

Dear President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry,

As leaders of religious communities and faith-based organizations, we are grateful for President Obama's support of the peace process in Colombia. After fifty years of internal armed conflict that has displaced over five million people and shattered countless lives, we join with our Colombian sisters and brothers during the upcoming 2013 **Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia** to say, "**Now Is the Time for Peace with Justice.**"

We know a lasting peace can only be built on the strong foundation of truth, justice, reparations to victims, and reconciliation at every level of Colombian society. Therefore we urge you to press the Government of Colombia for:

- Greater inclusion of victims of the violence and broad participation of civil society in the peace negotiations and in the implementation and verification of peace accords. Peace must be built from the ground up as well as negotiated from the top down. The engagement of every sector of society – including victims' associations, displaced communities, civil society organizations, religious communities, and labor unions – is necessary to construct a just and sustainable peace;
- A bilateral cease fire and a commitment from all parties to respect international humanitarian law even as negotiations proceed so as to protect the civilian populations still caught in the crossfire, especially the most vulnerable – Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, women and children, and farmers in rural areas;
- Establishment of an independent truth commission to find and reveal the full truth about those who implemented, ordered, financed and promoted the violence and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law against the civilian population, whether they be guerrillas, paramilitary forces, or the government's own security forces;
- Dismantling of paramilitary and guerrilla successor groups, as well as other illegal armed groups, to ensure the protection after a peace accord of rural communities, displaced communities returning to their land, and those relocated to urban centers; and
- A commitment to strong measures of justice for those guerrillas, paramilitaries or state security forces who committed atrocities or gross violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. The victims of violence themselves should be included in the process of defining justice for the perpetrators of violence. The restoration of justice should also include fair and meaningful reparations to the victims and programs that support the safe return to their lands.

Furthermore, we call on the U.S. government at this critical moment to substantially reorient its foreign assistance to Colombia so that it is aid for peace, rather than aid for war. U.S. foreign assistance funds should support the peace process and the implementation of peace accords.

Restructured aid should focus on the safe and sustainable return of land for internally displaced persons and refugees including titling and de-mining; integration support for those displaced communities that do not wish to return to their places of origin; and alternative economic development programs that respect human rights and the environment and are developed in consultation with local communities. We also urge you to advocate for and provide U.S. funding

for the development of more effective protection programs for human rights defenders, union members, returned communities and other communities at risk.

Recognizing that those who participated in the violence will require support in order to build a peace that lasts, U.S. aid should also support the reintegration of demobilized guerilla fighters and social services for child soldiers. The lives of demobilized guerrillas who choose to enter the political process must be protected so that past calamities are not repeated.

Finally, this new understanding of U.S. aid should help prevent a return to violence by supporting a strengthened justice system, an independent truth commission and an independent mechanism to verify peace accord compliance.

We urge you to recognize the role of Protestant and Catholic churches and those of other spiritual traditions, religious communities, faith-based organizations, victims' associations and citizens' organizations in the process of reconciliation, as they assist victims, help in the reintegration of demobilized guerrillas, provide supportive services to child soldiers, and re-weave the social fabric of their local communities.

Our faith traditions, our international service experiences and our civic commitments compel us to speak now in this critical moment in time. We believe that the United States can play an important role to foster and build a just and sustainable peace in Colombia. We urge you to rise to meet this challenge.

Sincerely,

*Signature of religious leaders*