

# Nashville 2001 Delegate Actions Congregational Follow-Up Resources for Colombia Resolution

*The letter to President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell was initiated by Lawrence Greaser, former interim MBM/COM director for Latin America, and J. R. Burkholder, former Peace and Justice Committee member, and written in consultation with the interim Council on Faith, Life and Strategy and the Colombian Mennonite Church.*

## The Task of the Colombian Churches

The Anabaptist churches in Colombia strive to be both prophetic and pastoral in the midst of war: *pastoral* in the way that they walk alongside the victims of violence and displacement, offering support and counsel as people try to re-build their lives; *prophetic* in the way they raise their voices to Colombian society and government about the need for nonviolent solutions to the conflict.

In total, there are 57 Anabaptist churches in Colombia with a combined membership of approximately 3,200: 36 Mennonite Brethren churches with a total of 1,800 members; three Brethren in Christ churches with a total of 110 members; and 18 Mennonite churches with a total of 1,200 members.

### Some of the initiatives of these Anabaptist churches include:

- **Mencoldes (Mennonite Developments Foundation of Colombia)**, the relief and development agency of the Colombian Mennonite churches, is assisting more than two thousand people in displacement and/or poverty through accompaniment and training. With displaced persons they provide humanitarian aid, medical attention, legal advocacy, and assistance in psychosocial recuperation and economic sustainability.
- **JustaPaz**, a national justice and peace organization that promotes conflict resolution and nonviolence through teaching in schools, congregations, and government offices, through dialogue with armed groups, and by promoting conscientious objection. JustaPaz also promotes human rights and peace within a coalition of other Protestant churches and within the national peace movement.

### Other Mennonite agencies working in Colombia

- **Christian Peacemaker Teams**—In May of 2001, a CPT team came to Barrancabermeja, Colombia, at the invitation of refugees who have been displaced from their home communities as a result of paramilitary violence along the Magdalena and Opón Rivers. CPTers provide physical accompaniment, act as human rights observers, initiate public nonviolent actions calling for an end to the violence, and distribute press releases and other materials to international media as a way of raising awareness among the global community. To learn more, visit the CPT web site (below).

Dear Friend,

"You have sown seeds of justice and peace for many years and now is the time for harvest," says Colombian Mennonite Church leader Ricardo Esquivia. He urges post-September 11 North American Mennonites to be active peacemakers.

We have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in Colombia. In the midst of poverty and violence made worse by our own country's economic and political policies, the Colombian Mennonite Church is demonstrating its commitment to Christ's way of peace. I'm impressed with the Colombian Mennonite Church's commitment to integrate faith and action, their multitude of ministries to share God's love with the poor and displaced in their communities, the solid Bible teaching from Mennonite pastors I experienced wherever we traveled, and the number of women in pastoral roles. But most of all, I'm impressed with the determination of the Colombian Mennonite Church to follow the Prince of Peace, Christ the King!

Last summer in Nashville, at the request of the Colombian Mennonite Church, MC and GC delegates passed a resolution asking our government to halt military aid to Colombia and to provide more social and humanitarian aid instead. Along with Executive Board member Jane Peifer, I was able to personally present this resolution to Colombian church leaders several weeks ago when I was in Colombia with an MCC study tour.

I hope you'll join me in continuing to pray for our brothers and sisters in Colombia, that God may be near to them, protect them, and bless their faithfulness. I also hope you'll join me in urging our government to stop its interference in Colombia.

I commend this resource to you and I encourage you to help your congregation use it to act in support of our Colombian brothers and sisters. Let's begin to harvest the seeds of justice and peace we've sown!



**J. RON BYLER**, Associate Executive Director  
Mennonite Church USA Executive Board



To the family of faith of the United States of America:

Through the apostle Paul we know that in these end times, faced with violence and injustice, creation is crying out with birthing pain, and we, the global family of faith, groan with it, waiting for redemption. Brothers and sisters, every birth is painful. Through these acts that we suffer God is trying us and inviting us to be birth parents of the new history where evil is overcome by good, where the enemy is loved, where we can all live without fear, and where nations respect the human dignity of all people on Earth.

