

Witness for Peace:

An Urgent Message From Our Columbian Partners

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Bogotá, Colombia - July 1, 2000

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this?

-Esther 4:14

My dear Brothers and Sisters, the gospel invites us to know how to "interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3). For this reason, "with fear and trembling", I dare to write to you in this moment of confusion and pain that the Colombian people are suffering, in search of solidarity and fraternal discernment.

The government of the United States of America, the most powerful hegemonic force in the world at the moment, has turned its eyes upon our small country of Colombia. The US Congress recently approved an "aid" package to the Colombian government for \$1,300,000,000, of which almost 90% goes towards military support for the army, in other words, to escalate the war.

In the same manner, the Colombian government is soliciting a similar amount of money from the European governments within the same vision found in the so-called "Plan Colombia", which seeks to gain military advantages over the guerrillas in order to supposedly reach peace in this country. It is probable that the European governments will follow in the footsteps of the USA.

During the last 50 years, Colombians have been living through a serious social conflict that is currently degenerating into an armed conflict that leaves:

- a disastrous annual count of 30,000 violent deaths,
- close to 2 million displaced people,
- a destroyed economic infrastructure in the country,
- an illegitimate government,
- a fragmented and desperate civil society
- and millions of common people's life-dreams frustrated.

In the last 15 years, the problems of this social conflict have been augmented by the terrible drug-trafficking business, which is financed by international mafia and carried out by Colombians. It is a business that takes advantage of many people's greed, the government's weakness, the corruption of many politicians, and the displaced and unemployed people's hunger and misery. It flourishes in this country of deep jungles, wide-spread mountain ranges and extensive coasts along two oceans.

Now drug-trafficking has become a source of financing for the guerrilla groups, paramilitary and self-defense groups, and turns into an excuse for the USA to intervene in Colombia, disguising these actions as a war against drugs, when perhaps really they are looking for the "external enemy" that they lost at the end of the cold war.

The bias in the media's presentation of scarce news about Colombia shows the violent actions pornographically, as if they were produced by drug-trafficking, presents the Colombian conflict as a diabolical struggle between mafia cartels, and hides the real basis of social injustice that produced the drug-traffic business in the first place. This bias has robbed other nations, such as the USA, Canada and European countries, of the opportunity to feel solidarity towards the pain of the Colombian people. They are blind when their respective governments use tax-payers money to increase the unfortunate situation of the Colombian people by escalating the war.

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. People displaced by the war increment coca cultivation in order to survive, such that more and more drugs reach the USA. This ominously vicious cycle increasingly involves more and more foreign powers, enriches the mafia, takes away the government's legitimacy and gives more power and authority to the guerrilla groups.

The Colombian people are not a drug-trafficking cartel, but rather a caring people that shows solidarity to others. Just like all other people, Colombians dream and seek a better future, largely guided and illuminated by simple churches that sprout up in the midst of the conflict and violence as a seed of hope that announces and lives out the "abundant life" which comes from the Prince of Peace.

What the North is sending to the Colombian people through this military "aid" is a message of death and destruction, amplified by a profound silence from many of the brothers and sisters from the North that belong to the great global faith family.

For this reason we are sending out this message to the churches [and faith based organizations] in the North that come from countries where their taxes paid to their governments are economically supporting, in their name, the annihilation of the Colombian nation and people.

We are asking you, just as Mordichai desperately pleaded with Esther regarding the threat of annihilation of the Jews, to not remain quiet at this time, but to unite your voices with ours in order to denounce the perverse nature of this kind of "aid" and the ever-closer danger that this war-like conflict may affect your homes and produce the death announced in the Biblical passage.

We plead with you, just as Esther did, to call together all believers and to fast and pray for the Holy Spirit to change the minds of your governors, and to give strength and wisdom to the members of Colombian churches so that we might console, offer hope and continue to take a message of life and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ to this people and this suffering church.

We invite churches and local congregations in the north to join Colombian churches and local congregations, strategically located throughout the country. Through interdependent fraternal relationships, we can create "Churches as Sanctuaries for Peace". These Sanctuaries can, by holding a broad vision, incarnate the intervention of the Holy Spirit through specific actions.

From these new "Churches as Sanctuaries for Peace", particularly those located in Colombia, we can bring the Colombian people a message of "abundant life" (John 10:10) and peace as promised by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. We live out this message through training, consolation, humanitarian aid to displaced people, pastoral support, integral projects to reconstruct lives and other creative forms of relating.

We ask you for support to transform this vicious cycle of death and destruction that military aid produces, into a virtuous cycle of abundant life and peace. In this way our people can receive an alternative message from the people of the north, sent by the churches there. This message would show that life, respect and solidarity can also come from the north.

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.

May God bless you and may Gods peace stir you.