



## Bulletin Quotes

*Below is basic background and general facts on Colombia. Also included are reflective quotes on the situation in the country from Catholic Church leaders. Please feel free to use them in your bulletins and newsletters as we collectively focus on Colombia in the coming days.*

### Background

Colombia continues to experience one of the worst human rights crises in the world. The current conflict is rooted in a long history of extreme inequality and political exclusion, though it has intensified in recent years due to the infusion of drug-related profits received by armed actors and substantial military aid from the U.S.

Colombia is the country from which 80% of the cocaine in the U.S. comes, as well as most of the heroin on the East Coast. It is one of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid, an aid package that, from the Church's point of view, has been excessively tilted toward anti-narcotics and counter-insurgency strategies. More focus is needed on local community development opportunities and the needs of thousands of people who have been forcibly displaced by the violence.

Colombia has become one the most dangerous places for human rights workers, journalists, union leaders and church workers. In the last fifteen years hundreds of Catholic religious leaders, including bishops, priests, nuns, pastoral agents and Protestant pastors have been killed. Colombia needs to make more progress toward ending widespread impunity for human rights abusers. The State Department calls impunity the "greatest challenge to the credibility of the Government's commitment to human rights."

*Join Catholic Relief Services along with our ecumenical partners as we pray for an end to the violence and suffering in Colombia, and take action to influence policy change in the United States.*



## Bulletin Quotes

"I never cease to raise fervent prayers to God for Colombia where for a long time many sons and daughters of this beloved Country have suffered from extortion, kidnapping and the violent loss of their loved ones. I ask the Lord to end this inhuman suffering once and for all and that they may find paths of reconciliation, mutual respect and sincere harmony, thus restoring brotherhood and solidarity, the solid foundations necessary for just progress and the building of lasting peace." *Pope Benedict XVI Angelus, February 3, 2008*

"Colombia is experiencing one of the worst human rights crisis in the world. The current conflict in Colombia is rooted in a long history of extreme inequality and political exclusion, though it has intensified dramatically in recent years due in part to the infusion of drug related profits that many of the armed actors currently receive." *Colombia Update- USCCB/CRS February 2007*

"The Church in Colombia has insisted on the absolute necessity of finding a peaceful, political and negotiated settlement to the internal conflict. Colombia today has every right to call upon its neighbors, especially the United States, to come to its aid". *International Policy Committee, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops March 16, 2000*

"Peace is no more than respect for the inviolable rights of the person ..., while war is born of the violation of these rights and brings with it even graver violations of them." *Ten Principles for the Road toward Peace, Episcopal Conference of Colombia, 2002*

"In the last decade some 60 Catholic religious leaders, including bishops, priests, nuns and seminarians, and even higher number of pastoral agents and Protestant pastors, have been killed. Colombia now has the second highest number of internally displaced persons in the world, displacement which disproportionately impacts Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities." *Catholic Relief Services*

"We must give peace weapons other than those that have been set aside for killing and destroying humanity. Above all, the weapons of morality are necessary." Let us cultivate attitudes of openness and of welcome, of respect, of truth and justice." *Ten Principles for the Road toward Peace, Episcopal Conference of Colombia, 2002*

"There is no peace if there are not clear criteria for sustainable human development, for cultural, economic, political, juridical and ecological development. Thus a very broad agenda is essential for the journey toward peace." *Ten Principles for the Road toward Peace, Episcopal Conference of Colombia, 2002*

"We recognize the dignity that each Colombian man and woman has as a creature of God that has been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to this, we realize that the mandate "thou shalt not kill" seems to have been forgotten and we are submerged in an atmosphere of death. The attempts perpetrated against human life of individuals and groups, the negation of liberty by kidnapping, the denying of rights belonging to women, children and the elderly, the destruction of goods that are necessary for carrying out a dignified life, all these factors affect us terribly." *Colombian Bishops Conference*

"Our purpose and goal is to work for an integral peace, to form a "culture of peace." As far as the armed conflict goes, once again we say what we believe: it will only be overcome through political negotiation, whose fundamental nucleus is the sincere and truthful dialogue between the parties involved in the search for a new vision for Colombia, within a framework of social justice and a new style of peaceful coexistence." *Colombian Bishops Conference*

"Being displaced means becoming a victim of a strategic battle in which others play with your life for profit in a balance of power in which you carry no weight" Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro, *Archbishop of Tunja Challenges for Nation Building, 2006*

"The accompaniment of victims, and walking humbly with those who suffer, especially the displaced population, are, among other initiatives, part of the proposal of peace building in the middle of conflict, which should include the population in the processes of seeking peace and reconciliation. *Mon. Hector Fabio Henao, Lessons Learned in Peacebuilding in Colombia, 2007*

"Listening to communities, not just as a passive act but as an active learning experience and as an opportunity to explore more deeply historical lessons in situations of armed conflict, enables us to put ourselves in the situation, on the path with those who suffer and, from this encounter, contribute our perspective of the Gospels and the Kingdom that Jesus promises us. It is the ability to listen like the good Samaritan who breaks through the indifference and gets involved in the search for peace and truth". *Mon. Hector Fabio Henao, Lessons Learned in Peacebuilding in Colombia, 2007*

We believe that all armed factions, the state and civil society should take part in this reconciliation process. We recognise the need for the accompaniment and backing of the international community and all necessary efforts to restore social justice, peace and reconciliation." *2005 National Reconciliation Conference of the Colombia Bishops*

## **Remembering the Victims and Rejoicing with the Peacemakers**

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