The solidarity that you have always showed for the pain of other peoples must not be lost with these recent acts [of September 11] that affect you directly. Rather, may your compassion increase with your own suffering and permit you to understand that it is in your country that the birthing process must begin. At this time the United States is the center of the world and what is done there has positive and negative repercussions in the other countries of the world. Citizens of the United States, like all other peoples, will enjoy or suffer the consequences sooner or later. "He who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward" (Proverbs 11:18).

It seems very symbolic that precisely this passage on birthing new life (Romans 8:22-23) is included in Paul's letter to the Romans, given that Rome was the center of the world in those times. I believe that this is a direct message to all the church of Christ that finds itself in the center of world political power, and that is where you are. What a great challenge and responsibility has come upon you today!

Your brother in Christ and humanity,

**RICARDO ESQUIVIA BALLESTAS**, Member of the Colombian Mennonite Church, Director of the Commission of Human Rights and Peace of the Counsel of Evangelical Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL), Director of JustaPaz

- **Mennonite Central Committee**—Through financial assistance and personnel, MCC supports Colombian Mennonite efforts to build peace and provide assistance to those displaced by the violence. MCC also provides worship and advocacy resources on Colombia for North American churches. Through these resources MCC encourages U.S. taxpayers to re-direct the military portion of their taxes to Colombian peace efforts.
  - **Commission on Overseas Mission and the Mennonite Board of Missions**—support the work and vision of the Colombian Mennonite Church through grants, personnel, exchanges, relationship building, and partnerships.
5. Withhold war tax dollars from your income tax payment and give them instead to peacemaking efforts.
  6. Find out how your congregation can support a Colombian congregation working for peace. Sister churches become a testimony for love, nonviolence, and active peace work as they provide a response to the wounds, fear, and brokenness which Colombia's conflict engenders. E-mail JustaPaz <justapaz@colnodo.apc.org> with "Sister sanctuary churches" in the subject heading.
  7. Learn more about coffee economics and use fair-trade coffee in your home and church. Try the "Café San Miguel" brand available from your nearest Ten Thousand Villages store.

## Call to action

1. Write to the Colombian Mennonite Church. Tell them of your prayers, support, and actions on their behalf (Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia, Avenida 32 No. 14-42, Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia).
2. Order a copy of the MCC packet *Turning toward peace: Dollars and Letters for Colombia*. The packet includes:
  - a letter from Colombian Mennonites;
  - information about peacemaking efforts of Mennonites in Colombia;
  - letters you can write in support of peacemaking efforts;
  - facts about the U.S. military aid package;
  - details about withholding war tax dollars to support peacemaking in Colombia.
3. Send a financial contribution to support peacemaking efforts in Colombia through the Mennonite Mission Network, MCC, or CPT.
4. Write to your representative, senators, and the President. Call on them to stop any further military aid via Plan Colombia or the Andean Initiative. Ask them to support funding for social and economic development in Colombia, and money for drug

## Resources

- *A Common Place* MCC magazine: Colombia profile, November 2001
- *At Such a Time as This*: Peace Sunday packet available from MCC Ontario, phone 519-745-8458, peacepacket@mennonitecc.on.ca
- *Turning toward peace: Dollars and Letters for Colombia* packet from MCC, 21 South 12th Street, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500, 888-563-4676

## Web sites

- Mennonite Central Committee U.S.: [www.mcc.org/us/colombia](http://www.mcc.org/us/colombia)
- Mennonite Central Committee Canada: [www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/colombia1.html](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/colombia1.html)
- Christian Peacemaker Teams: [www.prairienet.org/cpt/colombia/php](http://www.prairienet.org/cpt/colombia/php)
- Peace and Justice Committee (letters from Colombian Mennonites, legislators' addresses): [www.MennoLink.org/peace](http://www.MennoLink.org/peace)
- Washington Office on Latin America (talking points on U.S. drug policy): [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org)



## Nashville 2001 delegate action: Colombia Resolution

### U.S. "Aid" to Colombia: Fuel on the Fire

"Just as lighter fluid among flames produces more fire, more arms produce more war in the middle of social conflict. This military 'aid' will not put an end to the war nor eradicate drug-trafficking. It will only increase the number of deaths and the suffering of the Colombian people...."

