



Unity and Prioritization Can Convert Buenaventura into a Territory of Peace, Dignity, and Change

Last week, a delegation from Buenaventura, led by the mayor and her team, visited Washington, DC. During the visit, a meeting was held at the Colombian Embassy with U.S. civil society and the Buenaventura and Afro-Colombian diaspora.

Alarmed by Buenaventura's human and labor rights situation, as well as the insecurity coupled with the fiscal consequences of corruption and the lack of compliance with the 2017 civic strike agreements (intended to address the inequality gap and benefit Bonaverenses), our organizations would like to state the following:

Urban Peace Must Be Prioritized and Action Taken

We urge the Colombian Presidency, Colombian Congress, the High Commissioner for Peace, and the Colombian Attorney General's Office to do everything possible to move forward with the urban peace process that began in September 2022. This process brought much hope to those living in the city where the country's primary port is located. As the process was advancing, there was a reduction in armed violence and homicides. This was facilitated by the truce agreed upon between the illegal armed groups, which allowed for free transit of the area's inhabitants.

The significant drop in homicides between September and March 2022 encouraged many, both within and outside Colombia, to believe that peace was possible and that Buenaventura could exist without armed violence. There was hope that this marked the beginning of a better future. This socio-legal space allowed for a ceasefire agreement.

However, the urban peace process remains very fragile. For it to advance, the Colombian Congress needs to pass a law that provides a legal framework to streamline agreements and provide guarantees for the participants. At the same time, corruption

between some public officials and illegal groups has blocked the process and fostered distrust.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace has not prioritized urban peace processes, making them fragile. The necessary negotiation tools do not exist, which, unless resolved, may worsen insecurity. Inaction can result in the actors losing confidence in the process or deter participation in future processes, which is necessary for them to demobilize.

Local, national, and international civil society must oversee the process to guarantee its success. The process must also be transparent. Any criminal links between public officials and illegal groups must be severed. Parallel to this, protection for social, religious, and ethnic leaders must be ensured.

If the process fails, civilians who already live in very precarious and marginalized conditions, especially young adolescents and children, will suffer the most. A safe Buenaventura ensures better living conditions for its inhabitants, investments, and stability for both national and international businesses.

Advancing the Agreements signed on June 6, 2017.

All sectors -social, business, governmental, national, departmental, and local government- should unite to implement the Special Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Buenaventura 2040 (PIEDB 2040). These projects are crucial to fulfilling the commitments outlined in Law 1872 and its regulatory decree 958 of 2018. Despite facing significant setbacks and complex situations and attempts to disregard responsibilities in fulfilling these agreements, the demands voiced during the Buenaventura strike and the identified need for addressing inequality, inequity, and structural racism remain a priority.

The basic conditions required for living with dignity and peace in the territory -such as access to health, education, justice, productivity and employment, housing, and 24-hour drinking water- remain unresolved.

The U.S.-Colombia Labor Action Plan was signed with a commitment by both countries to resolve the labor rights crisis, labor precariousness, and the protection of port terminal workers. A decade after the signing, the labor situation remains precarious. It requires special attention from the Colombian Minister of Labor, the U.S. Department of Labor, the ILO, and all companies that use port services.

The agreements from the Buenaventura civic strike were intended to solve structural problems and guarantee rights. This includes the need for public and private investments to address the social investment deficit. The deficit results from resource mismanagement, corruption, and other structural issues that have depleted or diverted resources designated for the people. The economic model proposed in the PIEDB 2040 includes a vision of development¹ that increases resources, closes gaps and stimulates local economies.

¹ In 2040 Buenaventura is a biodiverse, multiethnic, multicultural, joyful and peaceful territory; nationally and internationally recognized for its ancestral and innovative forms of peaceful resolution of territorial and socio-political conflicts; for its sustainable tourism potential; for its pertinent and concerted land-use planning model with a differential approach that safeguards the territory, water, flora and fauna thanks to the recovery, protection, use and

As civil society organizations, we are still waiting for the U.S. government to move forward with the labor agreement regarding trade unionists and the port sector established under the FTA. Buenaventura should be included in future exchanges and actions to reduce racism and racial discrimination. We demand that President Joseph Biden, the U.S. Congress, the State Department, and the Department of Labor, within their mandates and agreements with Colombia, integrate efforts to dismantle illegal and criminal groups in Buenaventura, ensure justice for their victims, advance and implement the humanitarian agreements with the ELN that have a direct impact on the municipality of Buenaventura, and advance the implementation of the Ethnic Chapter of the 2016 peace agreement.

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Latin America Working Group (LAWG)

International Institute for Race and Equality

Colombia Peace Agreement NGO

Colombia Human Rights Committee (CHRC)

National Alliance of Afro-Colombian Journalists

Afro-Latino Development Fund

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conservation of ecosystems that contribute to environmental sustainability, as natural heritage of the Pacific Coast, the nation and humanity; being the epicenter of creative industries, cultural agendas and sports and artistic schools that enhance the material and immaterial heritage of the Region.

Buenaventura's rural and urban areas have been able to close historical gaps of economic and sociocultural inequality through the implementation of an innovative governance model in which decision-making on public policies, budgets and annual investments is the result of dialogue and consultation between official territorial and national entities; local governments and ethnic authorities of black and indigenous communities; social and cultural organizations and associations; academia and the private sector.

These actors, strengthened within themselves, deploy actions that enhance life as a fundamental value of development, improve territorial and community security and promote the empowerment and transmission of ancestral, spiritual, traditional and contemporary cultural values and practices. Thus, ethno-education and self-education have been appropriated as a fundamental basis in the processes of upbringing, socialization and academic training at all educational levels, including training for work, entrepreneurship and the development of ICTs; and significant progress has been made in the implementation of a model of access and quality of health as a social and collective right that integrates the ancestral medicine of black and indigenous peoples, allopathic and alternative medicine.

The District of Buenaventura is a competitive territory that articulates its own economy of clean production with trade, tourism and logistics and port services as well as local industry, combined with the production, processing and marketing of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner, which are enhanced by the presence of the State, foreign investment and productive linkages of agro-industrial activities to the international market, generating equitable growth of the economy characterized by sustainable practices.