Colombia with the active participation of civil society;
4. Support multilateral humanitarian, development and environmental initiatives, working through the agencies of the United Nations and the Organization of American States;
5. Encourage and adequately fund Colombia to reform its judicial system, requiring accountability through the elimination of automatic grants of immunity or impunity, and providing for the prosecution in civilian courts of all instances where military personnel have been implicated in human rights abuses;
6. Support programs for the protection of threatened human rights defenders, civic, union and religious leaders, and judicial investigators;
7. Support scientific and technological developments to develop innovative and non-agriculturally based programs that provide new sources of income for those who currently make their living raising crops for drug production;
8. Provide increased humanitarian and development assistance to both the internally displaced in Colombia and those who have sought refuge in neighboring countries;

9. Undertake a transparent and credible investigation of the chemicals used for crop eradication, including the implications of possibly using substances which are banned for use in the US.

That CWSW and NCCC and their member communions develop educational materials to inform their members and others about the complexities of the situation in Colombia and the increasing US role, in order to shape a more constructive US policy towards the region.

That the churches in the US hold “Colombia-emphasis Sundays” as moments to bring attention to this issue.

NCCC urges that CWSW, on behalf of its member communions, develop and implement strategies to respond to the various humanitarian needs in Colombia and surrounding nations. Response efforts should foster ecumenical cooperation, strengthen cooperation of ecumenical partners, human rights and other civil society organizations in Colombia, taking into consideration the particular circumstances and perspectives of indigenous populations. These needs include:

- those of refugees and internally displaced – with particular attention to gender concerns;
- those of individuals needing immediate protection from human rights violations including those needing to go into exile;
- those impacted by conflict and/or poverty, who are without food, shelter, medical attention, counseling, or other supportive assistance;
- individuals and communities seeking to develop and implement alternative economic models in order to enable the voluntary eradication of coca;
- communities and organizations of civil society seeking to expand the capacity for self-governance and sustainable development.

Policy Base: *Human Rights (1963); Latin America and the Caribbean (1983); Human Rights: The Fulfillment of Life in the Social Order (1995); U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Policy (1952).*

How to contact your representatives

Call the capital switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected with your representative or senators' office.

(If you do not know your representatives, visit <http://www.house.gov> or <http://www.senate.gov> to find out. Or, contact Lutheran World Relief's Office of Public Policy at (202) 626-7933 and we can help you identify them.)

Identify yourself by name and city.

Ask to speak with the staff member who works on Colombia and/or drug policy.

Explain that you are studying the conflict in Colombia and the effects of U.S. aid to the region, and that you would like to know Congressman/woman _____'s (or Senator _____'s) position on the issue.

If the staff member is not there, leave a brief message on voice mail with the reason you are calling and request that they call you back by a specific date (so that you will have time to bring this information to your study group).

A MENNONITE VISION FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA

In observing our country's current sociopolitical situation, we believe that the churches with an Anabaptist tradition have an important role and message to bring to this difficult reality of conflict that exists on different levels of the Colombian society. Through fully living out the saving good news of Jesus Christ, we seek to develop a practical proposal and assume a clear nonviolent stance.

The church seeks to present a Christian alternative to violence, not through a heroic life only suitable for strong men and women, but rather as a community of brothers and sisters who give testimony to the Lord whose Spirit lives among them through their shared life, forgiveness, reconciliation, fraternal admonishment, and joyful willingness to share each other's burdens. It is a community where everyone offers their lives for the others (1 John 3:16).

We envision churches that become Sanctuaries of Peace. This alternative means presenting Jesus Christ as mediator for new agreements among Colombians, and offering ourselves as servants, putting to use the gifts, talents, and ministries that we have inherited from our ancestors in the faith.

Justification

The roots of the current cycle of violence and war in Colombia began to surface approximately 50 years ago. Although the dynamics of the conflict have changed over time, our country continually falls into this vicious cycle of violence. The end result of the problems found in the different areas of the national system is seen through the collapse of current everyday living conditions in our country.

