WHO ARE WE?

The Solidarity Collective collaborative project is an effort to bring us closer to our core values of horizontal and accountable solidarity both in our international work and within our own organization.

Practicing horizontal and participatory governance, the collective is led by those closest to the work—our partners in Latin America, international team members, and grassroots organizers in the US—and strives to uphold the same worker’s rights, feminist, and anti-racist principles within our own organization that we advocate for transnationally.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOMPANIMENT

International protective accompaniment is a non violent strategy for protecting threatened individuals and communities in the midst of an armed conflict or political violence. It is based on the principles of non violence, non inherence and impartiality.
ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2019, our Colombia Team drastically increased its activities due to the rising threats against human rights defenders and organized campesino, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. 2019, marked one of the deadliest years on record for social leaders in Colombia, with over 155 killed between January and September of 2019, according to INDEPAZ.

In Colombia, hundreds of thousands of people continue to be displaced from their ancestral lands, according to the National Victims Unit, at least 500,000 people have been forcibly displaced since the signing of the Havanna Peace Accords between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in late 2016.

During 2019, our small team of 2 volunteers carried out 13 international human rights accompaniment and verification missions across 8 different departments (La Guajira, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Narino, Antioquia, Choco, Meta, Cundinamarca) in Colombia. They also attended 8 visibilization meetings with Colombian partners and U.S Embassy officials.
Our Colombia team also published 17 blogs and 3 articles in major publications containing analysis from their perspectives on the ground. The team also produced 2 in-depth reports covering the links between the U.S-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and worsening labor conditions as well as the displacement crisis affecting thousands Indigenous Colombians even after the signing of the historic Peace Accords in 2016.

The team sent out 4 urgent actions, resulting in over 1,200 letters sent to members of Congress advocating for the rights of the Colombian people. Our team members participated in 6 congressional meeting. Produced 1 webinar on the effects of U.S foreign policy on the Colombian Peace Process.

Our team led a 4-week speaking tour across 4 U.S states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri) and Washington D.C, reaching hundreds of people across the midwestern United States. Our Colombia team appeared on 5 public radio programs and produced 5 short informational videos.
INTRODUCTION

The violent struggle to control territory for economic, military and political reasons, coupled with extreme levels of marginalization of the rural poor in the form of high concentrations of land ownership, has been one of the root causes of Colombia’s 55-year-old internal armed conflict.

This struggle has pitted the U.S-backed Colombian security forces and their paramilitary allies against guerrilla groups, resulting in extraordinary levels of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, with civilians by far the main victims.

Those disproportionately affected by the mass violence have been Indigenous People and Afro-Colombian and peasant farmers, as well as human rights defenders, social leaders and trade unionists.
In January, our Colombia Team accompanied CONPAZ and Mujeres AIINI alongside a group of female activists from New York City to produce a short documentary film counteracting the harmful narratives surrounding the Naya River basin communities. These communities have been stigmatized as simply a "hidden route for cocaine", a label that obscures, and often undermines, the courageous efforts led by men and women to build peace from the ground up and develop economic alternatives that preserve their natural environment. The group documented stories of resistance by communities impacted by the U.S-led “War on Drugs”.

"IN 2013 CAME THE FUMIGATIONS, THEN OUR CORN AND OUR YAMPEEN STOPPED GROWING"

The group travelled to various Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities located in the Naya River basin, all of which had been negatively impacted by the U.S-backed aerial glyphosate fumigations. The effects of these chemical attacks can still be felt by the local residents whose crops have yet to recover from the devastation created by Monsanto’s carcinogenic weedkiller.
In February, our Colombia Team accompanied Afro-Colombian leader, Daira Quinones, alongside John Walsh and Witness for Peace Southeast Board Member, Chelsey Dyer.

The group travelled with Daira to the Consejo Comunitario, La Nupa, a community she helped create and has been leading through the process of receiving a collective land title. Daira was forcibly displaced from her community of La Nupa in 2001 and has been unable to safely return since.

Our physical accompaniment enabled Daira to visit La Nupa and strengthen the communal process in the face of exacerbating violence against environmental protectors and human rights defenders in Colombia.
In March, our Colombia Team accompanied the Cuaca Department Victims Committee (MDV) to Villahermosa, Cajibio, Cauca. The MDV was established after the signing of the Victims Law of 2011 and negotiated on behalf of the victims during the 2016 peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country’s largest guerrilla organization, to oversee the implementation of points regarding State guarantees to truth, reparation, and non-repetition for victims of the armed conflict.

CAJIBIO

The Department of Cauca is one of the hardest hit regions by the armed conflict with hundreds of thousands forced to flee their homes in the midst of the armed conflict. Since the signing of the 2016 Peace Accords, members of the MDV have received death threats by armed groups who wish to deter victims from speaking the truth and accessing their rights to reparations in the form of land restitution.
In March, the Colombian team accompanied CONPAZ to Mapiripan, Meta for the commemoration of Dumar Aljure, Ana Felisa Peña, Asael Peña, Floresmiro Peña and Ana Felisa Peña who were killed by the national army 51 years ago.

