A Brutal World: Colombia in Crisis

REV. HORACIO ARANGO, S.J.

Since the 1980s, Colombia has been faced with a humanitarian catastrophe of enormous proportions. Various armed actors and in some cases state agents have seriously violated human rights, and there has been a progressive deterioration of the armed conflict between the forces at war. Both of these situations have systematically hurt a civilian population that is unarmed and is not involved in the war. It is becoming less and less possible to remain neutral and on the sidelines of the armed conflict. Millions of Colombians have to live within the restrictions imposed by the war. The actors in this conflict claim to represent the common good and demand that people give them loyalty, cooperation, and decisive support in strategic terms. This has led to political and geographic fragmentation throughout the country, based on local and regional control by those with guns.

From the Office

BRITISH ROBINSON

With this issue of In All Things, we—the national office of Social and International Ministries—are launching our Colombia Campaign. This campaign, a new international policy concern for us, will be a multi-year, multifaceted initiative that will rely upon participation from all of our Jesuit constituencies, both here in the U.S. and in Colombia: high schools, parishes, colleges and universities, social ministry projects, Jesuit school alumni/ae, current and former Jesuit Volunteers, and Ignatian Lay Volunteers.

This multi-faceted initiative, conducted in partnership with the Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS) and Catholic Relief Services, is designed to bring a more effective assistance to Colombia’s most vulnerable populations. We hope to achieve this by providing education, employment, and legal aid, and by feeding the poor. We also hope to work with the local population to promote peace and to bring about social change.

“...There will be peace to the degree that all humanity learns how to rediscover its original vocation to be a single human family...” Colombia is part of the great human family. Therefore, it welcomes the accompaniment of the international community, without that implying an acceptance of interference in the country’s internal affairs. It is well aware of its role and co-responsibility with other nations in the fight against drugs and terrorism, and of its effective participation in a world that is moving toward globalization. In this context, “the re-orientation of international cooperation in terms of a new culture of solidarity” is most necessary.

From Ten Principles for the Road Toward Peace, concluding message of the 72nd Extraordinary Plenary Assembly of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia, March 8, 2002. (www.usccb.org/idwp/international/cec3802.htm)
Within this “global village” that is becoming even more interconnected every day, we have felt an immense solitude in our struggle to fight the drug trade and defend life in the middle of an armed conflict. This is a humanitarian catastrophe without limits, and it could escalate in the immediate future if we do not receive greater international support.

While the war has increased in scope and ferocity, and perhaps even because of this, criminal organizations that specialize in drug trafficking have consolidated their businesses. Since the 1980s, Colombia has become the epicenter of international drug trafficking. However, these same structures that support drug trafficking domestically extend beyond Colombian borders and national responsibility, and branch out into the international financial system. These structures are affecting other countries’ policies to control the export of controlled substances and distribution networks. Although this is a multilateral phenomenon, Colombia has become the center for international policies to combat drug trafficking, because the drug trade also fuels one of the few armed conflicts left in the world where armed leftist rebel movements are still fighting.

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In the face of this dramatic reality, we, the Jesuits of Colombia, have centered our work in Colombia on peace-building. We believe that the Gospel comes to life through tireless work in this respect. We understand peace as the overcoming of all forms of violence, as the political resolution of social conflict, and as the fruit of social, political, and economic transformations. An enduring peace cannot be achieved if more than half of the population is excluded from society through lack of access to income and property.

We do not believe that the conflict in Colombia is ethically acceptable, nor is it acceptable that the armed actors claim to be representatives of the general welfare. We do not think that any act of violence can be justified in order to achieve peace with justice. After years of an internal armed conflict, we believe that international support and cooperation are needed in order to bring about national reconciliation. However, this collaboration does not justify or validate any type of foreign intervention as a solution to the Colombian situation.

The decisions and policies of the North American government have a significant influence on the present and future of our society, and particularly with regard to the lives of the poor. It is for this reason that it is absolutely vital that we establish and strengthen our links of cooperation with the North American people, with their institutions, and with our Jesuit companions working there.
Finding Joy in Collaboration: A Colombian Perspective

REV. HORACIO ARANGO, S.J.

Colombian Jesuits have a very positive view of the U.S. Jesuits, who are known for being sincerely dedicated to the cause of human rights and the poor. We are aware of the U.S. Jesuits’ long tradition of solidarity with Latin America on issues related to social justice. We trust that the established relationships between the U.S. and Latin America will be further strengthened by the evolving collaboration between the Oregon and Colombian Provinces. (See article on p. 5.)

This collaborative agreement offers all parties an opportunity to build a bond of brotherhood and apostolic cooperation between these two Provinces of the Society of Jesus.

As Jesuits and lay people in both provinces build a mutual understanding, they will become peacemakers together. I am certain, for instance, that Jesuits and lay people in the Oregon Province, who live so far from Colombia, might suggest alternatives that we ourselves have not been able to see because we are trapped in the immediacy of the conflict. This in turn could raise awareness about the social and political consequences of our respective governments’ decisions. Without a doubt, the increased pressure of public opinion regarding U.S. policies in Colombia could help foster a negotiated end to the armed conflict in our country. I believe that U.S. Jesuits and lay people could provide vital support for the Colombian Jesuits’ work toward promoting a just and long-lasting reconciliation in our country.

From the Office, continued from page 1

Services (C.R.S.), will include education, outreach, and advocacy activities that emphasize supporting Jesuits and lay colleagues who work in Colombia. It will also involve promoting actions of the U.S. Catholic Church, in order to increase U.S. awareness of the human rights crisis in Colombia. Furthermore, it will prioritize specific areas of concern, with the hope that U.S. policies will be developed and/or changed to better value human life and support a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Specifically, the campaign will focus on: 1) developing education initiatives in collaboration with the Jesuit Secondary Association and the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities; 2) launching advocacy initiatives through statements, action alerts, and other calls for action on Colombia, as well as co-sponsoring speaking tours and conferences; and 3) promoting other Colombia-related interests—including the possibility of utilizing Colombia’s Afro-Colombian minority experience to promote better racial understanding (and, in some cases, reconciliation) among African-American, Latino, and Anglo Catholic communities in the United States.

We are providing this issue as a primer on Colombia, primarily from the perspective of Colombian Jesuits and their lay colleagues. It includes background information on Colombia—its geography, its history, its people, and the conflict—and suggestions about how you can get involved. We intend this issue of In All Things to be a “call to action.”

Also, by way of introduction and as a sign of solidarity, we have asked the Provincial of Colombia, Rev. Horacio Arango, S.J. (see articles on pp. 1, 3) and the Provincial of the Oregon Province, Rev. Robert Grimm, S.J. (see article on p. 5), to articulate the problem/crisis in Colombia from their respective points of view. They also offer us their expectations and hopes for the newly-established “twinning” agreement between both provinces.

Finally, I would like to offer special thanks to my colleague, Jennifer Bailey. This issue of In All Things would not have been possible without her expertise, guidance and masterful translating skills. We hope you enjoy this special issue and will participate in this very important campaign to support our brothers and sisters in Colombia.
A Colombian Perspective

There are numerous ways to enrich the interchange and mutual learning between the provinces. Lay people in the U.S. have ample experience in the works of the Society and in Ignatian spirituality, which will help to illuminate our search for increased lay participation in Jesuit works and formation. In addition, the experiences of Colombia’s Jesuits, who live with those who are displaced and displaced by violence, can offer new ways to look at and develop Jesuit ministries to the Latino population within the United States.

The apostolic plurality of these two Provinces can offer rich opportunities for the development of all the people we serve, in both our countries. Not least of all, it will help all parties to better master each other’s language, which is an increasingly important skill in this globalizing world, and the universal body of the Society of Jesus.

