



## HUMANITARIAN MISSION FOR LIFE AND PEACE IN THE EASTERN PLAINS AND ORINOCO

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### Final Statement

Social and human rights organizations and communities of faith carried out this Humanitarian Mission to respond to the urgent call of the communities in the south of Meta and the north of Guaviare. For ten days (July 18 to 27, 2020), we travelled throughout the region. We walked and shared in the hamlets of Tercer Milenio, Caño San José, El Silencio, Nueva Colombia, La Cooperativa, Agua Linda (Caserío Santo Domingo) of Vista Hermosa and the Georgina Ortiz ETCR (Territorial Training and Reintegration Area). In the municipality of La Macarena, we met with communities of Losada Guayabero. In the municipality of Mesetas, we listened to inhabitants of the Mariana Páez ETCR and the surrounding communities, and the Simón Trinidad NAR (New Reintegration Area). During the inspection of La Julia, in Uribe, we spoke with NAR delegates from the community of La Pista and other neighboring communities. And in the north of Guaviare, we shared with the communities of Puerto Cachicamo and the Jaime Pardo Leal ETCR in the village of Colinas.

This tour was held during the COVID-19 pandemic, after agreeing on strict biosecurity protocols with the communities. We complied with the measures set out by the national government and the suggestions of the municipalities and departments we visited.

In this tour:

1. On the peasant's farms, **we saw** subsistence crops such as cassava, plantain, corn, sugarcane and fruit trees destroyed and uprooted; burned and desolate houses; destroyed water tanks, macheted hoses, produce scattered on the floor, broken kitchen utensils and mattresses. **We saw** remains of artifacts used by the ESMAD (Mobile anti-riot squad) and sheaths of long weapons used by the National Army. **We saw** the apprehensive and angry faces of small coca producers (whose crops have been forcibly eradicated) and subsistence farming families harassed by government forces. At the same time, the government allows the clearcutting of forests and extensive cattle raising on thousands of hectares. This has disrupted ecosystems and caused the forests to lose their functionality and connectivity.

**We saw** the fear on the faces of the local population, because of the threat of the military who, during the various operations, would shout, "Don't worry about us, worry about those who are coming after us. Long live the AUC!" reminding them of threats carried out in the past.

We saw former FARC fighters abide by the terms of the agreement in the ETCRs, NARs and reintegration processes in the communities that were visited. We saw the government's failure to fulfill its responsibilities towards the population in the reintegration process and the surrounding communities.

We saw roads in disrepair and bridges bombed by the army, which limit and slow travel in the region.

2. **We heard** indignant and grieved testimonies of women, men and children who had been attacked by the public forces. **We heard** mothers anguished and upset because of the mistreatment they have received, which feeds cycles of violence.

**We heard** testimonies of women who were sexually abused, threatened of being so, and victims of military monitoring and intelligence who would describe to them the underclothing they were wearing on a given day.

**We heard** testimonies of threats, stigmatization and personal injury by members of the public forces against community journalists, who documented abuses, aggression and the indiscriminate use of force in the forced eradication of coca crops. **We heard** about the judicialization and extinction of property rights as a strategy to dispossess and intimidate peasants and disarticulate the social fabric of their organizations.

**We heard** how a peasant was the victim of an anti-personnel landmine. The mine exploded in a spot that the peasants had walked through on the previous afternoon. It was halfway between two army units five minutes away from each other. **We heard** the story of the murder of a community spokesperson and the persecution of territory leaders.

**We heard** that the military arrived during the pandemic without following biosecurity measures, violating the local and even national quarantine regulations.

**We heard** about the presence of paramilitary groups in the region. **We heard** that dissident groups also have clashed with the public forces. We heard that children and young people refuse to go to school because they fear stepping on anti-personnel mines and running into army patrols.

**We heard** that mining and energy project zones cover vast areas of land many times larger than the Family Farming Unit. **We heard** that the government passed park protection legislation long after peasants "settled" the area and decided to remove them, even if many of these peasants have been protecting and conserving the park area for decades.

3. **We learned** about the history of state-led colonization of the region in the 1970s, bringing people from different regions of the country to "civilize" these territories. **We**

**learned** about the settlement of peasants forced by violence to leave their regions of origin. **We learned** of people pushed into this region because poverty forced them to leave their families behind to look for a piece of land or strip coca. Many of them died and their families never heard from them again. **We learned** about stories of people forced to live amid physical, psychological and symbolic violence.

**We learned** about the implementation of mining, energy, tourism and extractive projects in the very same areas where peasant communities are dispossessed of their lands through the judicialization or denial of their rights over the lands they have occupied for many years.

**We were made aware** of the uncertainty and indignation generated by the government's failure to implement the peace agreements, especially the PNIS (National Integrated Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops) and the PDET (Territory-focused Development Plans). Most of the peasants included in the PNIS voluntarily eradicated their crops, but the government fully followed only a tiny number of its commitments.

4. **We felt** the communities' impotence, fear and uncertainty because of what they have experienced; they sense that their uncertain future and the circles of violence are being transmitted from one generation to the next, and they see their life's work being taken away from them.

**We felt** the peasant communities' pain for their motherland when they see the military trample on their honor and treat them as enemies, and how the rule of law is replaced by might makes right and a violent and unfair state; when they see how the peace that we have all cherished for a few short years is fading away. We felt the indignation of seeing how the State, which should be the guarantor of fundamental rights, denies them in many ways. We felt the indignation of the communities because representatives of the State such as the police forces, the governor of Meta and others stigmatize them.

**We urgently appeal:**

To people of good will in Colombia and elsewhere in the world, to act to avoid a human and environmental tragedy of irreparable consequences.

To the different government bodies, to follow their constitutional duties, to protect the life of the people and preserve key ecosystems in the current worldwide climate.

To the international community, to demand the fulfillment of bilateral agreements and to compel foreign companies to respect the ethical requirements included in human and environmental rights. We also invite them to recognize the positive and negative impacts they have on the region: cocaine consumption and implementation of mining and energy projects, among others.

**Signed by:**

Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria - FENSUAGRO

Sindicato de Trabajadores Agrícolas Independientes del Meta – SINTRAGRIM

Corporación Claretiana Norman Pérez Bello

Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz

Humanidad Vigente Corporación Jurídica

Fundación por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos y el Derecho Internacional Humanitario del Oriente y Centro de Colombia – DHOC

Benposta – Nación de muchachos

Comunidades de Fe Teusaquillo Territorio de Paz

Centro de Alternativas al Desarrollo – CEALDES

Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina

CEPALC: Centro Ecuménico para América Latina de Comunicación

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Corporación Vida-Paz

Colectivo Sociojurídico Orlando Fals Borda

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International Action for Peace—IAP

