

The prophetic role of the Church in Human Rights

Historical Context

On April 9, 1948, following the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, Colombia began armed conflict which to date has not ceased. There are two political parties in Colombia: the liberal party and the conservative party. As a result of this assassination, armed groups were organized to, as they say, finish each other off, and particularly killing many innocent people, among them women and men regardless of age. This was tragic, disastrous, without justification whatsoever. Very few were aware of the socio-political and economic power this war means, others fought for a side and a fanaticism. Therefore, in about the 10 years this war lasted, approximately 300,000 people were assassinated.

As a result of this civil armed violence, there was a stripping of lands, displacements, division of families, population growth in urban centers of municipalities and department capitals, pain, anger, inherited hate, psychosocial and economic imbalance, abandoning the countryside, hunger, and tremendous poverty.

This armed situation in the country was maintained with small groups on the margin of the law, until 1964, when two guerrilla groups appeared: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP *Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia – People's Army*), and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN – *National Liberation Army*).

In 2016, the FARC-EP signed a peace agreement with the Colombian government in Havana, Cuba. There are various things to stress from this. There was a small group that did not wish to join the talks and remained as FARC-EP guerrillas. Following the signing of the Peace agreement, due to some failures to comply, others decided to return to the mountains and call themselves “La Nueva Marquetalia.” I should report compliance with agreements reached, of which there are many, and this has generated socio-political and economic instability in the country.

The ELN and the Colombian government have begun several attempts at peace talks; the last was two years ago, but in attempting to develop the agenda, talks failed and currently it continues as a combatant group on the margin of the law.

In this way, we can say that Colombia has had an internal armed conflict for 72 continuous years, without a break.

The Presbyterian Church of Colombia has had presence and testimony in the country for 163 years, and has stood out for its social action in defense of the most vulnerable, and in the last 30 years appointed an Accompaniment Commission whose mission is to be in the territories of the campesino peasant farmers, those displaced by armed conflict, and persons that have been victims of the war. Thus, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia lives what is spoken in the scripture of Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

The Presbyterian Church “Comunidad de Esperanza” (Community of Hope), of which I am the pastor, has as its central axis “a better world is possible, and you and I make that a reality.” To joyfully fulfill this central theme, the church made the decision to work with ecumenical, inter-faith movements, and social movements, to work on defending life in favor of Human Rights and care of the creation.

From this perspective, we have accompanied peace talks signed between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government, and currently continue to support fulfillment of the peace agreement.

Parallel to these talks between FARC-EP and the Colombian government, we have also accompanied the pre-dialogues between the Colombian Government and the ELN, sadly these talks have failed in their intent.

Currently we are still working on defending life by supporting former combatants of the FARC-EP that signed the peace agreement with the Colombian government. Similarly, we are supporting the campesino movement which is being stripped of its lands, and we are denouncing the irrational exploitation of natural resources.

Motivated by this mission in favor of the impoverished, we are launching the “Comunidades de Fe – Colombia Territorio de Paz”(“*Communities of Faith - Colombia Territory of Peace*”) campaign. To achieve this goal, we are encouraging the organization of Faith Communities in different territories of the country.

To you, our dear brothers and sisters, we invite you to continue praying for us. Your prayers are very important. We also invite you to become aware of our reality, you are always welcome to our spaces, we must be united in these noble causes.

Thank you for your attention to this 800-word testimony.

Rev. Luis Fernando San Miguel Cardona
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(Rev. San Miguel Cardona visited Grand Canyon Presbytery in 2016 as an International Peacemaker)