For Colombia, twinning with the Oregon Province represents both a grace and a challenge. With our “twin,” we express a profound reality: We are different—and yet we are the same in our experience of the love of Jesus Christ.

A Short History of the Conflict

The roots of the conflict in Colombia go back decades, long before the emergence of drug trafficking and the current armed actors. The conflict is deeply rooted in economic, social, and political disparities that have persisted for more than a century.

Wealth and land remain concentrated in the hands of a small segment of the population, which sustains itself through an exclusionary political system that neglects the needs of the majority of the population. Historically, a large part of Colombia’s population has lived in destitute conditions. Many of these are Afro-Colombian and indigenous people.

Today’s conflict can be traced to a period in 1948 known as La Violencia, when 200,000 lives were lost and two million people were displaced due to intense political unrest in Colombia’s rural areas.

Left-wing guerrilla groups emerged in the 1960s from popular discontent stemming from La Violencia. Government-backed civilian bands that terrorized government opponents during this period were the forerunners of Colombia’s modern-day paramilitary “self-defense” associations.

Who’s Fighting the War?

Armed Actors in Colombia

The war in Colombia is carried out by three main armed actors: insurgent guerrilla groups, paramilitary or “self-defense” groups, and Colombian security forces. Both the insurgent and paramilitary forces are included on the U.S. State Department’s list of terrorist organizations.

Insurgent Guerrilla Groups

The largest guerrilla organization in Colombia is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which has opposed the government for decades and numbers approximately 17,000. The FARC now reportedly controls or influences nearly half of all the nation’s local governments, and virtually all of its rural areas.

The FARC regularly uses kidnapping as a means to garner funds and demonstrate strength. They also raise money through “taxes” levied on drug producers in territories under their control. In February 2002, after nearly three years of negotiations, the Colombian government officially ended peace talks with the FARC. Since then, the FARC has stepped up its campaign to undermine Colombia’s infrastructure, demolishing power lines, bridges, and water supplies in the capital city of Bogotá and elsewhere. (See “The Peace Process Ends” on p. 7.)

The second largest insurgent group is the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN), which is active in the northeastern part of the country. Guerrillas engage in massacres of civilians and suspected government sympathizers. They also bomb oil pipelines and other infrastructure. The ELN derives most of its income through extortion, primarily in Colombia’s oil and energy sectors.

Paramilitary Groups

Until 1989, Colombia permitted the formation of groups of armed civilians working with security forces. Cattle ranchers, large landowners, and drug traffickers alike all began to invest in paramilitary groups as a semi-private form of protection. Throughout the 1980s, as guerrilla activity mounted, such paramilitary groups proliferated.

Today, these groups are united under an umbrella organization known as the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC). Over the past two decades, paramilitaries and armed civilians, often working in partnership with the Colombian military, have been linked to many...
Finding Joy in Collaboration: A U.S. Perspective

REV. ROBERT GRIMM, S.J.

Almost three years ago, encouraged by Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Rev. Horacio Arango S.J., the Provincial of the Colombia Province, petitioned the U.S. Jesuit Conference to help the Colombia Province facilitate a twinning relationship with one of the U.S. Provinces.

Isolated by many years of war and social upheaval, the Jesuits of Colombia urgently sought a way to make their voice heard in the United States. They also hoped to have an opportunity to gain better language and professional training for Colombian Jesuits in the U.S., as well as find a haven for Jesuits under threat from terrorists. Another goal was to build linkages between Colombia’s own apostolic institutions and those in the U.S.

Although they are highly influential and prominent, the Colombian Jesuits recognized that any hope they had of achieving the Society’s mission of “faith doing justice”—or, in the Colombian context, “building a just peace”—required making not just changes in Colombia, but changes in the U.S. They looked to their brother Jesuits in the U.S. to aid them in their struggle for a more just and hopefully peaceful life in their own country. They hoped that, by twinning with one of the U.S. Provinces, they could more effectively build a bridge between two cultures and nations whose policies and actions so immediately affect one another.

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The Human Toll of Conflict in Colombia

Continuous conflict in Colombia has had grave effects on human life: From 1988 to 1997, an average of ten people were killed every day in political violence (including combat). By 2000, the average had risen to almost 20, and in 2001 the tally may have surged to 38 per day.

Roughly half of the world’s kidnappings occur in Colombia: 3,041 were committed in 2001, 70 percent of them attributed to left-wing guerrillas. The Colombian Commission of Jurists reported 161 massacres (three or more people killed at the same place and time) through September 2001; the resounding majority of these were committed by right wing paramilitaries.


The ELN is one of two guerrilla groups that have bombed oil pipelines and other infrastructure throughout Colombia.
migrant of people northward. We are not unaffected by the drug trade, which has so disrupted Colombian life. Their struggle to deal with the societal problems that fuel despair and terrorism, we judge to be our struggle. Their commitment to build a world of peace has captured our own best hope for making the Jesuit mission of “faith doing justice” a more concrete reality in our own culture.

What have we accomplished thus far? First, we are beginning to know one another on a very personal level. Jesuits and their lay colleagues in both countries are getting to know first-hand the realities that make up our two regions. We are visiting each other and building connections between our apostolic institutions. We are teaching each other our languages and sharing information about our cultures. Our evolving personal relationships already are changing the way we view our world and our ministry.

Here in the Oregon province, we find ourselves being called more deeply into the question of how we in the U.S. achieve reconciliation and peace in dealing with others. Joining in solidarity with the Jesuits of Colombia offers all those who hope to live out a more authentic Ignatian spirituality and mission an opportunity to become peacemakers and builders of a more just society.

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By law, U.S. security assistance to Colombia must meet specific human rights conditions in order for the aid to be released. A waiver of the conditions utilized last year by President Clinton is no longer available. Three leading U.S. human rights groups—Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Washington Office on Latin America—submitted evidence to the U.S. government in January 2002 that the human rights conditions in U.S. law have not been satisfied:

“A premature or flawed certification on the human rights conditions contained in aid legislation risks eliminating the leverage the United States has over this critical issue. It would send the message that the U.S. government is willing to turn a blind eye to human rights violations and allow Colombia to continue down a familiar path of impunity, violence, and terror.

“Colombia’s government has not, to date, satisfied these conditions. So far, the Colombian government has not suspended military forces, taken effective measures to sever all links at the command, battalion, and brigade levels, with paramilitary groups, and execute outstanding orders for capture of members of such groups.” (For a full text of this document, see the Human Rights Watch website: http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/02/Colombia0205.htm)
The Cure That Kills: 
Examining Coca Fumigation Policy

CARLOS SÁNCHEZ

The Problem

Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America stresses that drug trade “contributes to crime and violence, the destruction of family life, and the physical and emotional destruction of many individuals and communities, especially the young.” In the U.S., overdose deaths are at record levels; drugs are cheaper, purer, and more readily available. Moreover, this devastating trade ruins governments and erodes the economic security and stability of nations.

While analysts agree that an integrated solution needs to address both the supply and demand side of the drug problem, the Church and civil society are voicing concern over the direction of a drug supply eradication policy that is inefficient, controversial in Colombia, and increasingly linked to growing human rights and environmental concerns.

The U.S. Solution

On January 10, 2002, President Bush signed foreign aid legislation continued on page 8

The Peace Process Ends

On February 21, 2002, Colombia’s President Andrés Pastrana officially called off the three-year-old peace negotiations with the FARC rebels, after they hijacked a commercial airliner and kidnapped a Colombian senator. The government formally stripped the FARC of its political status, revoked the mandate for a demilitarized zone, and launched a campaign of aerial bombardment.