Presently civil society (the unarmed population) brings life to different processes in search of peace and those who are working among these civil society efforts have made some advances. Although some representatives of the Mennonite Church actively accompany this process, we challenge congregations to take on collective actions in response to the general needs created by the war, and to build the peace of God's kingdom.

We believe that a collective proposal for peace from the Mennonite Church and other Anabaptist churches should arise out of a deep commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ, and take into account the following points:

1. Reflection on the history of violence—an analysis of the specific experiences of Mennonite and Anabaptist congregations that have had to offer advice, alternatives, or solutions to problems of violence.
2. Discernment regarding the response to difficult situations—how can we make the peacemaking gospel of Jesus practical and real?
3. An analysis of experiences where peace becomes a possible response to war.

Why is it the church's duty to respond to the current situation?

Based on the Anabaptist vision, the church "should not be known by God alone, but should also be evident to any human observer. This church should be recognized for its repentance, rebirth and the new life of its members" (Arnold Snyder, "Semillas de Anabautismo, crecimiento mundial," in *Correo*, the Spanish-language publication of the Mennonite World Conference). This call to be like a city upon a mountain is an invitation for the church to be light, a sign, and a refuge for many, especially in the middle of conflict (Matthew 5:14, Philippians 2:15, Isaiah 49:6).

What Is a Sanctuary of Peace?

It is a people. It is a people that continually meets together to pray, discern, and seek God's direction.

It is a people full of the Holy Spirit that embraces human beings affected by the material and spiritual war raging around them. It receives them and affirms them as persons in the peacemaking gospel of Jesus Christ. This ministry becomes not only light and hope for many people under darkness, but also a clear step forward in living out reconciliation with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbor.

It is a people where every person's inherent value, talents, gifts, and ministries are rescued and discovered in order to serve God and all Colombians. In this way we reproduce Jesus' mission to "seek and save what has been lost."

It is a people that models shalom, God's integral salvation. It seeks personal, family, spiritual, and social recuperation, not only affirming the dignity and life of people in our society, but also building upon a nonviolent way of life through our everyday interpersonal and national relationships.

It is also a proposal:

- * The Sanctuaries of Peace will offer a clear message of nonviolence, peacebuilding, justice, and human rights along with discernment and a call for repentance.

- * It is a nonviolent proposal for dealing with conflicts: It will give training in the nonviolent prevention, resolution, and transformation of conflicts. It will promote alternatives to the obligatory military requirement. It will seek growth toward a pacific, reconciled life within the family, the neighborhood, the church, and the workplace.

- * The proposal grows out of reflections on the future that we want to build, the vision of the country that we want for our sons, daughters, and grandchildren, responding to the realities of impunity, the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and mechanisms for rebuilding a social tapestry in our country.

It is an actual space:

- * It is a physical space or territory for peace that has been publicly announced as such and demands respect for this status against all forceful violation.

- * A Sanctuary of Peace is a space where face-to-face encounters between opponents can take place, where forums, discussion groups, planning sessions, and other activities for justice, peace, and the well-being of all can be held, and where the secular community can participate and feel safe.

- * It is a refuge for people persecuted for their convictions or directly affected by the violence or injustice. It is a place of protection within the wings of the faith community.

This article from the April—June 2000 Mennonite Central Committee Peace Newsletter, Vol. 30, #2, is used by permission. The article was compiled by Jenny Neme and Pablo Stucky as a result of workshops held with pastors, church leaders, and youth from Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ congregations in Colombia. Neme and Stucky are coordinators of the Construction of Peace in Churches and the Community at JUSTAPAZ. Lutheran World Relief is a partner in the work of the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Active Non-Violence (JUSTAPAZ).

TEN QUESTIONS FOR COLOMBIA POLICY

The \$1.3 billion aid package passed in 2000, marking a dramatic escalation of US involvement in Colombia, carries with it many risks and involves many unanswered questions. In the months leading up to its passage, the Clinton Administration and congressional backers painted an optimistic picture of the package's potential to help Colombia deal with its complex problems, while critics warned of dire consequences.

