



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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July 5, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to share the hopes of my fellow bishops in Colombia regarding the encouraging political situation in that country. Attached please find the Spanish original version, as well as an unofficial English translation, of a recent Statement of the Colombian Bishops' Conference.

In this document, the bishops endorse the call for dialogue and reconciliation, as reflected in the recent cease-fire, as the means to effectuate a just and effective political solution. They also recognize the importance of continued efforts to reduce the number of weapons available to insurgents and other parties, as a critical path towards peace.

We also congratulate and endorse the tireless efforts undertaken by you, your staff and your predecessors, in helping to bring about such a positive development. Our nation has a special moral responsibility to protect the lives, dignity and future of all our Colombian brothers and sisters. On behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the USCCB, we ask the U.S. Government to continue in its path towards fostering peace in this troubled nation, through promoting vigorously the principles set forth in the enclosed Statement.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Enclosure: Statement, Colombian Bishops' Conference (Spanish original and unofficial English translation)



Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia

COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

Ante la decisión de las delegaciones del Gobierno Nacional y de las FARC-EP, de firmar el Acuerdo de cese al fuego y de hostilidades, bilateral y definitivo, así como la dejación de las armas, la Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia se permite comunicar a la opinión pública:

1. Reconoce este Acuerdo como un acontecimiento histórico para el país, el cual se espera que sea el primer paso para construir la paz tan anhelada por los colombianos, bajo la garantía del respeto de los derechos humanos y la promoción de la justicia en todos los rincones del territorio nacional.
2. Este paso que se está dando es el primero de muchos otros que deben acordarse en la edificación de la paz, entre los miembros de las FARC-EP y el Gobierno, con el fin de reconstruir con esperanza, respetando siempre la institucionalidad, el derecho nacional e internacional, el país que soñamos y queremos.
3. Es necesario que el Gobierno ofrezca a la opinión pública, a través de una pedagogía para la paz, una información suficientemente clara y veraz sobre los Acuerdos, de tal manera que ayude a los colombianos a superar las dudas que han generado temores frente a lo decidido.
4. Ante la dejación de las armas, es perentorio que existan protocolos claros y públicos, que informen sobre el procedimiento para la destrucción de las mismas. De igual forma, que esta destrucción se realice de manera pública.
5. La Iglesia Católica que ha estado al lado de las víctimas durante todo el tiempo de la guerra, también acompaña este momento histórico de Colombia con el propósito de seguir ofreciendo su servicio, para que los gobernantes construyan una Nación que respete la democracia, la libertad y los derechos humanos y favorezcan los procesos de perdón, reconciliación y paz.

Los Obispos de Colombia invitamos a todos los colombianos a unirse en una súplica ferviente al Señor Jesús, príncipe de la paz, para que nos regale este don necesario en cada uno de los rincones del país. Asimismo, para que quienes lideran los destinos de Colombia, promuevan y defiendan caminos que dignifiquen a todos los ciudadanos y gesten una sociedad más justa y reconciliada.

Confiamos este Acuerdo, y los procesos que siguen, al cuidado y protección de la Virgen de Chiquinquirá, Reina y patrona de Colombia.



+ Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga
Arzobispo de Tunja
Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal

Bogotá, D.C., 23 de junio de 2016

[UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION]

PRESS RELEASE

Regarding the decision of the delegations of the National Government and of the FARC-EP, to sign the agreement to cease fire and hostilities, bilaterally and definitively, so as to surrender weapons, the Episcopal Conference of Colombia wishes to communicate for public opinion:

1. It is recognized that this as an historic event for the country, which is expected to be the first step to build peace so longed for Colombia, under the guarantee of respect for human rights and promotion of justice in every corner of the country.
2. This step that is occurring is the first of many others which must be agreed to in building peace among members of the FARC-EP and the Government, in order to reconstruct hope, always respecting institutional, national and international law, in the country that we dream and we want.
3. It is necessary that the Government offers for public opinion, through an education for peace, sufficiently clear and accurate information about the Agreements, so that it helps Colombians to overcome doubts which have generated fears of what has been decided.
4. Before the surrender of weapons, it is imperative that there are clear and public Protocols to report on the procedure for the destruction of same. Similarly, this destruction must be made publicly.
5. The Catholic Church has been on the side of the victims throughout the time of war, and also provides accompaniment in this historical moment for Colombia in order to continue offering its service, so that government officials may build a nation that respects democracy, freedom and human rights and encourages the processes of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.

The Bishops of Colombia invite all Colombians to join in a fervent supplication to the Lord Jesus, prince of peace, to give this gift necessary in every corner of the country. Also, for those who lead the destinies of Colombia, to promote and defend roads that dignify all citizens and create a fairer and reconciled society.

We entrust this Agreement, and the processes that follow, to the care and protection of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá, Queen and Patroness of Colombia.

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Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga
Archbishop of Tunja
President of the Episcopal Conference
Bogotá, DC, June 23, 2016