The FARC responded by escalating its sabotage campaign on Colombia’s infrastructure by bombing electrical lines, knocking out water supplies, and blowing up bridges, leaving many communities without access to fuel, food, or medical attention. In addition, the FARC kidnapped a presidential candidate, and allegedly tortured and killed a senator. On March 16, 2002, the Archbishop of Cali, Isaias Duarte Cancino, was assassinated outside a church after a wedding ceremony. In April, a Catholic priest was killed by gunmen while celebrating mass, and two more priests were kidnapped by guerrillas. Yet another priest, known to be close to the murdered archbishop, was forced by death threats to leave the country. In light of the increasing violence against clerics, the murder of Duarte, who had been an outspoken critic of the violence in Colombia, spurred the Colombian government to launch a new ecclesiastic protection program for bishops and priests in the most violent areas.

Human rights defenders now are concerned that people who live in what used to be the FARC’s demilitarized zone are in danger of persecution by the right-wing paramilitaries, who might consider them as pro-guerrilla simply because they remain in the area, tending to their homes, farms, and businesses. Reports already have surfaced that paramilitaries are threatening local populations with death if they do not leave. There also is the very real fear of increased confrontations between guerrillas and paramilitary forces, which would have grave consequences for the civilian population.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has announced that it is stepping up preparations in Colombia, as well as in the border regions of neighboring countries, in case the upsurge in violence sparks a new, large-scale displacement.

In a public response to the official demise of the peace talks, the Colombian Conference of Bishops has announced that they respect and support the decision of President Pastrana, but that they “stand firm in the conviction that dialogue and negotiation are the way to overcome conflicts and to establish a culture of peace.” The head of the Conference, Monsignor Alberto Giraldo, has proclaimed that Colombia is “morally sick.” The current violent acts, he says, “cause a true spiritual slaughter. We are losing our hope; human values are weakening; our visions of the future are vanishing.”

1 The Colombian Conference of Bishops has issued guidelines for attaining peace in Colombia, entitled Ten Principles for the Road Toward Peace. For the full text of this statement, see their web site: http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/cec3882.htm
human rights crisis in southern Colombia. As fighting for control of this resource-rich region increases, all of the armed actors have unjustly and violently targeted the civilian population and pastoral workers for allegedly aiding rival actors. Humanitarian agencies of both the Church and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees report that the majority of the 15,000 individuals displaced throughout the southern Colombian border since the year 2000 cited selective assassinations, disappearances and general threats as their reasons for displacement. (See “The Human Face of Displacement” on p. 12.)

2. Aerial Spraying

The eradication strategy includes widespread aerial spraying of the chemical “Roundup Ultra,” which is an enhanced form of Roundup, a commonly available U.S.-produced herbicide. Theoretically, the aerial spraying targets only the large coca plantations. However, local communities throughout the southern border region have documented the spraying of schools, homes, water sources, food crops, and livestock, threatening food security. Local farmers have reported increases in gastrointestinal, respiratory, skin, and eye ailments, particularly among children.

Both the Colombian and Ecuadorian bishops have expressed several concerns over the indiscriminate application of Roundup:

• The herbicide is being applied in a manner that is inconsistent with its U.S. requirements. Although Roundup Ultra is licensed and approved in the U.S., it is not recommended for aerial spraying above ten meters. In Colombia, the presence of armed actors has caused airplane pilots to fly (and spray) at higher altitudes to avoid gunfire.

• Despite application warnings on the manufacturer’s label, Roundup has been sprayed over communities, waterways, and livestock, threatening food security. Local farmers have reported increases in gastrointestinal, respiratory, skin, and eye ailments, particularly among children.

Concerns

The Colombian and U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Conferences have expressed three main concerns over this latest campaign to eradicate coca production.

1. Militarization

The increase in Colombian security forces and paramilitary activity is actually fueling a
control poppy growth—with the result that the total amount of the herbicide deposited in regions around coca fields is 37 times greater.

• In Colombia, Roundup is mixed with Cosmoflux, a Colombian-produced additive to help the chemical adhere to plants. Although the individual components of this chemical are cleared for use in the U.S., no studies have been conducted on how they react when mixed with other chemicals. Last summer, the company responsible for producing a Cosmoflux component announced that it would stop selling its product for use in the aerial eradication program because of their concerns about its chemical interaction with other agents.

These concerns have led to national and international calls to limit aerial spraying. The U.N. Drug Control Program has called the strategy, “inhumane” and “ineffective,” and has proposed the creation of an international body to monitor the program against coca and poppy. The World Wildlife Fund has warned that aerial spraying may have a devastating long-term impact on the richly diverse and delicate Amazon basin. Furthermore, the government of Ecuador has demanded that the Colombian government not spray within ten kilometers of its border, while local governors proposed manual eradication as an alternative to spraying.

In the face of these concerns, the U.S. and Colombian governments staunchly defend the fumigation strategy. The U.S. State Department extols the safety of Roundup—despite the fact that to date, no adequate or definitive health or environmental impact assessments have been conducted to determine the possible connection between the spraying and adverse health effects on the local population. Government agencies have not responded to numerous independent requests to collaborate in such impact studies. The program’s critics cite that even the State Department’s September, 2001 “Naríño Report” admitted to the fumigation program’s methodology limitations and an inability to make definitive statements about the human or environmental impact of spraying.

### In Lieu of Fumigation: Alternative Development:

Bishop Fabio de Jesús Morales, whose diocese lies in the affected area, insists that local farmers in this territory grow coca because it is one of the only viable economic alternatives in an area historically neglected by the state. In a

**Killing Every Green Thing in Its Path**

According to the literature disseminated by the United States, aerial spraying does not cause death. “But the corn dies eight days after being fumigated,” says a local Putumayo farmer. Corn crops in many rural regions of Colombia are being decimated by the application of Roundup, which is intended to kill only the illicit coca fields.

Corn is a fundamental staple for the peasant economy in Colombia. A primary food source for humans and animals alike, it provides numerous rural families with a crucial means of income, especially in areas with poor access to markets.

Aerial spraying threatens corn and other basic food crops throughout Colombia. Ironically, it is actually undermining Catholic Church-supported alternative development projects, which are attempting to give farmers a viable substitute for coca propagation.

For instance, a promising alternative crop in this region is the banana, which is a vital source of nutrition for the local peasants, who consume it daily. The spraying, however, has destroyed many of the banana plantations, as well as the residents’ hopes for a local market in bananas. One area priest describes how the banana trees die: They die slowly, drying out and rotting from the inside, until all that is left is a hole in the ground. Once the leaves turn yellow and start to rot, they are not even good for animal feed.

Yucca is another important crop, which like the banana is an important regional staple and product for local markets. “Yucca is one of the most fragile crops, and like papaya fruit, it dies three days after it is fumigated,” says another local farmer. Even if the yucca is harvested immediately, it is already a lost cause: once it has been exposed to Roundup, yucca becomes watery, blackens, and is no longer consumable.

The meager commercialization of these crops is mainly due to the non-existence of access roads to commercial distribution centers. Church and local leadership have promoted integrated community development programs to help farmers produce native crops, keeping in mind the basic need to preserve natural resources (land, water, and air) and conserve the region’s precious forest resources.

However, none of these products is being industrially commercialized. Without government incentives and a supporting infrastructure to help market these crops, farmers are forced to sell their produce at market prices that do not even cover their expenses. This explains why these crops are cultivated almost exclusively for local consumption.

Unfortunately, due to their proximity to coca plantations, many of these crops have been destroyed by the widespread and sometimes indiscriminate spraying. In some cases, fields and pastureland in zones that did not have a single coca bush have been sprayed.

Today, peasants are afraid to plant even the alternative development crops, because they fear that the cultivation of any new crop will provoke new applications of Roundup, under the pretext of eradicating coca plantations.

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Examining Coca Fumigation Policy

continued from page 9

U.S. Involvement: What Next?

