



Tomorrow's
Peace
Starts Today!

Days of Prayer and Action

May 15 - 18, 2015

#DOPA #PeaceForColombia

May 18, 2015

Dear President Obama and Members of the U.S. Congress,

As leaders of a broad range of faith-based organizations and religious communities across the entire United States, we are greatly encouraged by the advances in the Colombian peace process. We are heartened by the recent agreements of the negotiating parties to remove land mines and to account for the disappeared, by actions from both parties to reduce ongoing conflict, and by the willingness of the negotiating parties to listen to a dramatic range of courageous victims of violence by all armed actors. Now, more than ever, we are convinced that this process offers an historic opportunity to end a conflict that has displaced more than 6 million women, men and children, disappeared over 25,000 and killed more than 220,000 people, over eighty percent of whom were civilians.

We deeply value the Obama Administration's increasing signs of support for the Colombian peace negotiations, including the appointment of a special envoy to the peace process and Vice President Biden's 2014 visit highlighting the negotiations and the rights of victims of the conflict. We appeal to all members of the U.S. Congress to join in a bipartisan support for peace and to commit to accompany Colombians of all walks of life as they seek to implement peace with truth and justice.

As the peace process with the FARC guerrilla advances, we make an urgent appeal to the Colombian government and the ELN guerrillas to open serious negotiations and to the United States and international community to encourage this important step. Peace can only be fully achieved when all actors on the battlefield seek to end the conflict.

As we rejoice in advances for peace, we know that the road ahead is difficult. As some of our Colombian colleagues have told us, "there can 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 urge the Administration and Congress to press the Colombian negotiators to incorporate the just demands of victims of all armed actors—victims of the guerrillas, paramilitaries and the Colombian armed forces—for truth, justice, meaningful and successfully implemented reparations, and guarantees that the brutal past will never be repeated. This challenge includes addressing the severe social and political exclusion of Colombia's poor and marginalized communities that contributed to fueling the conflict.

The United States government is speaking the words of peace--and that is most welcome. It is also critical that all of our actions and assistance support peace. Instead of military aid, assistance should be transformed to support peace accord implementation, address humanitarian needs, and strengthen civilian institutions. In a post-peace accord society, civilian justice and law enforcement institutions should replace the military in Colombia's countryside, and development efforts should be civilian-led. U.S. assistance should be increased to civil society organizations that can help build peace on the ground.

U.S. assistance should also focus on the safe and sustainable return of land for internally displaced persons and refugees. We urge the United States to advocate and provide funding for more effective



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protection programs for returning communities, as well as for human rights defenders, union members, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and political groups that may join the electoral process once peace is declared. U.S. aid and diplomacy should be used to ensure full implementation of the Labor Action Plan, signed prior to the free trade agreement; its commitments to protect trade unionists and encourage respect for labor rights are still largely unfulfilled.

U.S. funding should also support strong truth and justice mechanisms, as well as demobilization and reintegration programs, rehabilitation for child soldiers, programs for victims of sexual violence, land mine education and removal, support for families of the disappeared in the search for their relatives, and the continuation of a robust human rights program. The United States government can contribute to the quest to establish the truth about the conflict by issuing an inter-agency order to declassify U.S. documents for a truth commission.

Just as the parties to the conflict will be bound to respect the peace accords that emerge, so too should the international community act to uphold them. For the United States, that will include respecting the agreements that have been reached on rural and drug policy. This calls for a greater focus on small-scale, farmer-led rural development and for a focus on alternative development programs built with farmers' participation rather than aerial spraying programs, which destroy staple food crops and harm the environment and communities' health. This shift offers a more sustainable and effective approach to reduce illicit drug production and strengthen rural communities.

As well as developing peace-oriented assistance, there are other actions the United States can take to help Colombia build peace on the ground. The U.S. government can urge the Colombian government to dismantle paramilitary successor groups that continue to threaten and harm rural and urban communities. This includes investigating and prosecuting those members of the Colombian armed forces, police, civilian authorities, landowners and businesses that continue to aid, abet and tolerate these brutal groups. Only when all the varied sources of violence are addressed can peace fully take root.

We wish to caution that as the peace process advances, threats and attacks against victims' representatives, land rights leaders, faith leaders, human rights defenders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, and peace advocates have increased. Now and following a peace accord, the United States must call on the Colombian government to denounce these threats and attacks, provide protection and, most importantly, ensure that these threats and attacks are promptly and effectively investigated and prosecuted. Peace can only be achieved when all Colombians can freely and safely exercise and express their rights.

Finally, we urge the United States to reaffirm the role of victims' associations, faith organizations, and civil society organizations in constructing peace. These organizations can and should play a vital role in implementing and monitoring peace accords, advancing reconciliation, assisting victims to rebuild their lives, reintegrating former combatants and rebuilding the societal fabric that war has torn asunder.

We urge the United States to embrace its moral obligations to help Colombia build a just and lasting peace.



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