Now that the package is a reality, it would be wise to take a more careful look at the risks and uncertainties posed by this policy before appropriating more funding. Frequently, the questions asked about Colombia counternarcotics policy are limited in scope—is the right equipment being delivered on time? How many hectares of coca are being eradicated? Here are ten unanswered questions policymakers *should* be asking.

- 1. Has the policy helped the United States to limit drug abuse and drug violence?*
- 2. Is increased US aid to the Colombian military leading to improved human rights performance?*
- 3. Has the policy helped the peace process or harmed it?*
- 4. What is the regional impact of the policy?*
- 5. Is the policy headed for quagmire?*
- 6. What are the impacts of the policy on democratic structures and civil military relations?*
- 7. Are the alternative development programs being implemented effectively?*
- 8. Are US-funded programs to strengthen human rights and improve the justice system effective?*
- 9. What is the impact on Colombia's crisis of internal displacement and refugee flows?*
- 10. What is the impact of this policy on the environment?*

For the “answers” to these questions, visit the website of the Latin America Working Group,
<http://www.lawg.org/10questions.htm>

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Make your voice heard. Write to your elected officials to state your opinion on an issue, to make a request, or to express appreciation for a recent action.

Letters are most effective when written with a personal message--not as a "form" letter or on a postcard.

Try to focus on one subject or issue in the letter. Begin by stating your purpose for writing, follow with reasons for your concern and points to emphasize your argument.

If commenting on specific legislation, mention the bill number. (Visit the Library of Congress website, <http://thomas.loc.gov> (no www in the address) for information on current and past legislation).

Finally, restate your request and ask for a response. Don't forget to sign your name and include your address!

Remember that the most effective letters are brief, concise, and courteous.

Visit Lutheran World Relief's website at <http://www.lwr.org/action/advocacy> for current action alerts on Colombia. The alerts will provide you with information that you can include in your letter.

For further assistance, contact Adrienne Thompson at 202-626-79433 or by email at advocacy@lwr.org.

Put your faith into action!

For representatives:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
<http://www.house.gov>

For senators:

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
<http://www.senate.gov>

Capitol switchboard (to be connected with representatives' and senators' offices):
202-224-3121

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Studies show that letters from readers are among the most widely read features in daily newspapers. When a letter of yours appears on the editorial page, you probably have the largest audience you will ever address. It is possible to estimate its size. A small town weekly may have a circulation of one or two thousand. A metropolitan daily may have as many as one or two million. According to the National Conference of Editorial Writers, more than one-third of the newspaper's audience are regular readers of the editorial and opinion pages in their daily newspaper, and almost three-fourths usually read those pages. A letter to the editor is a good way to express ideas about timely subjects of general concern.

Here are some suggestions that can help you to write the kind of letter that is most likely to receive favorable consideration on the editorial desk:

1. If possible, use a computer/word processor or typewriter and double-space the lines. Write on only one side of the paper. If you have no computer or typewriter, write plainly and neatly with ink. Do not crowd words or lines.
2. Plan your first sentence carefully. Try to make it short and interesting. If you begin with a reference to a news item, editorial, or letter in the paper, your letter immediately has added interest for the editor. However, this is not always feasible or absolutely necessary.

Encourage and support writers who had the courage to express an opinion that will elicit floods of disagreement. Positive feedback encourages more good articles.

If you write to criticize, begin with a word of appreciation, agreement, or praise. Don't be merely critical: make constructive suggestions.

3. Deal with only one topic in a letter. It should be timely and newsworthy. Be sure your meaning is clear. Use simple and short words, short sentences and paragraphs. Your letter will be easier to read.
4. Express your thoughts as clearly and concisely as possible. Check your local paper for the average length of a letter and try not to exceed it. In addition to considering what will be accepted, you must consider what will be read.

Reprinted from the ELCA Lutheran Public Policy Advocacy Office-Nebraska.