The Bush Administration’s FY 2003 budget calls for an increase in military aid beyond the strict counter-narcotics goals. The new proposals will also put more money in the hands of the Colombian military, which has one of the worst human rights records in the hemisphere and documented ties to the right-wing paramilitary groups that are labeled as terrorist by the U.S. state department. (See “U.S. Policy in Colombia: The Human Rights Conditions” on p. 6.)

Against the backdrop of the Colombian Presidential election, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, the front-runner and only candidate adamantly opposed to a negotiated settlement, is calling for a military solution to defeat the guerrillas and coca trade. If elected President in May, a formal request for increased U.S. involvement in Colombia’s civil war will likely be forthcoming. A new call for U.S. support for the counterinsurgency effort may close the door on the nascent ELN peace talks, frustrate any attempts to resume dialogue with the FARC, and further polarize the conflict.

SPRING/SUMMER 2002

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1 From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Statement on Colombia.

2 See: http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/ law/colombia.htm

Catholic Conference Statements

In March, 2000, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops’ International Policy Committee released a Statement of Cardinal Law on Colombia.1 This statement lays out the basic position of both the U.S. and Colombian Episcopal Conferences regarding U.S. aid to Colombia. The Conference stresses that a genuine balance must be found between assisting Colombian security forces and providing aid that more directly addresses the root causes of Colombia’s conflict. An integral component of any effective drug eradication policy must be the provision of immediate financial and technical assistance, to promote agricultural alternatives for the poor farmers who currently must rely upon coca cultivation.

Signs of Hope

Due to considerable advocacy in the U.S. and Colombia, several important restrictions regarding human rights and aerial spraying have been placed on future aid to Colombia. From now on, the Administration is required to demonstrate the following about its fumigation program:

- that aerial spraying does not pose undue risk to human health and the environment;
- that aerial spraying is conducted in compliance with U.S. and Colombian laws;
- that the fumigation program provides financial compensation to local farmers for any loss of legal crops or health problems caused by the spraying.

Additionally, these new conditions for the fumigation program’s certification require alternative development plans to be enacted wherever aerial spraying has occurred. These plans must be developed prior to any new herbicide applications.

Nevertheless, advocacy groups remain concerned about the lack of transparency and openness to independent civil society participation in the certification process. Restrictions on spraying and the provision of development alternatives are both important advances, but the program continues to have a number of loopholes. Many fear that rules may not be consistently followed requiring U.S. constituent and Congressional oversight to closely monitor the program.

region suffering from virtually no infrastructure for marketing alternative products and basic services, coca seems to be the only option.

Thus, to merely fumigate without investing in the region’s social and economic infrastructure will only serve to displace residents and drive illicit coca production into other locations. As the bishops of southern Colombia assert, “If drug eradication is to be effective, the program must provide non-military aid in a timely manner. It also must develop and fund alternative income strategies, in conjunction with local participation.” Theoretically, the eradication program includes funds that are earmarked for alternative crop development, judicial reform, and other social and economic priorities. To date, however, most of these resources have not materialized.

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**Catholic Conference Statements**

In March, 2000, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops’ International Policy Committee released a Statement of Cardinal Law on Colombia. This statement lays out the basic position of both the U.S. and Colombian Episcopal Conferences regarding U.S. aid to Colombia. The Conference stresses that a genuine balance must be found between assisting Colombian security forces and providing aid that more directly addresses the root causes of Colombia’s conflict. An integral component of any effective drug eradication policy must be the provision of immediate financial and technical assistance, to promote agricultural alternatives for the poor farmers who currently must rely upon coca cultivation.

**Signs of Hope**

Due to considerable advocacy in the U.S. and Colombia, several important restrictions regarding human rights and aerial spraying have been placed on future aid to Colombia. From now on, the Administration is required to demonstrate the following about its fumigation program:

- that aerial spraying does not pose undue risk to human health and the environment;
- that aerial spraying is conducted in compliance with U.S. and Colombian laws;
- that the fumigation program provides financial compensation to local farmers for any loss of legal crops or health problems caused by the spraying.

Additionally, these new conditions for the fumigation program’s certification require alternative development plans to be enacted wherever aerial spraying has occurred. These plans must be developed prior to any new herbicide applications.

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the process to ensure that the provisions are rigorously applied.

New Concerns

Despite existing concerns, the Administration appears to be wedded to a strategy that not only focuses on a heavily militarized approach to the drug problem, but also expresses an increasing willingness to blur the line between counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism roles for U.S. engagement in Colombia. As the U.S. government anti-drug rhetoric increasingly argues the link between drug trade and terrorist funding, greater involvement in Colombia’s 38-year conflict is becoming more palatable to those willing to see Colombia as a potential battleground for the War Against Terrorism. (See “U.S. Involvement: What Next?” on p. 10.)

The recently released Bush Administration budget request for 2003 includes a substantial increase in funding for the drug eradication program. The Foreign Operations appropriation request, alone, would provide Colombia with close to $374 million in military aid and $164 million in social and economic aid—not including additional anticipated U.S. Defense budget appropriations. This new military aid would establish yet another counter-narcotics brigade to expand the eradication campaign, and would support the establishment of a new Colombian brigade to protect economic infrastructure, particularly the oil pipelines.

Coca and Colombia: A Call to Action

The Church calls into question a government policy that threatens people’s survival. The spraying campaign needs at the very least to conform with U.S. and Colombian regulations, prohibiting the spraying of communities that are complying with manual eradication or pursuing alternative development. More importantly, the U.S. should promote independent and transparent studies to document the relationship between spraying and the adverse human and environmental impact.

Colombian and U.S. bishops recognize that, in the field, successful farming alternatives to coca production need to address the need for equitably based agrarian reform, crop substitution, and technology transfer. Alternative development also must be a truly participatory and consultative process.

As long as policy makers avoid the root causes of the problem—inequitable land distribution in Colombia and especially the demand-driven market that makes drug crops such profitable agricultural commodities—there is likely to be little decrease in the overall supply.

From the U.S. end, we must reduce domestic demand for drugs, not through only drug education, but also through treatment and rehabilitation programs for drug users. Treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society represent the most effective means to combat the drug trade within the United States.

Efforts to promote source eradication must focus on establishing supportive structures that enable poor farmers to lead dignified lives by raising legitimate crops and becoming integral players in their country’s economy. An integrated drug eradication strategy in Colombia must focus on addressing the nation’s crippling poverty, criminal impunity, and rampant corruption—all of which pressure rural communities to turn to the coca trade as their only means of survival.

Resources on Fumigation

- Catholic Relief Services, In Solidarity with Colombia program. http://www.catholicrelief.org/where/colombia/index.cfm
- On-line photos taken by Church partners available at: http://www.usfumigation.org/SprayDamage/photoindex.htm
Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

From the United Nations’ Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (http://www.unhcr.ch)

The displaced in Colombia are survivors of an atrocious war among the guerrillas and the government armed forces. To be displaced in Colombia is to be the poorest of the poor.

The Human Face of Displacement

Ledys Bohórquez Farfán

The Jesuit Refugee Service/Colombia accompanies people displaced by violence as they rebuild their lives. Through emergency, transitional, and prevention programs, JRS/Colombia tries to empower displaced people to reclaim their human rights. A country team of Jesuits and lay people serve displaced communities in Barrancabermeja (Santander), San Pablo (Sur de Bolívar), Buga (Valle del Cauca), and Tierralta (Córdoba), Colombia.

As you sit reading this article, it may be spring in your country. From your window you might see the many colors of the flowers, you might smell the fresh odor of the leaves, and you might feel all the life that springtime inspires.

Here it is always spring; flowers are always in bloom. We can smell the fragrance of the cayena, roses, orchids, and novios. But this sort of springtime fades for those forced to flee to the cold of Bogotá, and for those who must live within the rough, dirty concrete walls of a shelter in Barrancabermeja or Tuluá or Quibdó, or any other city far from their hometown. Spring loses its meaning for thousands of children who once played in the countryside with neighborhood friends, and now are lost amid unknown faces. (See sidebar, “The Death of Innocence” on p. 14.)

