



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on Colombia

Mercy and solidarity inspire the convinced efforts of the Holy See and the Catholic Church to avert conflicts and to accompany processes of peace, reconciliation and the search for negotiated solutions. It is heartening that some of these attempts have met with the good will of many people who, from a number of quarters, have actively and fruitfully worked for peace. I think of the efforts made in the last two years for rapprochement between Cuba and the United States. I think also of the persevering efforts made, albeit not without difficulty, to end years of conflict in Colombia.

Address of Pope Francis to the Diplomatic Corps, Monday, January 9, 2017

Peace in Colombia: Since signing a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016, the Colombian Government, with the support of the Church in Colombia, has been implementing a complex and multi-faceted peace accord to integrate ex-combatants and extend the reach of the state to the entirety of the national territory. The fifty-two-year armed conflict, the legacy of which still haunts this country's deeply wounded polity and civil society, has cost over 220,000 lives, and has internally displaced seven million people. This conflict, long recognized as the catalyst for most of Colombia's current human rights concerns, has exacerbated the historical neglect of the rural hinterlands, perpetuating cycles of violence and impunity that have destroyed the social fabric of much of the countryside where the FARC (and other insurgent groups) have operated. Narcotics and human trafficking, extortion, illegal mining and a range of other crimes have plagued many rural population centers for generations, with politically calculated violence often spilling into the major cities.

After the initial peace agreement was narrowly rejected by a national plebiscite on October 2, 2016, the government and the FARC drafted a new compromise accord which was ratified by Congress on November 30th, marking the official transition from the peace process' negotiation to its implementation phase. The importance of the peace agreement transcends even the objective of ending the conflict: For the first time in its history Colombia faces the prospect of being able to effectively integrate the marginalized regions whose people have been excluded from participating fully in the country's political and economic life since independence. This will require fostering a just and equitable social and economic development, extending the state's presence and services, as well as the protections of the rule of law, throughout the entire national territory.

US Assistance: Since 2000 Plan Colombia—the bi-partisan U.S. foreign aid package—has provided over \$10 billion in assistance to the Colombian government's anti-narcotics and counterinsurgency efforts. The centerpiece of this U.S. aid initiative was an anti-narcotics program designed to create and train new battalions of armed units, providing sophisticated tactical equipment and intelligence assistance, and relying on widespread fumigation as the principal means for eradicating coca. The goal should now be to proactively support implementation of the peace agreement, principally through supporting the restructuring of public investment towards traditionally marginalized areas, fostering

sustainable rural economic development, and strengthening transitional justice mechanisms that foster the consolidation of peace. The successful implementation of the peace agreement could mean a substantial demilitarization of the drug trade in Colombia, an objective consistent with both U.S. and Colombian security interests.

USCCB Position: Since spring of 2000, USCCB has stressed that U.S. aid should strike an essential balance between assistance to the armed forces and support that more directly addresses the root causes of the conflict. The Conference has stated that all aid should be conditioned on human rights criteria, and should foster alternative development, strengthen judicial reform, extend the presence of democratic institutions to rural areas, and provide humanitarian aid to the displaced. Both the Holy See and USCCB have strongly endorsed the peace process, and USCCB has urged the United States Government to support a successful outcome.

To this end, USCCB urges:

Support by the United States for implementing the Peace Agreement. To a significant degree, peace in the country is due to the contextually flexible collaboration between the U.S. and Colombian governments—this approach should continue. In particular, attempts by the United States Government to extradite former FARC or ELN officials should not jeopardize compromises reached on the issues of reconciliation and justice by the Colombian Government in its negotiations with these parties.

Inclusion of basic standards for the protection of human rights in all aid programs. The ongoing demobilization of FARC ex-combatants must be closely monitored to ensure that violence is not perpetrated against them as they assemble in the concentration zones for their reintegration into society. The Colombian government must also ensure the safety of human and labor rights activists in rural areas, as there have been many reports of targeted political assassinations of human, labor, and political rights activists by anonymous criminal groups bent on derailing the implementation of the peace agreement.

Increasing development and humanitarian aid to Colombia. The United States can make a significant contribution to the consolidation of peace and stability by focusing its foreign assistance on social and economic development, as well as continuing to provide aid to internally displaced persons. U.S. aid should assist equitable economic development by supporting the extension of democratic and legal institutions in rural areas, promoting reconciliation through effective transitional justice mechanisms, and ensuring the long-term resilience of the countryside through sustainable environmental initiatives.

Permanently end aerial fumigation, and increase appropriate alternative development for impoverished farmers. The Colombian Bishops have stated their clear opposition to fumigation, which has destroyed legal crops and livestock, contaminated water, and has posed serious health concerns for vulnerable civilian populations. The Colombian Government's suspension of fumigation must become permanent, and less indiscriminate ways of destroying illegal crops must be employed. Civilians reliant on illegal crops must not be left unassisted, as this fuels the type of discontent that fosters violence.

Resources: Statements and letters on Colombia: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/latin-america-caribbean/colombia/> **For further information:** *Christopher S. Ljungquist: 202-541-3153(ph); 202-541-3339 (fax); CLJUNGQUIST@USCCB.ORG*

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