



2022 Colombia Program Anual Report

WITNESS FOR PEACE SOLIDARITY COLLECTIVE

The Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective is an independent U.S. organization founded in 1983 by U.S. activists to respond to the devastating effects of U.S. funding for the Contras in Nicaragua. Since then, the organization has developed its activities to amplify the impacts of U.S. foreign policy in several Latin American countries. Currently, Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective works in Honduras, Cuba, and Colombia.

In Colombia, the Solidarity Collective has been working since the implementation of **Plan Colombia in 2000**, in order to make visible the impacts of the U.S. military funding of the "War on Drugs" on communities and the intrusions of transnational corporations backed by the **Free Trade Agreement that was signed in 2011**.

Our primary methods include:

Political education: We provide educational resources and training to our base on the harmful effects of U.S. policies in Latin America and the achievements of social movements, and mobilize them to act for change.

Advocacy: Through concrete legislative campaigns and urgent actions, we constantly engage our networks to promote policies for peace, justice, and sustainable economies.

Physical, political, and media accompaniment: Our programs in Colombia and Honduras support affected communities and social leaders, offering them an additional level of protection on the ground, and organizing to make their voices heard by decision-makers and our community networks.



Colombia Co-Director, Barbara Orozco

Colombian Context

BACKGROUND

The Colombian population entered 2022 with disenchantment, fear, resistance, and peaceful struggle after 5 years since the signing of the 2016 Peace Accords. Far from achieving peace, the five years brought a reconfiguration of armed actors, an increase in violence, and an attempt to implement socio-economic reforms that brought all of Colombian society to the streets during the social protests of 2019 and 2021. The only response of the state was militarization and repression.

CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

The first half of 2022 was marked by the context of elections that for the first time in the contemporary history of Colombia produced a turn in the country's direction through the inauguration of a new center-left government on August 7. As part of the coalition, for the first time, a black woman coming from one of the regions most affected by the armed conflict has assumed the Vice Presidency of the country.

The first commitment of the new government was to achieve peace, and as soon as it took office, it initiated dialogues with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and presented a new policy called "Total Peace," which was approved on November 3. Among the policy's goals is to initiate dialogues with all armed actors, based on the understanding that to achieve lasting peace requires a solution that is political, peaceful and rooted in dialogue.

United States & Colombia

PEACE ACCORDS

In the 2016 Peace Accords, the United States was called upon to provide international accompaniment to ensure the safety and the dismantling of illegal armed groups. With the arrival of the new government to power, the United States officially assumed the role of an international accompaniment of the Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Accords in October 2022.

WAR ON DRUGS AND MILITARIZATION

The United States has played a key role in militarization and in maintaining a logic of war during the more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia. The United States provided billions of dollars to the Colombian State denominated as "defense" and under the political umbrella of the so-called "War on Drugs."

In the first five years of the 2016 Peace Accords' implementation, the Trump Administration in the fight against drugs, demanded that Colombia eliminate coca crops by spraying them with glyphosate. In addition, the U.S. Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) arrived in the country to instruct the Colombian Security Forces.

The U.S. administration maintained a high funding for the Colombian Military Forces despite allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

As a result, there were attempts to reverse these interventions within the United States Congress, among them, the representative of the House and chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Gregory Meeks, requested that the Leahy Act be applied in its entirety and "support for Colombian security forces involved in serious human rights violations" be suspended. Likewise, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, presented three amendments to the 2022 budget in order to limit the resources that would be delivered to Colombia.

Biden Administration

However, the new Biden Administration reached a military spending of 877 billion dollars in 2022, which amounted to 39% of total world military spending, and is based on Washington's foreign policy, which is concentrating its efforts on dispute to preserve its hegemony against China and Russia.

As far as Colombia is concerned, the National Defense Authorization Act was approved without the amendments presented by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that sought to limit resources for the country to be invested in the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) and aerial spraying with glyphosate. The only amendment that was considered is related to Colombia's accountability for the panorama of human rights violations by members of the security forces. However, the U.S. provided the largest budget for Colombia in the decade (\$471.3 million), of which \$40 million was earmarked for the Armed Forces.

In addition, Colombia is recognized as a non-NATO ally, which means access to greater collaboration in defense technologies, privileged access to the U.S. defense industry, more joint military exchanges, training with NATO countries, and special access to military funding, among other benefits.

Indigenous, Black, and Campesinx Communities and the Human Rights Situation

WFPSC accompanies grassroots processes of Black, Indigenous and Campesinx communities in the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, on the Pacific Coast of Colombia and in departments most affected by the armed conflict and the various kinds of structural violence that they have historically suffered from.

The communities defend the implementation of the 2016 Peace Accords and since its signing, denounce the civil absence of the State, the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all armed actors, the damage to the environment and the spraying with glyphosate. They assert that the militarization of the rural territories is not a solution and that the "logic of war" has to end to ensure Lasting Peace and the life of future generations together with the persistence of their cultures.

Some data that reflect the human rights situation in 2022 are:

- **94** massacres with **300 victims**
- **189** social leaders were assassinated
- **42** signatories of Peace Accords were murdered
- More than **20,000** families became victims of **140** forced mass displacements.