In Colombia, most people fleeing violence do not leave the country to become refugees. Instead, they become internally displaced within Colombia. Currently, the exact number of displaced Colombians is uncertain. The existing data suggests the number could be approximately 2.5 million Colombians displaced since 1985.

The phenomenon of displacement began more than a decade ago, just as the paramilitaries became active. The majority of forced displacements are caused by the paramilitaries, a fact which has been corroborated by many investigators and eyewitnesses. Guerrilla groups and the Armed Forces are also responsible for a lesser share. Most people are displaced either by direct threats or by their fear of falling prey to massacres, assassinations, and disappearances.

The Poor in Spirit

Poverty is not just the loss of material necessities; it is also a spiritual condition. You are poverty-stricken when you have to live in fear and with a sense of uprootedness. Spiritual poverty is the fear of not belonging to anybody or anything—of not having your own land and...
Causes of Displacement 2001

In 2001, Colombia’s paramilitaries were responsible for 43 percent of the forced displacement. Guerrillas were responsible for 35 percent, the Armed Forces for 6 percent, and 15 percent was caused by unknown actors.*

![Causes of Displacement 2001 chart]

19% Afro-Colombian
3% Indigenous
47% Women
46% Under age 18

* According to the leading Colombian documentation center on displacement, the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES).

Of the people who are displaced, 84 percent had to abandon their land, only some of which was titled. The majority of Colombia’s displaced residents were small landowners with fewer than 20 hectares. According to the latest information, their hope for return or resettlement is growing; nonetheless, a significant number of displaced people are likely to remain in the urban centers.

Chocó: Resource Rich—And Destitute

The local populations living in the Chocó region offer a clear example of this. The majority of Chocó residents are Afro-Colombians, but there are also indigenous groups such as the Embera, Wounaan, and Tule.

Their land, which extends from the border with Panama to the border with Ecuador, is rich in natural resources. It also is geopolitically strategic, since it is located centrally between two oceans.

Because of its resources and location, land in this region is highly coveted. Armed actors use violence and threats to force residents to abandon their property. Internal displacement is an ongoing problem in Chocó, but it reached a crescendo in the mid-1990s, when more than 10,000 local residents were driven out by paramilitaries.

Despite the violence there, the Chocó region has received international attention as a potential site for development in the 21st century. Plans to develop Chocó have been in existence for years. The most important is the Pacific Coast Integral Development Plan, which would capitalize on the rich potential of the region’s natural resources and would institutionalize regional development. This plan would include the construction of both an inter-oceanic canal and an inter-oceanic land bridge between Bahía Candelaria on the Atlantic side and Bahía Cúpica on the Pacific side.

The other proposal, called the Pacific Plan, responds to the dictates of the U.N. Development Program, World Bank, and Global Environmental Facility, all of which see Colombia’s Pacific coast as a great genetic bank of biodiversity. This plan emphasizes environmental richness rather than the creation of an infrastructure. It requires that the Colombian government designate the area as an ecological zone and design an environmental protection plan as a prerequisite to receiving World Bank money.

Each of these plans, which would turn the region into continued on page 14
that all of Colombia’s armed groups—the paramilitaries, the guerrillas and the Armed Forces alike—respect their rights. Some visit the municipal administrative offices seeking help for their immediate needs. Still others struggle to ensure that the resources meant to aid displaced communities actually reach their intended destination. Such advocacy can be dangerous work. Today, these people—themselves the victims of brutality—are also become the accused, the stigmatized, the displaced.

The Death of Innocence

As a small child, David lived in a typical Colombian village. It was an ideal place: a dreamy town, nestled in a valley near a large, clear river. David played, ran, fished, studied, and helped his parents. He was happy. But then his father was assassinated, and his family had to move to one of Colombia’s large cities.

In the city, David placed his childhood in a box and closed it tight. He learned to work to survive. He forgot about fishing in the river. He forgot all the games he used to play with his dog, or cats. He could think of only one thing, now: how to get food for his mother and three younger brothers.

David has changed. Today he is a sixteen-year-old who debates the various choices life has given him: One is to take part in illegal activities like joining one of the armed groups in the area, or working with the illegal gasoline trade, or becoming a farm worker picking coca leaves. These activities would allow him to earn a regular income to help his family. Another option is to continue studying, in the hope of achieving at least part of his dreams. A third alternative is just to stop studying and try to find work wherever he can. David’s life, like the lives of so many other children in Colombia, is forever altered.

either a commercial zone or a biogenetic laboratory, has created conflict among the local residents, who are of varied ethno-cultural backgrounds, including indigenous, black, and mixed-race Colombians. Such discord runs counter to the ideal of promoting harmonious development based on the region’s unique cultural needs and traditions.

From Struggle to Loss: Displacement in Chocó

After a long struggle to gain land titles (in fact, right after official land titles were finally granted), the native inhabitants of Chocó began to be threatened by the encroaching war. All too soon, they were forced to flee.

In this land of eternal spring, of roses and orchids year round, displaced people live in poverty and despair. They are tired of being abandoned by their own government and having to fight for their rights. Still, they persevere, against great odds and with great courage: Some join labor unions; some join social organizations; some have the audacity to demand that all of Colombia’s armed groups—the paramilitaries, the guerrillas and the Armed Forces alike—respect their rights. Some visit the municipal administrative offices seeking help for their immediate needs. Still others struggle to ensure that the resources meant to aid displaced communities actually reach their intended destination. Such advocacy can be dangerous work. Today, these people—themselves the victims of brutality—have also become the accused, the stigmatized, the displaced.
**Path to Peace**

Despite Colombia’s complex and explosive conditions, which seem to worsen by the day, the Society of Jesus remains undeterred in its support of the victims of Colombia’s brutal conflict. Jesuits in Colombia are assisting people not just through prayer and pastoral service, but through the day-to-day work of trying to foster peace and rebuild civil society.

In a country ravaged by violence, the following four Jesuit-run programs persist in the unflagging pursuit of hope in the face of despair, and peace in the midst of war.

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**CINEP and the Peace Communities: Persevering, in Peril**

**REV. ALEJANDRO ANGULO, S.J.**

On a pier along the Atrato River, nine unarmed Afro-Colombian youths between the ages of 15 and 20 are arguing with four commanders of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The commanders are armed to the teeth.

All the young men want is to carry the body of their friend, Edwin Ortega, to his hometown of Costa de Oro, down the river. They insist that he must be buried where he was born 25 years ago. According to Afro-Caribbean culture, if a person is not buried in the land where he was born, bad luck will be unleashed.

The FARC commanders refuse. They cannot forgive Edwin, and the peace organization he helped to lead, for the fact that more than 100 young black locals refused to join the ranks of their guerrilla movement. Instead, these young people opted for more peaceful endeavors, such as running a local business or acting in a community theater.

This is, in fact, why Ortega is dead. The FARC shot him and now intend to throw his body in the Atrato.

At last, Ortega’s grieving friends negotiate a compromise with FARC. The body will be buried, but it will be buried in Jiguamiandó—far from Ortega’s native land. As his companions leave the pier, they hope that the Spirits will understand the constraints imposed by war.

**The Peace Communities**

Ortega worked for the Peace Communities—a growing grassroots organization that is seeking to establish itself in this war-torn region of Colombia without becoming involved with any armed group. The Peace Communities are returning to the area after having been displaced by the guerrillas and paramilitaries.

The guerrillas use this land as a strategic corridor for importing arms and exporting cocaine, either through Panama or directly from the Gulf of Urabá. Powerful multinational lumber and banana corporations also have interests in this region; some have supported assassinations of workers and farmers by hit men and paramilitaries. Needless to say, the work of the Peace Communities can be carried out only through ongoing negotiations with all of these actors.

