

Peace for Life Second People's Forum

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA • 20-23 MARCH 2009

Organized in partnership with Colombian NGOs and social movements led by

Proyecto Justicia y Vida

BOGOTÁ DECLARATION 2009

Faith and Resistance for Peace and Life in the Age of U.S./Global Empire

With the powers of dance, music, testimonies and prayers, and enriched by multiple analyses, we Colombian peoples' movements, and international delegates in solidarity, issue this joint call to the international community. In March 2009 at Bogotá, Colombians through *Proyecto Justicia y Vida*, joined with the Second People's Forum of *Peace for Life* to focus Colombia's armed conflict and struggle within a larger global context, under the theme, "Without Fear of Empire: Global People's Resistance." *Peace for Life* defines its peace and justice objectives in relation to the core issues of empire, state terrorism and militarized neoliberal globalization, especially as forged by the imperial power of the U.S.

The international delegation brought solidarity and support, with over 50 political activists, scholars, laity, pastors, priests, and peoples attending from every continent. Hundreds of Colombians met in common purpose with international guests coming from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Fiji, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Palestine, Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa, South Korea, Tonga, United Kingdom, and the United States.

RESISTANCE'S PAIN AND POWER

Together, we Colombians and international delegates, weave the strength of our resistance with our faith for a common struggle. Our struggle grows strong amid the destruction of peoples and lands that the U.S global empire—with its transnational corporations and Neoliberal policies—inflicts upon the peoples of Colombia and so many others.

Colombia today is burdened by the nightmare of more than 50 years of armed conflict, as guerrilla groups have waged an ongoing struggle against unjust Colombian governments. The present government exploits this long-standing conflict to advance the special interests of its elite, the 3 percent of the population who owns over half of Colombia's arable land. The conflicts inside the country are many and complex, but we lift our cry especially against the U.S. global empire, which, often with Europe's complicity, endlessly multiplies the people's pain.

There is some hope, because today the power of the U.S. global empire is in decline, due to its own internal economic crisis, and the unyielding resistance of people's movements in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. Moreover, there are the rival powers of a stronger China, Russia, and especially the new governments brought to power by peoples' movements across Latin America (in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, for example). Nevertheless, the empire remains a threat. It has divided the entire globe into strategic command regions, and maintains over 800 military bases worldwide. The U.S. is now making a desperate and brutal assault on the people of Colombia, in order to secure empire's traditional hold over all the Americas and, by extension, over the globe. Empire is hungry for the resources of Colombia, Latin America's fifth largest economy. It has a particular hunger for narco-trafficking, exploiting it and so destroying humanity. It now seeks to strengthen its strategic position in Colombia, located between Central and South America, and bordering Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. Empire especially covets the oil of Colombia, the third largest Latin American supplier of oil to the U.S. (after Venezuela and Mexico). To feed its domestic demand for oil, the U.S. imports more oil from Latin America than even from the Middle East. And with gains and investments from these resources, the empire plays a ruthless game, a "casino capitalism," a speculation of high finance that brings the people low.

And so, Colombia's peoples are bleeding. Women, children, the aged—especially those from Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant/*campesino* communities—are now being displaced and dispossessed from their lands. Indigenous peoples' struggle for their land and culture is met by the Colombian state's continued repression and threats of "extinction." Middle classes have been exploited by their banks and lending agencies. Millions of displaced persons and refugees have been created by strategic maneuvers of elites who expropriate land for economic gain and power. These displacements are not just a simple transfer of peoples from one place to another; they are the brutal, forced loss of home and housing, being coerced to live without dignity, seeing loved-ones killed, tortured, poisoned by defoliating spraying of coca fields, denuding and polluting mother earth. Moreover, when leaders for peace and justice have come forward to work in peaceful and political ways, they routinely have been assassinated by military and paramilitary agents.

We have seen this bleeding before. We recognize the bleeding of Colombian peoples as U.S. Empire's work elsewhere. It is, for example, the same bleeding we see when the empire of America and Israel work together to dispossess Palestinian peoples of their lands, enforcing more than 60 years of colonization, apartheid discrimination, and illegal occupation of Palestine. In Colombia today, Israel works as a full partner with the United States in the funding and training of military and paramilitary forces to enact illegal dispossession of lands and peoples, as they do in Palestine.

