

Nonviolent Peaceforce Colombia Working Group Report January 2006



After the meeting of the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) International Governing Council (IGC) in Guatemala in August 2005, in which the formation of “The Colombia Working Group” was approved, the Latin American and Caribbean Coordinator started to strengthen the work that was being done in following the violent situation in various rural communities in Colombia. These communities are in the midst of a conflict that has already involved many innocent victims, a great number of major assassinations, kidnapping of children in order to make them join armed groups, women raped, communities displaced, etc.

Within this process the “The Colombia Working Group” was formed. It includes international collegial organizations that have already been carrying out the work of accompaniment in Colombia, such as PBI, FOR; plus Colombian organizations such as SUIPCOL, people from other countries, and members of the IGC who were invited to be part of this select group of people who will give their support with ideas, feed-back and suggestions for an appropriate development of the working group.

The Latin America Coordinator was invited by the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado to participate in the second meeting of the “Communities of Peace in Resistance.” This trip was very important for strengthening relationships with international and national organizations in Colombia and primarily with rural communities that have been asking for some type of “International Accompaniment” on the part of Nonviolent Peaceforce.

With these first dialogue and investigation steps, they were able to identify several of the main threats that the rural Colombian communities are suffering daily as well as the Peace Initiatives that have arisen to confront in a NONVIOLENT manner the situations of war.

THE MAIN THREATS FACED BY THE RURAL COMMUNITIES

TYPE OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

To individuals and to collective bodies of people.

Example: assassinations, persecutions, kidnappings, personal and community threats, displacements, theft, being singled out, stigmatizing, etc.

TYPE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AGGRESSION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

State terrorism, torture, collective massacres, detaining of individuals and groups, extortion, burning of houses, kidnappings.

TYPE OF MILITARY AGGRESSION

This allows them to hold a certain territory that involves the control of daily life of the inhabitants of that area, the mobility, kidnapping of children, raffling of bicycles and radios, etc. in order to convince children to join the armed groups.

TYPE OF ECONOMIC AGGRESSION- Economic blockades, withholding and theft of food from local people, control of the products that enter and leave their communities.

TYPE OF JUDICIARY AGGRESSION – Arbitrary detention of people, violation of due process of law, lack of communication, illegal entries in the government databases.

TYPE OF CULTURAL AGGRESSION – They have occupied, used and destroyed places, symbols, temples, meeting and relaxation sites sacred to the indigenous culture.

TYPE OF AGGRESSION TO THE HARMONY OF THE COMMUNITIES- Communities confronting each other in some cases.

TYPE OF AGGRESSION AGAINST THE RIGHT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION – Arbitrary detentions, lack of communication, lack of information about the reasons for detention, etc.

TYPE OF AGGRESSION AGAINST THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS – They have ignored the organizational procedures of the historic Black and Indigenous organizations, not respecting their processes and decisions.

TYPE OF AGGRESSION TO THE GIVEN WORD – “One keeps one’s word” is one of the values that the Indigenous and Black communities have maintained and that now has been violated and broken.

SOME INITIATIVES THAT WERE PRESENTED BY THE COMMUNITIES IN RESISTANCE IN THE FACE OF THE WAR:

In a clear and emphatic manner the communities made clear that they are not in favor of any of the armed actors, that they do not participate with any of them, and that they ask that their peace process be respected.

- ? Events, marches, gatherings and meetings for peace and for making visible their peace activities.
- ? Self-help food-producing projects
- ? Indigenous Guards where around 7,000 indigenous people offer “accompaniment” in community meetings and have even rescued leaders kidnapped by the armed groups.
- ? Recovering of the personal and ancestral right to act on and defend one’s rights, including to judge those who are perpetrating the attacks and to sanction them. They are supported in doing this by the Colombian Constitution that acknowledges this right.
- ? Community assemblies
- ? Governing capability of the Community Councils
- ? Early Warning System (Defense of the People)
- ? Women have recovered “child soldiers”
- ? Permanent demand for Justice and Reparations on all levels; not accepting the plea of IMMUNITY
- ? The major resistance is through the use of “The Truth” in which the community faced with the attacks speaks always on a national and international level and, in this way, has reached levels of credibility.
- ? Incidents on the national and international levels, with legal accusations made on the national and international levels
- ? Training of other communities in leadership development and democratic methods which are then shared with the other members in the community.
- ? Obtaining land titles
- ? Confronting the aggressors

With all the above, the next step on the part of the Working Group through the Latin America Coordinator began with choosing several of the communities that had asked for international accompaniment. In some cases, it was determined that there was a need to “consider them” for possible investigation by the Nonviolent Peaceforce in the future for a possible “International Accompaniment Project in Colombia.”

After a lengthy selection, analysis and evaluation process, the following regions were chosen for investigation in February of 2006: Choco, Valle del Cuaca, Meta, del Caqueta, and Antioquia.

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