The Atrato River is not the only place in Colombia where diverse interests collide, often continued on page 16

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CINEP helps promote peace by offering workshops on such topics as human rights and agricultural production.

Fr. Angulo is Executive Director of the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP), a Jesuit-sponsored human rights program based in Bogotá, Colombia.
A Beacon of Hope

For the past five years, the Jesuit-run Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP) has been helping the Peace Communities movement by offering workshops on such topics as civic education, human rights, agricultural production, business practices, and how to rebuild one’s identity after being displaced.

For 30 years, CINEP has been closely examining Colombian society, especially the organizations that have arisen to help support civil society in the poorest sectors of the country. Today, the organization faces an enduring challenge: how to build a democratic society in the midst of an armed conflict that accounts for 30,000 deaths annually, more than 3,000 kidnappings a year, and the displacement of more than two million people.

It is the responsibility of 35 CINEP researchers to review and evaluate the local community groups that ask CINEP for help, either directly or through local churches. The organization helps find solutions through close collaboration among the interested parties. It also publishes manuals about CINEP’s work and conduct workshops throughout the countryside. There is no pre-set formula; this is not an exact science. All of us roll up our sleeves and work together to achieve a common goal.

For instance: In Meta, located in southeast Colombia, there are 400 women living in the neighborhoods within the demilitarized zone who have discovered that their domestic work is not only an art, but also the basis of productivity and political stability in their villages. The husbands of these women also have come to realize that they can no longer abuse their wives or treat them like slaves.

In the southwest region of Putumayo, thousands of farmers once had no choice but to plant coca, because they could not get good prices locally for their crops, such as yucca or plantains, and there was no way to transport the crops to market. The only option was to sell coca to the drug traffickers, who would come directly to their homes to buy the plant’s leaves and paste. Now, with the help of CINEP, these farmers are figuring out how to replace coca with other crops in order to support themselves.

CINEP envisions a social structure in Colombia that is cemented by the protection of human rights. Edwin Ortega’s young friends—as well as the women of Meta, and farmers in Putumayo—are working every day to broaden their understanding of human rights. They are doing their part to promote the ideal of human rights, and to protect the lives of those who struggle to defend them.

As far as the promotion of justice is concerned, we must become more aware, as the Church itself has done, of its more recent and new exigencies for our mission; such are, among others, protection of the human rights of persons and peoples (individual, socioeconomic, civil and political, the right to peace, to progress, to cultural integrity); the disturbing consequences of the interdependence of peoples, causing grave damage to the quality of life and culture of poor peoples, especially of “indigenous” peoples.

Constitutions and Complementary Norms, Part VII, 247:1

Among other programs, CINEP helps women to realize that domestic work is not only an art but also the basis of productivity and political stability in their villages.
The Middle Magdalena Program for Development and Peace (PDPMM) is a communal effort to build up society in the midst of conflict. The project is located in the north of Colombia in an area stretching over 40,000 square kilometers with 800,000 inhabitants. Both guerrillas and paramilitaries are active in the region. I direct the PDPMM, which is sponsored by the Diocese of Barrancabermeja and by the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP—see “CINEP and the Peace Communities” on p. 15), a Jesuit social research center.

We all know that working for peace in the middle of the war in Colombia is risky, but we accept the uncertainty. I direct the PDPMM, which is sponsored by the Diocese of Barrancabermeja and by the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP—see “CINEP and the Peace Communities” on p. 15), a Jesuit social research center.

The PDPMM conducts educational programs to help institutions build a dignified and inclusive peace. It also carries out projects of sustainable human and economic development. Each project is a step towards conflict resolution and community-building despite the violence.

We do not believe that the recent suspension of peace negotiations between the FARC and the government, and the resulting increase in the conflict, are reasons to cease our activities. Our work for the next ten years has already been planned and, God willing, we will continue it, regardless of the state of the war. We believe that this is the only way to create the democratic, participatory, and just nation that Colombia currently lacks.

We all know that working for peace in the middle of the war in Colombia is risky, but we accept the uncertainty. Since we have started working here, the war has killed more than 2,000 people in this region alone. More than 150,000 have been assassinated in Colombia, 20,000 because of the war.

In the six years that PDPMM has existed, four members of the team have been kidnapped, two of them Jesuits. Fortunately, all have been freed. For us, these kidnappings turned out to be an opportunity to speak with the guerrillas about liberty and justice. During this same time period, nine PDPMM participants were assassinated by the paramilitaries. Three of these were women; despite their losses, the families of these women have continued to work with our program.

In the face of such difficulties, the PDPMM persists, and is even in the process of expanding into new projects, such as establishing a radio station and forming organizations for women and youth. Other projects are designed to improve the quality of life through securing a food supply: fish, tropical fruits, cacao, palm oil, and cows’ milk and meat. The goal of these new efforts is to end coca production across 18,000 hectares in the region.

In 2000, France granted the PDPMM the Human Rights Award. Last year, we won an award from the Network for Human Rights in Colombia. 

In Japan, we work with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, which has developed a program of “Sister Cities” with the PDPMM. For more information, contact the CSN at: csn@gc.org
A Rural Vision of Peace in Colombia

Rev. Alfredo Ferro, S.J.

The Central Peasant Institute (Instituto Mayor Campesino, or IMCA) is one of the works of the Colombian Province of the Society of Jesus, which was founded 40 years ago. Its mission is to stimulate sustainable development projects in the Valle del Cauca, located in western Colombia. At first, its focus was pedagogical: teaching adult peasants and young people how to become more directly involved in designing and implementing plans that affect their communities. Today, the Central Peasant Institute helps families, communities, and municipalities to generate sustainable development that strengthens rural peasant society. To this end, we work in three areas of intervention: environmental/technical assistance, socio-political issues, and religious/pastoral culture.

The Rural Problem

Colombia is essentially a rural country, but the peasant population has diminished considerably over the past 30 years. Rural populations fell from 70 percent of the national population in 1970 to only 25 percent in 2001. These figures are important, because they demonstrate how a country that should have focused politically on the countryside abandoned its rural sectors, thereby forcing people to emigrate to large cities, where their lives have little to do with their values, skills, and hopes. Those who remain in the countryside to work the land do so in very unfavorable conditions. They have difficulty gaining credit or support for their activities and face constant public security issues.

The rural problem is at the root of Colombia’s present armed conflict. The migration of people from the country to the city has impoverished hundreds of families. In addition, the absence of agrarian politics has created an exclusive social structure, in which some landless peasants and others affected by violence have taken up arms to vindicate their rights. Colombia has turned its back on the countryside. There is no planned agrarian reform that would make profound changes in productivity, employment, and trade.

IMCA’s Work for Peace

Although we are swimming against the tide, due to the lack of agrarian politics, IMCA continues to stubbornly bet on the strengthening of Colombia’s rural peasant society. We firmly believe that development in the countryside will bring new winds of peace to the nation, in as much as it will bring people food, work, and of course, land, soil, water, and animals for generations to come.

It is long and silent work to empower the peasant population.
to achieve their goals of food security and a trade surplus. We work to help them do so in a way that respects the environment through crop diversification and methods of cultivation and production that do not poison the earth.

It is long and silent work to empower the peasant population to exercise their rights as citizens. We help them learn to interact with the government and its agents as equals, with neither an attitude of servitude nor an expectation of favoritism, both of which characterize the way Colombia has conducted business in the past.

It is long and silent work to break down the political system of exclusion, by promoting broad community participation that includes gender and generational equality.

It is long and silent work to encourage the peasant population to embrace their own, local, ancestral values, traditions, and wisdom, and to join in the public debate from their own historical starting point.