"Perhaps, brothers and sisters, it is precisely in order to support the Colombian churches in turning the governmental message of death from the North into life that God has placed you there in the nations of the North at this time, just as God did with Esther."

—*Excerpts from letter to North American churches from the Colombian Mennonite Church, July 2000*

### "Plan Colombia"—FY 2000 and FY 2001

In 2000, the U.S. government approved nearly \$1.3 billion in aid to Colombia in order to "fight the drug war." The vast majority of the assistance—80 percent—was for Colombian military and security forces. Much of this military aid has already been delivered to Colombia.

### "Andean Regional Initiative"—FY 2002

In early 2001, the U.S. government proposed a broader strategy, giving aid not only to Colombia but to its neighbors as well. This plan is called the Andean Regional Initiative.

The Andean Initiative includes a decrease in military and police aid for Colombia and an increase in economic and social aid. But it is still weighted toward security forces, which receive about 70 percent of the funds, with the remaining 30 percent designated for social programs.

Final funding for the Andean Regional Initiative was yet to be determined as of mid-November, but it will likely be around \$625 million. In 2002 the U.S. government will almost certainly propose sending additional money to the Colombian military.

There is growing criticism of the policy, however. Several amendments to decrease the military portion of the aid were offered in Congress this past year. Although these amendments were defeated, they represent increasing efforts to change the policy. With the continued efforts of peace and justice advocates, this momentum will continue to grow.

### Advocacy Proposals

Colombian church members have outlined some policies that the United States could pursue which would promote peace, instead of furthering the violence in their country. These include: support for civil society and governmental peace initiatives, assistance for people displaced from their homes, encouragement of judicial reform, and economic development for small and medium-size producers, in order to provide an alternative to coca production.

*This information was current as of November 2001. For continued updates on U.S. aid proposals, see the Center for International Policy's website at <[www.ciponline.org/colombia/](http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/)>.*

—*Rachelle Schlabach, MCC Washington Office*

## Prayer for Peace

From Janna Bowman, JustaPaz

*The following prayer was inspired by a discussion in a "Moment for Peace" gathering held at the Teusaquillo Mennonite Church, Bogotá, Colombia. Each Wednesday from 12:30-1:30 p.m., church people, community members, and displaced families gather for a time of prayer, reflection, and social and political analysis. Last week we asked the question, "What is your prayer for sisters, brothers, and the government of the United States at this time?" This is what they said. May Christians in the North hear their cry and amplify their voice.*

### A Colombian Prayer for Peace

God of justice and peace, Holy Spirit that moves in our midst allowing us to love and forgive, we pray for a sweeping of the Spirit through the peoples of the world, a swelling of desire for closer relationship with you, and true peace among the nations. God of salvation, we pray for restoration and peace in Colombia. We place the United States before you, God, lifting before you our sisters and brothers of this great and powerful nation.

We plead for a pouring of your grace and wisdom upon them—strengthen and make bold those walking your nonviolent path. Touch the hearts of those hardened in the ways of violence and greed, fill them with uncertainty about their oppressive policies, and give them willingness to hear the words of those who give voice to your loving will.

We pray that they use their power for good and stun the world by granting pardon and gifting the nations with peace.

God, we know that weapons don't heal the wounds generated by conflict. At this moment we ask that the U.S. people, government, and economic powers help us sow seeds of love and peace in our Colombian soil so that one day we may enjoy these same fruits.

We cry out for an end to the systems and policies that impoverish our communities, intensify violence, and kill our food crops.

We pray that the leaders of Colombia speak on behalf of the majority, suggesting alternatives to military solutions that steal rather than give life to our nation.

And for ourselves, continue gracing us with the strength and will to struggle against the principalities and powers and for the coming of your kingdom on Earth. Even as we rise before the powers demanding an end to the exportation of war into our land, we humble ourselves before you, our King of kings and Lord of lords.

