



IGLESIA CRISTIANA MENONITA DE COLOMBIA

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**Statement of the Colombian Mennonite Church
on the massacres in communities,
the assassination of community leaders and former guerrillas
and a call to churches, government and civil society¹**

*Peacemakers who sow in peace
reap a harvest of righteousness. James 3.18 (NIV)*

By the 31st of December 2020, 249 people who laid down their weapons in compliance with the Peace Accords between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla have been killed.² There are documented reports of 91 massacres in 2020³, the main victims of which have been adolescents, young people and small farmers. In addition, in 2020 310 civic and community leaders were murdered, including children.⁴ These were people who practiced the most loving and Christian of principles: to serve and love their neighbors.⁵ Death has been sown, and with it, terror. And all this is happening in the context of drug trafficking and corruption that prioritize individual enrichment over the common good. This same individualistic emphasis is also manifest in the overall economic functioning of the country, making it a major obstacle to overcoming the poverty and inequality that afflict Colombia, and which particularly affects Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations, women, and small farmer families. This poverty and inequality can lead people to join drug trafficking and armed groups. It is in this reality that we find ourselves as a church: a reality of violence and injustice that requires that the church, the body of Christ, respond with faithfulness and wisdom.⁶

It is right that as churches we call on our governing authorities to fulfill their vocation as expressed in Romans 13, verses 3 and 6, to reward good and punish evil and in that way to serve God. This includes fully complying with their commitments laid out in the Peace Accords with the FARC; fully supporting the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (transitional justice); being actively present in all corners of the country to ensure justice, social, health, economic and educational services, and giving priority to these in the national budget; providing immediately applicable alternatives to illegal drug production; and doing everything in their power to achieve a negotiated solution to the ongoing armed conflict with the ELN guerrilla. We ask the same of the ELN. We recognize that steps have been taken and progress has been made, but if the violence that plagues us is to cease, those in power must prioritize attention to these areas.

1 We are grateful to the Mennonite Church of Ibagué for its statement, parts of which have been adapted for this statement.

2 *El Tiempo* <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/el-2020-cierra-con-249-excombatientes-asesinados-segun-farc-557423>

3 Según INDEPAZ <http://www.indepaz.org.co/informe-de-masacres-en-colombia-durante-el-2020/>

4 Según INDEPAZ <http://www.indepaz.org.co/lideres/>

5 Matthew 5:43-44; Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27; James 2:8

6 Isaiah 58:6-7; Hebrews 15:3; Luke 18:1-8; Isaiah 10:1-3; Micah 6:8

However, as churches we have a particular responsibility to:

1. Call things by their name: Denounce violence in all its manifestations. As Christians we understand that there is not good violence and bad violence. We do not make a distinction between justified killing and unjustified killing, good deaths and bad deaths.⁷ Nor do we accept the taking of life as a lesser evil.⁸ We understand that the State is secular and not confessional and that it can choose to use weapons and kill for different reasons, but it is not our place to endorse or participate in this. We understand that armed groups may choose to take up arms and kill in the name of social transformation, but it is not our place to endorse or join in. We do not equate institutional and illegal action.⁹ But we do believe that the example and teaching of Jesus to love the enemy and seeking their transformation is clear (Matthew 5:43-48).
2. Teach nonviolence as a way of life and as an ideal tool for transforming conflicts, be they social, community or family. This includes not using dismissive language toward another person or group. (Matthew 5.21-24)
3. Work actively to build peace. May our churches and faith communities be known as messengers of peace and may our buildings be used as places of peace. Train our members and leaders as promoters and agents of nonviolent conflict transformation and peace. (Matthew 5.9, 13-16). Promote both social and legal justice in our country.
4. Incorporate themes of justice, reconciliation, and peace into our teaching, preaching and singing as essential components of the proclamation of the Gospel and the call to a new life. (2 Corinthians 5.20)
5. Accompany the victims in their pain and in their search for justice and truth. Support organizations that work to this end. (Romans 12.15)
6. Invite those who commit violence to accept the Gospel's call to repentance and to a new and transformed life. (2 Peter 3.9)
7. Practice solidarity by doing what we can to bring better opportunities and improved living conditions to our communities. Leave individualism behind and work for the common good in our economic activities. (Santiago 2.14-17)

Our clear and consistent message as churches will permeate the culture, the economy, the social relationships and the exercise of government in our country. What the use of weapons during our 200 years of existence as a nation has not achieved, the instructive and transformative message of the Gospel of Peace can accomplish. It will be like the small mustard seed that grows into a tree. It will be like the yeast that leavens the entire loaf.

Today this call is all the more urgent as we see how easily and quickly violence and injustice escalate, bringing sadness and great loss to our society. "They that have ears, let them hear."



Yalile Caballero Vargas

⁷ Micah 2:1-2; Jeremiah 22:3; Luke 22:50-51

⁸ Luke 10:30; Proverbs 6:16-19

⁹ Luke 3:14; Romans 13:1-4

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