We support this sort of change as a vital element in the reconstruction of the social fabric in Colombia and the promotion of an ecumenical dialogue.

The challenging task of fostering such change has not been part of the recent peace process. However, these kinds of changes will create a solid peace, based on rebuilding the peasant population and revitalizing the primary source of the Colombian economy: the countryside.

We firmly believe that development in the countryside will bring new winds of peace to the nation, in as much as it will bring people food, work, … soil, water, and animals for generations to come.

From the Shores of the Excluded...

In addition to the Project for Sustainable Development, we have added some new initiatives, which grew out of our desire to accompany those who are victimized and excluded. The cries of the excluded in Colombia have inspired IMCA to join forces with the Jesuit Refugee Service (see “The Human Face of Displacement” on p. 12) to assist the more than 6,000 internally displaced people in the region. We also work with the Peace Program for (see “Programa por la Paz” on p. 20) to promote a favorable public opinion towards peace through social and community media outlets in the countryside, as well as through supporting the work of individual peace promoters.

We also have been working with various regional nongovernmental organizations on a peace agenda to ensure that civil society will have a voice in the construction of a new Colombia.

Although these efforts may appear small, we believe that they aim at a greater receptivity towards peace. They also help to encourage all those who are involved in analyzing the peace process to demand that “the people” be included in the peace process, so that it does not become a negotiation among members of the elite class, with no grassroots base.

We believe that a return to the countryside is essential: a return to peasants as masters of their own development, with the land and opportunity to produce and sell their own products. With training in time-honored farming techniques, and with an improved social and commercial infrastructure, the peasants of Colombia will help to create the climate for a long-awaited peace with justice.

In Danger and Undaunted

continued from page 17

award from the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights in New York City. In December, the PDPMM received Colombia’s National Peace Prize. We appreciate receiving such recognition—but the path ahead remains long and difficult.

Daily life in the PDPMM involves sharing the pain and uncertainty experienced by the peasants with whom we work—like Alma Rosa Jaramillo, who was assassinated last Fourth of July. Our days are spent on the peasant farms harvesting rice, in the schools where children learn to live as brothers and sisters, and at community planning meetings. Our work also may involve engaging in dialogue with armed actors, hosting radio discussions about ethical citizenship, celebrating the Eucharist with political prisoners in jail, conducting monthly spiritual reflection programs for our team members, or analyzing the current situation.

Every day we need to build solidarity in our land and to become more sincerely and truly tied to our people. Every day we face new challenges to initiate new projects.

The projects developed by the Peace Communities are steps towards conflict resolution and community-building despite the violence.
Programa por la Paz: Heeding the Urgent Call of Suffering

REV. LUIZ FERNANDO MÜNERA, S.J.

The prolonged armed conflict in Colombia has deep roots. Many of our children and young people have never known the meaning of peace. All of us must now envision and work together to construct a new, peaceful country. In 1987, the Colombian Province of the Society of Jesus decided, as a whole, to make a commitment to peace-building in Colombia. Out of this commitment, Programa por la Paz (the Peace Program) was born. It was created both to inspire Jesuits and to coordinate their activities for peace. The Peace Program gives Jesuits a way to contribute positively to the construction of a new culture of peace in Colombia.

The Peace Program has developed an educational initiative for young people, children, farmers, and people from poor sectors of the cities. We conduct workshops to help people reclaim their sense of identity and find ways for peaceful transformation of conflicts. We also help Colombians raise their political awareness. Many of these projects were developed in conjunction with other Jesuits. As one of the workshop participants reports: “The workshop teaches us that, although conflicts are always present, we have the tools to help confront them, even the biggest ones.”

Trying to generate a favorable public opinion towards peace, we work with small radio stations to motivate leaders to promote an attitude of hope regarding peace. We also conduct a training program for journalists who cover the armed conflict.

The urgency of the suffering in our country calls us to devote all our efforts to trying to end the war. That is why we participate actively in the civil society’s Peace Movement, and why we use our influence to see that peace negotiations foster reconciliation among Colombians. Despite the difficulties and lack of compromise shown at times by the guerrillas, we continue to believe that a negotiated solution to the conflict is the only way out for this country.

Fr. Múnera is Executive Director of Programa por la Paz (the Peace Program) in Colombia.

JRS/COLOMBIA

Many internally displaced people in Colombia must flee by boat or whatever means they can find.
A New Jesuit Reductions for the Third Millennium

REV. WILLIAM WATSON, S.J.

I am propelled forward by a vision of what a twinning project with Colombia might lead to in the future.

I see many Jesuit universities in Latin America and North America collaborating on a major social project somewhere in the Colombian Amazon—a new Jesuit Reductions for the third millennium. I can see us working together to create a bold, new social experiment that can act as a living laboratory for the world, helping us learn how to live together in peace and harmony, caring for the least fortunate, understanding new energy sources and caring for God's creation.

I can see a new mission for Jesuit higher education in the world that can help us serve the most pressing needs of the church and fulfill the vision of our recent General Congregations. I can see us finding the synthesis of the "service of faith" and the "promotion of justice," using the great patrimony of our Jesuit education combined in new and creative ways with the dynamism of the Spiritual Exercises.

I can see a global Society of Jesus working together in a new brotherhood in collaboration with the laity, to give hope to the tens of millions of people around the world who live lives of desperation and misery. In essence, I see the melding together of the missionary zeal of St. Francis Xavier, patron of the missions, with the care of the poor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, patron of students. I see a new hope for Jesuit higher education as a missionary work in faith and in the service of God's poor.

Last July, the president of Gonzaga University, Rev. Robert Spitzer, S.J., appointed me as Gonzaga's delegate to represent the university for the trip to Bogotá. I was hesitant, at first: What possible benefit could come of the trip? But the Lord has a way of surprising us.

The trip to Bogotá was a deep spiritual awakening for me—an epiphany. Over the course of my time in Colombia—going to meetings, celebrating the Eucharist with the juniors, sharing meals with the delegation and Jesuits from Colombia, meeting colleagues from other U.S. Jesuit schools, and attending the conference on Constructing Peace for Colombia—I began to understand not why I came, but why Christ brought me here. Slowly it came to light how significant the collaboration could be between Oregon and Colombia, for both provinces, and what a positive challenge the relationship could offer, particularly for Gonzaga University, visa vis the service of faith and the promotion of justice. In many ways, my trip to Bogotá brought me back to one of the fundamental faith events of my novitiate experience.

I was a novice at the time of the 32nd General Congregation. My class was the first in the Oregon Province that, as a condition for first vows, had to accept the new vision for the Society expressed by that Congregation, specifically Decree 4, which addresses our mission and culture.

I was deeply moved by the GC32 documents and wanted my Jesuit life to reflect their teachings. When I went to philosophy studies at Gonzaga University, I saw Jesuit higher education at work, up close and for the first time. Being at Gonzaga showed me the apostolic potential for higher education. However, I also saw that it was still only a potential. We needed to find new ways to enliven everyone who studied or worked at the university with the Ignatian vision to serve faith and promote justice.

Discerning God's Call

As a young Jesuit regent, my heart was set on serving a mission in Africa. Instead I was assigned to work in a high school in Portland, Oregon. But God has his ways: It was there that I discovered my facility for creating the kinds of Ignatian retreat experiences that can transform students and faculty.

After my ordination in 1985, I continued to serve in Jesuit schools and universities. However, as the years wore on, I started to have real questions. As positive as my many experiences were, I had yet to see manifest in one of our colleges or universities a model in which the whole institution, in its core identity and educational pedagogy, was committed to the...
service of faith and the promotion of justice.

What I came to realize was that numerous isolated apostolic initiatives do not add up to an apostolic institution. I had by no means lost faith in the Jesuit commitment to higher education, but I did wonder how institutions that are so large and diversified—and sometimes seriously fragmented by multiple and oftentimes conflicting visions and ideologies—could even begin to resemble the vision for a Jesuit work, which had been so clearly detailed in GC32, and even more specifically identified for higher education in GC34.