The purpose of the commemoration, which was also accompanied by the Truth Commission and the Search Unit for Presumed Disappeared Persons, was for the Aljure Martinez family to begin the process of clarifying the truth, recognize the responsible actors and reconcile with the actors responsible for the murder of 11 relatives.
In May, our Colombia Team led a group of U.S-based activists to the departments of Valle del Cauca and Cauca to learn about the connections between the U.S “War on Drugs” and economic liberalization through Free Trade Agreements like the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA) signed by the Obama administration in 2011.

Since the signing of the 2016 Peace Accords the largest left-wing guerrilla group, FARC, has become a political party and laid down their weapons. This has created a power vacuum, quickly being filled by right-wing paramilitaries and their corporate backers, leading to an explosion of violence against small-scale farmers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in northern Cauca.
BLANQUITA-MURRI

In June, our Colombia Team accompanied Edwin Mosquera from CONPAZ (Comunidades Construyendo Paz en los Territorios) to the community of Blanquita-Murri in the department of Antioquia.

Due to the lack of implementation of the 2016 Peace Accords by the Colombian central government, the community has organized the first-ever inter-ethnic peace committee, designed to tackle the points laid out in the historic agreement. The community faces stigmatization and harassment by various illegal armed groups as well as the Colombian Army.
In July, our Colombia International Team traveled to Argelia, Cauca to accompany La Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz for a commemoration for the victims of the armed conflict. The event was led by community leaders and organizations such as La Mesa Municipal de Victimas de Argelia. During the march, the Colombian military co-opted the event, and commemorated one of their fallen soldiers, proclaiming that they were also victims of the armed conflict.

ARGELIA

The community meeting following the march took place in a school. Against international law, the armed military entered the school building and stayed throughout the duration of the meeting. This put everyone at risk, especially the children who were present. This area has increasingly been militarized due to the coca cultivation campesinos depend on. There have been countless assassinations and forced disappearances due to outside actors vying for control of land and illicit coca crops that campesinos depend on.
LA GUAJIRA

In July, our Colombia Team led a group of environmental activists and students to the department of La Guajira to learn about the devastating impacts of Cerrejón, the largest open-pit coal mine on the planet, on the traditional ways of life of the Wayuu Indigenous people and Afro-Colombian communities located near the colossal mining operation.

Delegates learned about the struggles taking place in La Guajira since Exxon-Mobile began exploration in the 1970s and how it connects to environmental justice movements in their own communities.
In August, our Colombia Team accompanied the Wounaan community of Pichima Quebrada, whose members found themselves caught in the middle of a crossfire between FARC dissidents and the ELN, guerrilla forces that are still active in Colombia despite a peace agreement signed between the national government and the FARC in 2016.

The day after this confrontation, fearing for their safety, 95 families and a total of 417 people were forced to leave their territory and seek refuge in the nearby municipality of Santa Genoveva de Docordó, located at the southern end of the Chocó department and inhabited largely by an Afro-Colombian population. They took only the clothes they were wearing.
"Eradicating Peace: The Other Side of the U.S "War on Drugs"

In October, Evan King, a member of our Colombia Team, travelled to the Midwest Region with COCCAM spokesperson, Leider Valencia, to discuss the impacts of U.S foreign policy the efforts of small-scale farmers to build alternative economic models, while resisting State repression and resource extraction by multi-national corporations.

Leider spoke at multiple universities, appeared on 3 public radio programs, 4 community exchanges, and ended his 4 week tour in Washington D.C, where he participated in a panel discussion and spoke to lawmakers about the harmful effects of U.S policies in Colombia.
On November 21st, the team accompanied Congreso de los Pueblos in Bogotá’s national strike where student, labor unions, indigenous groups and civil society exercised their right to protest.

The mobilization spoke to wide dissatisfaction with the government’s response to massacres against social leaders, indigenous peoples, rural women and their communities, labor and pension reforms, student protests, corruption, and the recalcitrant implementation of the 2016 peace accords. The city was hyper-militarized with U.S. sponsored anti riot police who violently repressed peaceful protestors.
In December, our Colombia Team returned to the Consejo Comunitario La Nupa, to accompany Daira Quinones as she conducted workshops on historical memory and ancestral wisdom with youth as well as elders.

Due to its geographic location and land resources, La Nupa has been victimized by a number of illegal and legal actors during the course of the 53-year-old civil war. Despite the challenges, the community of La Nupa continues to fight for a collective land title to their ancestral land and seeks to defend their community from industrial agricultural and narco-trafficking organizations.
"SOLIDARITY WITH COLOMBIA IS NEEDED MORE THAN EVER"

Our team relies on supporter like you to make this work possible. We thank everyone who has contributed to our efforts to build solidarity across borders in hopes of creating a more peaceful, just and sustainable future.

MEET THE TEAM

SAMANTHA WHERRY

Samantha attended the University of Loyola Chicago where she recieved a BA in International Studies and a minor in Peace Studies. Sam is originally from Antioquia, Colombia, just an hour outside of Medellin. Throughout her undergraduate career, she interned at various human rights organizations. She has done extensive research on the effects of aerial fumigation on the rural communities in Putumayo.

EVAN KING

Evan joined the team in February 2018. He holds a BA in International Relations and Latin American Studies from the College of William and Mary. Born in San Diego, California, Evan grew up in Chihuahua, Mexico, where the "War on Drugs" had a deep impact on his desire to advocate for justice and sustainable development in Latin America.
At the end of FY2019 our Colombia Program expenses were $40,195 USD with 100% of funds coming from individual donations from members and supporters that make this work possible.