

A Resounding Call for Change in Colombia Policy

June 2009

Dear Honorable Member of Congress,

On behalf of the 18 undersigned organizations, we would like to highlight recent events calling for substantial changes in U.S. policies towards Colombia that garnered exceptional constituent response.

The Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia is an annual effort by hundreds of congregations, university groups, and local organizations across the U.S. and Colombia to call for a new direction in U.S. policies towards Colombia. This year the initiative highlighted Colombia's grave internal displacement crisis—now the second largest in the world—and called on President Obama's Administration and Congress to enact policies that would mitigate rather than exacerbate the crisis. Given that the United Nations has confirmed that over four million Colombians have been forcibly displaced from their homes, U.S. assistance and trade policies towards the country must be evaluated through the lens of efficacy in ameliorating the crisis. Since the launch of Plan Colombia nine years ago, our staff and partners in Colombia have observed that such policies have actually contributed to displacement and have failed to adequately address the urgent needs of the displaced. Please see the enclosed letter that outlines the concrete policy changes we seek from the Obama Administration.

In April of this year, we invited our U.S. constituencies to send this call for change to the Obama Administration through multiple channels. Perhaps most novel was the invitation to gather in small groups, discuss the displacement crisis, and craft thousands of paper dolls to represent the millions of displaced Colombians. The paper dolls were then publicly displayed and delivered to governmental representatives in multiple U.S. cities on April 20. We also invited faith communities to incorporate Colombia-focused messages and prayers into worship services on April 19. Finally, we offered members the opportunity to send policy change requests to the Obama administration through postcards and faxes.

The level of participation in these Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia was unprecedented. Congregations, university groups, and other organizations across the country hosted doll-making parties that generated an overwhelming 18,913 paper dolls. These dolls were publicly displayed in eight public events in major cities across the U.S. and Colombia, including rallies, marches, and deliveries of the dolls to Congressional offices (see the enclosed pictures). Over two thousand people participated in these events. Meanwhile, 172 faith communities and nearly 25,000 people of faith prayed and spoke for change in Colombia policy during worship services in April. All in all, participants requested approximately 21,000 postcards to send the call for change to President Obama (see enclosed sample), in addition to sending 3,985 faxes and emails.

The groundswell of constituent participation in this year's Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia demonstrates mounting public concern in the U.S. about the displacement crisis in Colombia and the role that U.S. policies play. Our constituents are hopeful that the Obama Administration will fulfill its mandate of change by abandoning the discredited military aid and "free trade" policies of past administrations and refocus on efforts that truly alleviate Colombia's swelling humanitarian crisis. The policy proposals enclosed here provide a good starting point. We urge you to work toward their expedient implementation. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

(Signatory organizations on next page)

Signatory organizations:

(All of the following organizations helped coordinate the 2009 Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia)

8th Day Center for Justice

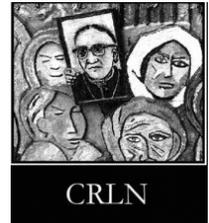


Colombia Human Rights Committee



COLOMBIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America



Christian Peacemaker Teams

Fellowship of Reconciliation

InterReligious Task Force on Central America



Latin America Working Group

Lutheran World Relief

Mennonite Central Committee, U.S. Washington Office



LATIN AMERICA
WORKING GROUP

Movement for Peace in Colombia

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries



Witness for Peace

Witness for Peace, Mid-Atlantic



Witness for Peace, New England

Witness for Peace, Northwest



Justice and
Witness Ministries



Witness for Peace, Southeast

Witness for Peace, Southwest

Witness for Peace, Upper Midwest



Our Call for Change

(As expressed in thousands of postcards, faxes, and emails to President Obama)

Dear President Obama,

With four million internally displaced people, Colombia is home to the Western Hemisphere's greatest humanitarian crisis, and ongoing conflict has forced half a million people to flee to neighboring countries. I urge you to act boldly to change U.S. policy in Colombia, beginning by:

- **Ending all military aid to Colombia.** The U.S. must stop funneling billions of taxpayer dollars to the Colombian military, given its ongoing ties to illegal paramilitary groups, its escalating practice of killing innocent civilians, and a system of impunity that fails to prosecute those responsible for human rights abuses.
- **Using U.S. influence to promote a negotiated end to the conflict.** In a conflict that threatens to go on indefinitely, Colombians are daily taking risks to relieve the immense suffering of the civilian population and achieve peace. The United States should lend its weight in support of these efforts.
- **Prioritizing social and humanitarian funding for internally displaced persons and refugees.** Given the gravity of the crisis, the U.S. must make prevention of displacement and protection of IDPs a top priority.
- **Supporting victims' efforts to find truth and obtain justice and integral reparations.** Armed actors from all sides have terrorized civilians with heinous acts. The U.S. must stand by and empower the truly courageous individuals, especially victims, who are searching for truth, justice, and integral reparations in these cases.
- **Increasing funds and accountability for programs that promote sustainable alternative development.** The U.S. should ensure that such programs are designed in consultation with Colombian peasant, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.
- **Forging economic ties that spur people-centered development, and abandoning failed FTA policies.** The U.S. should help create opportunities for small farmers, the rural poor, and endangered workers, rather than passing a free trade agreement capable of displacing Colombia's poor by pushing them further into poverty.
- **Ending fumigation and forced eradication programs** that have pushed thousands of farmers from their lands without reducing coca production. Instead, the United States should be investing in drug prevention and rehabilitation programs to reduce demand for drugs here at home.
- **Protecting the rights of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities** that have been disproportionately affected by displacement and the ravages of war. The United States should guarantee that U.S.-funded aid projects are not carried out on land obtained by violence.

Thank you for making human rights in Colombia a priority for your administration.