

Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia

Personería Jurídica Especial 2069 del 10 de Octubre de 1997

PEACE DECLARATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA

The fruit of justice will be peace. Isaiah 32:17

1. The presence of Presbyterians in Colombia goes back to the time of Simón Bolívar, who requested support from Great Britain in the fight for independence from Spain. His request was granted and the British Legion arrived in the region. Among the soldiers was Colonel James Fraser, who married a granddaughter of General Santander and remained in Colombia, in the town of Salazar de las Palmas in northern Santander. Fraser, a Presbyterian, joined with a Catholic priest in the country's first ecumenical endeavor, cooperating to introduce coffee in our country. They demonstrated an attitude of tolerance and peace between creeds.

2. The first missionary of the Presbyterian Church, Henry Barrington Pratt, arrived in Colombia in 1856. Since then we have been present in different parts of the national territory, bearing witness to the love of God through the church and the creation of the American Schools in several cities, which were pioneers in educating boys and girls together.

3. We have lived as a religious minority through the different stages and historical conflicts in our nation, suffering religious persecution and intolerance until peaceful coexistence with other creeds was enabled when freedom of religion was established by the Constitution of 1991. We mention this reality not to ignite passions or point fingers but to acknowledge our lived experience. This has allowed us to learn the difficult process of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and contribute to peace among the Colombian people.

4. Our great intention is to be reconcilers in this society of deep enmity (Ephesians 2:14-16) between those who have held power for centuries and those who suffer the consequences of social exclusion. We know it is a long road not free from difficulties, but we have this glorious ministry, and in it we are not alone.

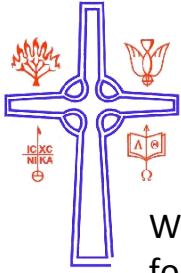
"158 years educating, serving, proclaiming the good news..."

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Barranquilla - Colombia



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We know that there will be no true reconciliation if there are no processes: of forgiveness among enemies (Matthew 18:21-22), of carefully seeking the truth (Psalm 85:11), of restorative justice (Galatians 6:1), and repairing the great wounds resulting from more than 50 years of armed conflict. We must learn about Jesus' actions in the face of violence and injustice in order to choose non-violent solutions to the conflict. As followers of Jesus, we cannot choose another way besides the way of PEACE. "Sustainable" peace that goes hand in hand with "restorative justice." Displaced persons and victims must be restored to their way of life, much as Calvin did 500 years ago with the thousands of displaced persons who arrived in Geneva through the Diaconal work of the Church.

5. As Reformed Christians we must bear witness to Christ. We know that the conversion of the hearts of Colombians is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. We pray that the Spirit blow in our country, bringing profound changes to the mentality of the violent and, by its grace, transforming this beautiful country into a place that gives rise to coexistence, inclusion, equity, and the full development of the creative potential of all for a dignified life.

6. Churches and civil society organizations can work with the government in the search for alternative solutions to the situation of violence, conflict, and political and social crisis in Colombia, whose harmful effects on the population are regularly disseminated by the different media of the country.

7. We hope that the dialogues between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP) will continue despite the obstacles encountered in recent months and regardless of the presidential election results.

8. In this context we call on the parties involved in the armed conflict to reach agreements including a bilateral ceasefire for the benefit of the civilian population in general, which is the first victim of the conflict.

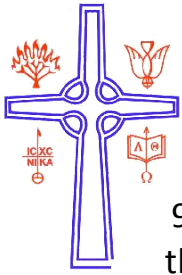
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9. We ask international protection bodies, churches agencies, participants in the ecumenical movement, and all those who love peace to support the efforts that are being made to achieve this purpose in Colombia and to engage in the subsequent implementation of agreements for cessation of the armed conflict as advisors, encouragers, and observers of the process.

10. We are asking the national government under leadership of the President to pay special attention to the current political situation and to refrain from the use of force in responding to complaints from different sectors of the citizenry: farmers, teachers, environmentalists, transportation workers, students.

11. We urge all people, political leaders, parties, representatives of civil society, and churches, to set aside a spirit of defensiveness and to participate in the construction of a true and lasting peace.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA

Barranquilla

June 5, 2014

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