In my experience, tensions over faith and justice often arise among the faculty at Jesuit institutions. These tensions tend to fall into three distinct groups. There are those who are committed strongly to justice, but who rarely mention faith and tend to mistrust any traditional expressions of faith. These people often see private expressions of faith as signs of regression back to the days when faith was disconnected from issues of peace and justice. Then there are those who have a strong faith vision but have difficulty connecting it to its practical manifestations in service to the poor. These people fear an empty activism devoid of faith and what they see as the growing politicization of religion. The third and largest group of people seem indifferent toward both faith and justice, and apparently are quite oblivious to the spiritual and social significance of this most important aspect of Jesuit works: the mission of higher education.

A New Lens for an Abiding Vision

When I was in Colombia, I could see for the first time how that vision of Jesuit higher education could be concretely expressed as part of a Jesuit university’s core identity. A relationship between a Colombian Jesuit university and Gonzaga would provide numerous possibilities for faculty and student exchanges, as well as research and social service opportunities. In Colombia, I could see in microcosm all the hopes and challenges of the world to which we Jesuits and our lay colleagues in the U.S. are called to engage.

Today, as Gonzaga University’s Vice President for Mission, I feel that Christ is holding out a golden opportunity to help our university pursue and embody the magis, through a proposed “proyecto” (project) between Javeriana University in Bogotá and the Social Centers of Gonzaga University. This project will connect us to the heart of the Society’s work in the world. It is an exciting project that has the potential to create a unified vision for education in faith and justice. It also has the potential to create a new Ignatian paradigm for interdisciplinary education, which is called for by GC34 and can help Jesuit education become truly revolutionary and evangelical by addressing the critical issues of our day.

The Provincial of the Oregon Province, Rev. Robert Grimm, SJ, has shown enormous vision by entering into a new twinning agreement with our Jesuit brothers in Colombia. (See Fr. Grimm’s article on p. 5.) Twinning with Colombia may well transform the way we look at ourselves as Jesuits and the way we conceive of all our apostolic works throughout the Oregon Province. The reason for this potential transformation is simple:

Our mission as Jesuit educators obliges us to address the very sorts of social issues that are present in microcosm in Colombia: Human rights, economic development for the disenfranchised, environmental protection, protection of indigenous populations, governmental and legal reform, globalization, the problem of refugees, green energy sources, sustainable development, the North and South divide, and the effects of drugs upon people in both Colombia and the United States.

What I came to realize was that numerous isolated apostolic initiatives do not add up to an apostolic institution.

However, when I realized this, I also realized that my enthusiasm alone would not translate into a concrete twinning project for Gonzaga. I also would need the backing of the university’s president and academic deans. Therefore, upon returning from Colombia I made a presentation to the university’s leadership proposing a collaborative program with Javeriana University. I also urged Gonzaga to send a large delegation down to Colombia sometime in the 2001-2002 academic year. I argued that if we could bring the key players of the proposed twinning project face to face, they too would recognize the program’s enormous educational, social and spiritual potential for both Jesuit universities.

After making my presentation to Gonzaga, I was heartened by the response I received, especially from one dean who told me that for 20 years he had been going to meetings about faith and justice, and that not one significant project had ever materialized from any of the meetings. He said that the collaboration with Colombia could be the first real instance of a concrete project that might finally bear fruit for Gonzaga in the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

I arranged to bring all the delegation together for a 7:30 a.m. breakfast meeting. The date for the breakfast was September 11. Needless to say, the topic of Colombia never came up that tragic day. Instead, we spent the time figuring out an emergency response for the student population. The immensity of the terror and the shock of what was happening made me attend to the situation unfolding in America. For the time being, at least, my heart let go of Colombia.

For three weeks, I struggled to deal with the terrorist attacks and the demise of the project in Colombia. One morning in the Jesuit house chapel, I was gazing at the mosaic of Christ the King and noticed that on Christ’s right are Aloysius Gonzaga and Francis Xavier, standing side by side. It struck me that, as surely...
as Gonzaga and Xavier were standing side by side, both universities were supposed to work together. Acting on faith (or merely hope), I promptly sent an e-mail to those who had gathered for breakfast on the morning of September 11, again approaching the topic of twinning with Colombia.

Now that the U.S. had been pulled so dramatically and painfully into global events, it seemed even more important than ever for Gonzaga to reach out and find ways to concretely address the most pressing issues of our day. Under the current circumstances, of course, I understood that some of our committee members now might of the Oregon Province’s twinning agreement with the Province of Colombia, email Coordinator Rev. Michael Tyrrell, S.J.: tyrellm@bellarmineprep.org

1 For more information about the Oregon Province’s twinning agreement with the Province of Colombia, email Coordinator Rev. Michael Tyrrell, S.J.: tyrellm@bellarmineprep.org

2 The text of Fr. Kolvenbach’s powerful speech on “Faith and the Promotion of Justice in Jesuit Higher Education,” is available online at: http://www.scu.edu/news/releases/1000/kolvenbach_speech.html.
Contents

A Brutal World: Colombia in Crisis
Rev. Horacio Arango, S.J. ........................................ page 1
Finding Joy in Collaboration: A Colombian Perspective
Rev. Horacio Arango, S.J. ........................................ page 3
Finding Joy in Collaboration: A U.S. Perspective
Rev. Robert Grimm, S.J. ........................................ page 5
The Cure that Kills: Examining Coca Fumigation
Carlos Sanchez .................................................. page 7
The Human Face of Displacement
Ledys Bohórquez Farfán ........................................ page 12

Paths to Peace
- CINEP and the Peace Communities: Persevering in Peril
  Rev. Alejandro Angulo, S.J. ................................ page 15
- In Danger and Undaunted: Pursuing Peace in the Middle Magdalena Valley
  Rev. Francisco de Roux, S.J. ................................ page 17
- A Rural Vision of Peace in Colombia
  Rev. Alfredo Ferro, S.J. ....................................... page 18
- Programa por la Paz: Hearing the Urgent Call of Suffering
  Rev. Luis Fernando Munera, S.J. ......................... page 20

A New Jesuit Reductions for the Third Millennium
Rev. William Watson, S.J. ..................................... page 21

Books

Ingrid Betancourt, Until Death Do Us Part: My Struggle to Redeem Colombia
Mark Bowden, Killing Pablo
David Bushnell, The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself
Gabriel García Márquez, News of a Kidnapping

An educational packet about peace in Colombia, produced by the American Friends Service Committee. See http://www.afsc.org

Questions for Concerned Readers

Here are some questions to ponder and resources to consider if you want to become involved in assisting Colombia.

- How can U.S. Jesuit and other church communities help their counterparts in Colombia to search for peace and deal with the humanitarian crisis they face?
- If the U.S. expands military aid to the Colombian government, how can we be sure that human rights standards are not violated in the process? What can we as U.S. citizens do to ensure that our country’s involvement does not exacerbate, rather than help, the plight of the Colombian people?
- The U.S. government and the Western media tend to focus on Colombia’s “drug problem.” How does this shape popular American opinion about Colombia’s problems and what the U.S. response should be?

Web sites

Check out our web site—inallthings.org—for the text of the U.S. Jesuit Conference’s Statement on Colombia and similar statements by other Catholic organizations.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)
http://www.catholicrelief.org

Witness for Peace
http://www.witnessforpeace.org

American Friends Service Committee
http://www.afsc.org

U.N. High Commission for Refugees
http://www.unhcr.ch

Center for International Policy
http://www.ciponline.org

Human Rights Watch
http://www.hrw.org

National Mobilization on Colombia
http://www.colombiamobilization.org

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