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF: PROJECTS IN COLOMBIA, OCTOBER 2002

- Emergency Response to Families Displaced by Violence in five areas of Northeast Colombia - Partnering with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO). Through this project IELCO will provide temporary shelter and food to two hundred families that have fled from the former cease-fire-zone to Santander, Boyaca, Bogota, Meta and Tolima. Assistance to the displaced will include providing food, medicine, shelter and health care. This emergency response came after a four-year peace process was cut off and guerilla forces began intensive bombings that led to major area displacement of families from their homes and from their land.
- Sanctuary Churches for Peace - Partnering with The Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Active Non-Violence (JUSTAPAZ). This project is part of a ten year project focused on empowering empower people, churches and communities to practice active non-violence, to transform conflicts, and to promote structures and lifestyles that promote just and sustainable peace. In this phase of the project JUSTAPAZ is working with 30 churches who are leading their communities to actively promote peace and transform conflicts while attending to the immediate needs of the victims of war.
- Development of Peacemaking Training and Teaching Materials - Partnering with The Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Active Non-Violence (JUSTAPAZ). JUSTAPAZ will organize, edit and publish materials to teach and organize communities to build peace. This includes conducting research, creating two training modules for community-level trainers, developing three manuals for trainers, and distributing the newly created peacemaking materials to 6,000 groups who are all involved in Civil Society's Permanent Assembly for Peace.
- Self-sufficiency for 300 People Displaced by Violence - Partnering with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO). Displaced families will be provided with sustainable and life-giving work that includes projects associated with gardening, and farming chicken, fish, and collecting eggs.
- Emergency Response to the Persons Displaced by the New Wave of Violence, Southern Colombia - Partnering with The Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Active Non-Violence (JUSTAPAZ). The Colombian military has been conducting airstrikes that have caused a new wave of displacement, JUSTAPAZ is responding with a humanitarian assistance plan to provide temporary shelter, food and health care to two hundred internally displaced people.
- Research of Forced Displacement, Peace and Human Rights in Colombia - Partnering with Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES). In order to halt the humanitarian crisis of an estimated 2.5 million internally displaced people in Colombia, this project funds the research and publishing a study on the causality of internal displacement from the year 2002.
- Integrated Assistance to Displaced Persons In Bogotá, Colombia - Partnering with the Colombian Mennonite Foundation for Development (MENCOLDES). Bogotá is the capitol city of Colombia and receives the largest numbers of internally displaced people. MENCOLDES provides emergency and psychosocial assistance in terms of basic needs, professional development training, grief counseling and psychosocial assistance to assist displaced people in reconstructing sustainable lives.

- Ecumenical Network of Churches and Christian Organizations - Partnering with the Presbyterian Church of Colombia. A group of six denominational churches will establish a network of churches who work with displaced people. This network will learn from each other, develop a strategy to coordinate their work with the displaced population of Bogotá, Colombia, and work together on advocacy for the rights of Colombia's internally displaced populations.
- Microenterprise Project for Displaced Women, Bogotá, Colombia - Partnering with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom of Colombia (LIMPAL). This program 80 displaced women in Bogotá will receive job skills training and together implement three microenterprise projects. They will also be trained in human rights so they will be better able to work with one another and protect their families' rights.
- Support to Displaced Persons Due to Violence, Northeast Colombia - Partnering with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO). IELCO will work with displaced communities to form three cooperative banks. This projects will provide improved socio-economic conditions and the long term sustainability of internally displaced communities who are working to reestablish their lives.

BIBLICAL PASSAGES RELATING TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

All passages are NRSV

Amos 5:14-15 “¹⁴Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. ¹⁵Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

Isaiah 1:17 “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

Psalms 82: 1-5 “¹God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement: ²How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? ³Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. ⁴Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.’ ⁵They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.”

Proverbs 31:8-9 “⁸Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. ⁹Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Micah 6:8 “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Matthew 25: 31-45 (The judgement of the nations)

Luke 10:29-37 (the Good Samaritan)