It is the same bleeding from empire that, historically, we have seen in the invasions and occupations of the Philippines for its resources and strategic position, in the partition and brutal militarization of the divided Koreas, in the more than a million lives lost in the U.S. war in Vietnam, in the militarized colonization of Puerto Rico, in the economic isolation and invasion

of Haiti, in the brutal interventions into democratic struggles in Nepal, in the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and in the embargos and attacks on the people's revolution in Cuba. Today we see the bleeding continue, in the war and occupation of Iraq (a million of its civilians sacrificed to empire), in the suffering of young women and men in the sweat factories of empire's "free trade export zones," in the uninvestigated feminicides (murders of women) in Guatemala, in the networks of human trafficking (in women, especially), in the empire's torture cells of Abu-Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, in the empire's feeding on the callous neglect and exploitation of Dalit people, in the imperial actions and inactions in Rwanda, the Congo and Sudan, and in the empire's current spiraling into greater militarization and war in Afghanistan. Even as we meet in Bogotá, we also hear the cries from Sri Lanka, where civilians are dying from attacks by a government supported by the US in the name of a "struggle against terrorism."

Empire has its own religion, often believing that this bleeding is a necessary sacrifice for globalization, for civilization, for the future of all peoples. Too many Christian churches preach this theology, condoning the sacrifice of the poor, or becoming complicit by their silence with this sacrifice of the earth and her poor. We reject this theology of sacrifice for imperial globalization. We refuse to be the sacrificial lambs for the empire's pretexts and projects, whether called "war on terrorism," "war on drugs," or "development."

THE CALL AND PLEDGE OF A COUNTER-IMPERIAL FAITH

We, nevertheless, are not just bleeding. We are also breathing life, and celebrating life's emergence, even in the throes of U.S. imperial power. We breathe in our rage and mourning, and live out a new culture of memory, remembering to be led toward justice and peace by our many departed ancestors and martyrs. We breathe and calmly discern in empire the structural demons of greed and violence that we must name and resist everywhere. We breathe within a fragile ecosystem of air and water, and are thus united and empowered with all peoples of this one earth, which births and nurtures us all. In Bogotá, we Indigenous, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and other peoples of conscience, celebrate together this new spirituality of breath and life. This spirituality breaks down the politics and religions of self-centeredness, egoism, individualism, and greed, and brings peace and life with justice.

Thus our shared pain and lamentation have arisen in faith, with a new counter-imperial spirituality, nurtured by many faiths that guide our concrete popular movements and organizing. We are especially led by and have as our exemplars the women and mothers of the dispossessed in Colombia and among the dispossessed of every land. This spirituality is part of a revolution of spiritual values and practices the world over. We call all peoples of faith and conscience to this revolution—whether they be from any religion or no religion—to participate in the spiritualities of many faiths resisting empire today in their own settings.

We join our Colombian brothers and sisters to call for prosecution of the Colombian state's and financial sectors' crimes against humanity, especially as transnational corporations have ravaged the country. War and dispossession against all, especially farmers, must be ended. Colonization and racism against Colombia's indigenous peoples must be dismantled, especially for the Raizal peoples of Colombia's Caribbean region. We bring the same urgency to prosecuting crimes against international law in Colombia as we do to those in Palestine.

We call also to our brothers and sisters under repression or in crisis inside the U.S. imperium. We celebrate your faith and spirituality of resistance against your government's imperial power. Your economic crisis is part of the multiple chaos being visited upon us throughout the world, driven by the imperial adventures and interventions of U.S. global power. Your bleeding within the U.S. is one of the many rivulets of blood flowing from the open wounds of empire around the world.

As all who hear our call join with us, we pledge our resolve to resist the many strategies of empire today. Here at this People's Forum, we have analyzed and mourned our planet in peril, but in hope and joy we are building new structures to hasten the time of a liberation from empire for all the oppressed of the earth.

*Adopted by the participants of the **Peace for Life Second People's Forum** held on 20-23 March 2009 in Bogotá, Colombia*

The **Second People's Forum** of *Peace for Life* was organized in partnership with *Proyecto Justicia y Vida* and a consortium of Colombian NGOs and social movements: *Sociedad Latinoamericana de Economía Política y Pensamiento Crítico (SEPLA)*; *Colombianas y colombianos por La Paz*; *Movimiento de Cristianos y Cristianas por la Paz*; *Comisión Interfranciscana de Justicia, Paz y Reverencia con la Creación*; *Movimiento de Maestros y Maestras*; *Movimiento Campesino Colombiano*; *Movimiento Indígena Colombiano*; and *Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes del Sector Financiero*. Other local organizations, including progressive Christian groups like *Red Ecueménica*, were also represented at the Forum.