

MESSAGE FROM THE COLOMBIAN BISHOPS ON THE 2010 ELECTIONS

A COMPLEX YEAR FULL OF CHALLENGES

(English Translation)

TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE INDEPENDENCE OF COLOMBIA

1. Those who participated in the events that took place on July 20, 1810 envisioned the future of a nation in which all people would enjoy human dignity, national freedom, natural rights, glory, and honor. They knew they would have to risk their own personal security, their property, their families, and even their lives in order to defend these values.

Today, two hundred years after the independence of our nation, as we hear democracy's new call to participate in the 2010 election process, we are inspired by the principles upon which our nation was founded and the heroism of our forefathers.

2. Today, one look at the evening news is enough to remind us of all of the difficulties our nation is experiencing. We see violence in every aspect of our lives (in families, sports arenas, urban neighborhoods, rural areas, in gangs, schools etc.) and we are struggling with unemployment, forced displacement, lack of housing, hunger, impunity, corruption, and a culture of illegality. All of these challenges, however, must be confronted by people willing to work in the noble profession of politics with creativity, courage, self-denial, and transparency.

We have inherited from our elders countless treasures that define who we are today as Colombians—and we are rich in human and Christian values. Among them are the well-tested values of solidarity with those who suffer, strength in the face of adversity, the ability to rise up again from the most difficult circumstances, and the unity of our families. We must rely on these things and put them to work with enthusiasm to build a nation to which we can belong as its children, and where we can participate in its future.

3. It is painful to see that some of those who we elected in the past are now in jail or have been removed from office. Others have had their suitability for office, their honesty, or their transparency in life questioned. This has led to a great sense of disinterest and apathy among voters. Many people are suspicious of politicians and disappointed in them. They feel betrayed and let down.

4. We the bishops of Colombia firmly believe that we are all responsible for the present and future of our nation. Therefore, **we call on all candidates** to put the common good before personal or partisan interests and to introduce programs that respond to the needs of the people. **We call on voters** to take advantage of this opportunity to exercise their rights and duties as voters and to participate actively in seeking the public good. It is also an exercise of conscience when as citizens, we choose people, who because of their ethical qualities and professional abilities, are willing, like our forefathers, to commit themselves to seek the paths that lead to justice, brotherhood, and wellbeing for all citizens.

We know that this electoral process will have an impact on the immediate situation of life in Colombia and we are convinced that the Lord—who is the Way, the Truth, and the Light—will lead us towards comprehensive development, reconciliation, and peace.

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