

Press Release

Peace in Chocó: Between the Shadow and the Light

The truth will set you free (John 8:32)

As the ethnic-territorial dioceses and organizations in the department of Chocó, we want to reiterate our continued hope for a negotiated solution to the Colombian armed conflict that has historically affected our nation. The signing of the peace agreement between the National Government and the FARC guerrillas as well as the start of the negotiations with the ELN in Quito are positive signs of progress in the arduous pursuit for peace.

However, with great concern we have observed certain occurrences that have weakened our faith in the successful completion of the peace processes.

1. In regards to the peace agreement with the FARC, the following issues are of particular concern: the logistical inadequacy of the demobilization concentration zones; the recurrent tendency in some social and political sectors to ignore signed agreements; a lack of clarity concerning the effective dismantling of militia structures in both rural and urban areas; and failure in the proper implementation of agreements with the ethnic chapter, particularly as a result of unawareness regarding previously established norms and principles.
2. We hold concerns regarding the ELN, as they have occupied the territories and spaces of ethnic populations, which have put communities and their leaders at risk.
3. In Chocó, as well as many regions across the country, we have witnessed the widespread and systematic control of illegal armed groups. These factions carry traditional discourse and attitudes of paramilitaries and occupy territories that the police force has been unable control, resulting in the insecurity and vulnerability of numerous communities. In recent months, religious and secular civil society organizations alike have expressed their concern about these occurrences, which have also been reported on in the international press.
4. In urban centers, violence and crime continue to occur, especially among youth and minority sectors. The population has been affected by prevalent insecurity and ineffectiveness in the part of the authorities. There are also testimonies regarding the presence of paramilitary groups that have established territorial control across urban centers and perpetrated killings, calling into question the Social Rule of Law.

Demands and appeals:

1. We demand from Colombian State the implementation of mechanisms of protection for the inhabitants of Chocó, including regaining control the arms trade monopoly, as outlined by the norms of the Rule of Law. In order to foster peacebuilding within the Chocó community, we demand the implementation of the accords established in Havana as well as the current negotiations with the ELN. The Colombian population expects visible results from the disarmament and dismantling of paramilitaries and

other criminal groups. As long as the public perceives leniency towards illegal armed forces on the part of the State, the peace process will lose credibility.

2. We urge the FARC and ELN guerillas to persevere in their commitment and willingness to ending the armed conflict by actively responding to the expectations of civil society.
3. We invite the Colombian diplomatic community and the United Nations to continue to support the peace processes and peace initiatives led by civil society, which contribute to a successful end of the armed conflict and the construction of peace for all Colombian territories.
4. We urge the local, regional, national, and international media to inform the public truthfully and serve as allies in making visible the humanitarian crisis occurring in Chocó.

May the God of life enlighten and strengthen us in the search for a more peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation.

Quibdó, March 17, 2017

Interethnic Forum

Departmental Indigenous Board

Diocese of Apartadó

Diocese of Istmina

Diocese of Quibdó