We who are tired of violent death and woundedness bow to the true God of salvation. Saving Grace, use us as instruments in the Spirit's work of restoration for peace.

Oh Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.



**Graphic Note:** *Ojos de Buey, Ox Eyes, are large seeds harvested from a flowering vine growing in the jungles of southern Colombia, zones of escalating conflict. In his presentation at Nashville 2001, Ricardo Esquivia gave delegates Ox Eyes to symbolize the seeds of justice and peace Anabaptists have sown. Now it is time for the harvest.*

421 South Second Street, Suite 600  
Elkhart IN 46516-3243  
T: 219-294-7131, F: 219-293-3977  
E: info@MennoniteUSA.org

Hon. George W. Bush  
President of the United States of America

Hon. Colin Powell  
Secretary of State of the United States of America

Esteemed Gentlemen,

We, the official delegate body of Mennonite Church USA, along with other members of the church, including over 5,000 youth gathered in Assembly in Nashville, Tenn., July 2-7, send greetings and our prayers that you may have wisdom and courage to lead our country and the global community in ways of peace and justice for all.

We speak from our faith in Jesus Christ and from our history as a Christian people who have believed in and attempted to practice ways of peace and love. We present for your consideration and action the following Resolution regarding Colombia and the involvement of our government in that country.

#### **Preamble**

Our concern for the situation in Colombia is informed by regular reports from the Mennonite Church of Colombia, along with frequent communications from other church and peace groups in that troubled land. The following statements are based largely on these sources, which give us information not always found in the normal news media.

We know that for more than 40 years Colombians have been living in serious social, political, and economic realities that have produced a culture of violence, a destroyed economic infrastructure and a fragmented and desperate civil society that leaves millions of common people's life-dreams frustrated.

We are informed of some 30,000 deaths yearly and the displacement of 2 million rural people from their land. From February through April of this year 55,000 such persons have been driven from their homes and farms.

We are told that the problems of this ongoing conflict have been augmented over the past 15 years by the terrible drug-trafficking business, which has its root in the demand for illegal drugs in our country and elsewhere.

We are informed that under the pretext of a war on drugs the United States has become a partner with the Colombian armed forces in a counter-narcotics campaign that is devastating the country, stepping up the levels of violence on all sides through military "aid," and thus sending a message of death and destruction to the Colombian people.

We are told that the fumigation efforts of Plan Colombia have destroyed food crops and caused sickness of both humans and animals, only to drive desperate people elsewhere to grow coca and cash crops, as well as intensifying the conflict between guerilla and paramilitary groups.

In light of these facts, we believe that Plan Colombia does not adequately address the long standing problems of poverty, injustice and violence, but instead, in its military assistance aspect, exacerbates these problems and increases the frustration and misery of the majority of Colombian people.

We recognize that the Colombian situation is very complex and that it is exacerbated by the demand for drugs in our country. We do not have easy answers to the problems that beset Colombia. However, we lament, along with our Colombian brothers and sisters, the decision of the United States government to send funds and support to the Colombian security forces.

#### **Therefore be it resolved that**

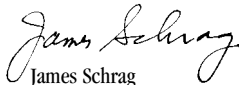
We, MENNONITE CHURCH USA, hereby express solidarity and support for the churches and agencies in Colombia who have borne the heavy burden of cultivating peace in a culture of violence. We pledge our support for initiatives that uphold human rights and encourage peaceful dialogue in Colombia.


We call on you as leaders to direct our nation in the reduction of the demand for illegal drugs in our country, thereby also lessening the incentive to produce them.

We request a change in Plan Colombia, a plan that uses violent means, including the destruction of cash crops and the homes of poor people, with the consequent displacement of millions within their own country. We urge an increase in funding and support for alternative cash crops and markets for the farmers of the Andean area.

We promise to pray that God will give you and other leaders of our country wisdom and courage to do what is right and pleasing to God, remembering that we should treat other nations the way we would like them to treat us.

Respectfully submitted this seventh of July 2001 on behalf of the delegates of the Mennonite Church USA Assembly meeting in Nashville,

  
James Schrag  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Church USA

  
Lee Snyder  
Moderator  
Mennonite Church USA