A YEAR OF ACTIVITIES



2022



507 Actions Taken



4 Virtual events organized



10 International Delegates



3 Urgent Actions



10 Protective Accompaniments



14 Articles & Blogs



Colombia

Supporting Peace and Justice

In a year marked by the electoral context and a turn of the direction of the country with the election of a new government in Colombia and the beginning of the Biden Administration in the United States, the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective has maintained its activities in the country together with grassroots organizations and Black, Indigenous and Campesinxs communities who continue to resist the different forms of structural violence aided by U.S. economic and military policies.



Our team carried out 10 accompaniments to grassroots organizations, Black, Indigenous and Campesinxs communities in the departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Nariño (Colombian Pacific Region), Arauca, Putumayo and Bogotá

Jessica Garcia accompaniment in Bajo Calima

CAMPESINX FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN MIRANDA, CAUCA

The Association of the Creation of the Campesina Reserve Zone of the Municipality of Miranda – ASPROZONAC – is a campesinx-based organization created in the Municipality of Miranda and affiliated to the Unitary Agricultural Union Federation – FENSUAGRO.

After the mobilizations of the National Agrarian Strike of 2016, in which campesinx organizations from all over the country converged demanding compliance with the Accords assumed by the Government of Juan Manuel Santos at the National Ethnic and Popular Peasant Agrarian Summit in 2013 and 2014, the agricultural workers of ASPROZONAC obtained the La Elvira Farm. However, the government at the time did not fulfill its commitments to the families. When the families arrived at the farm they had nothing and were practically abandoned.

Due to the impacts of the Green Revolution that had been implemented by the U.S. the families ended up on land that for the last 100 years was dedicated to monoculture, for 50 years to cattle ranching and for 50 years to production of sugar cane. They needed to start recovering it. Currently, they have five types of land but do not have funds to pay for them, after the pandemic.



ASPROZONAC, Miranda, Cauca

BLACK RESISTANCE IN BUENOS AIRES, CAUCA

During 2007, ASORENACER was born in Buenos Aires, Cauca. Currently called **Renacer Siglo XXI**, they are a civil organization dedicated to supporting, advising and accompanying various judicial and administrative processes of the population of victims of the armed conflict. Their work focuses on strengthening organizational and leadership processes with a differential and gender approach, promoting the defense of human rights and protection of the ancestral territory of the black people.

The work of the defenders of **Renacer Siglo XXI** has been especially threatened by the presence of armed actors, massive and systematic violations of human rights, as well as by the economic and strategic interests of multinationals and transnationals with extractivist objectives.

Other important factors that have jeopardized the work of this organization are the disproportionate growth of illicit crops in Cauca and the failure of the previous National Government to implement the 2016 Peace Accords.



Cimarrona Guard in Buenos Aires, Cauca

INDIGENOUS TERRITORIAL DISPOSSESSION IN BOGOTÁ

On September 29, 2021, 350 people, mostly women and children, belonging to 13 indigenous peoples, after walking for 13 hours in protest of the humanitarian crisis they were experiencing, arrived at the "Enrique Olaya Herrera" National Park in Bogotá and stopped to rest.

Shortly after settling in the park and organizing to have a meal, the indigenous peoples, represented by the organizing process called Indigenous Authorities in Bakatá (AIB) were given the first and only response of the State so far: a repression. Around 10 pm that day, the riot police (ESMAD) intervened with tear gas and stunners, which had effects on the health of pregnant women and children. The indigenous peoples decided to settle in the National Park of Bogotá and declare themselves in a permanent protest 'Minga Permanente'.

Currently, they are relocated to the La Florida Building in Bogotá, and continue waiting for a response from the district and national governments for return.



Autoridades Indigenas en Bakata



Accompaniment with Justapaz

ACCOMPANYING FAITH COMMUNITIES THAT BUILD PEACE

Throughout 2022, **Justapaz** did not only accompany faith communities in their peace-building processes that form part of their daily work but also toured three departments of Colombia collecting testimonies on the need to advance peace talks with the armed groups that continue to be armed in different regions of the country.

Thus, Justapaz together with the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation, toured Chocó, Arauca, and Nariño in order to create a documentary that would give an account of the different voices that build peace within and for the rural territories and that would show the urgent need of achieving peace within all regions of the country.

The documentary will have three chapters, one per department, in which various voices of social leaders and different communities from each of the visited regions will be heard. They have spent a lifetime organizing and resisting nonviolently in the context of the armed conflict in places where the signing of the 2016 Peace Accords has not had a direct impact. Despite being different communities and contexts, they all share the same request in common: the need to achieve peace that will be permanent for the entire territory.

TERRITORIAL DISPOSSESSION IN BUENAVENTURA

The region of Bajo Calima, Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca, has been constituted as a Community Council where 10 black communities and 3 indigenous reservations coexist. The population of 5 black communities and 1 indigenous reservation have been completely displaced in the first months of the year to urban areas. At the end of the year, they remain in a humanitarian crisis with no guarantee of return. Since the signing of the Peace Accords with the FARC-EP in 2016, this is the second forced mass displacement in this region.

Given its strategic geographical position and the presence of the most important port in the Pacific Region, Buenaventura has not only become the epicenter of large megaprojects in the process of development but is also a strategic corridor for the export of drugs, mainly to the United States, as well as the import of chemicals for the production of the cocaine paste.



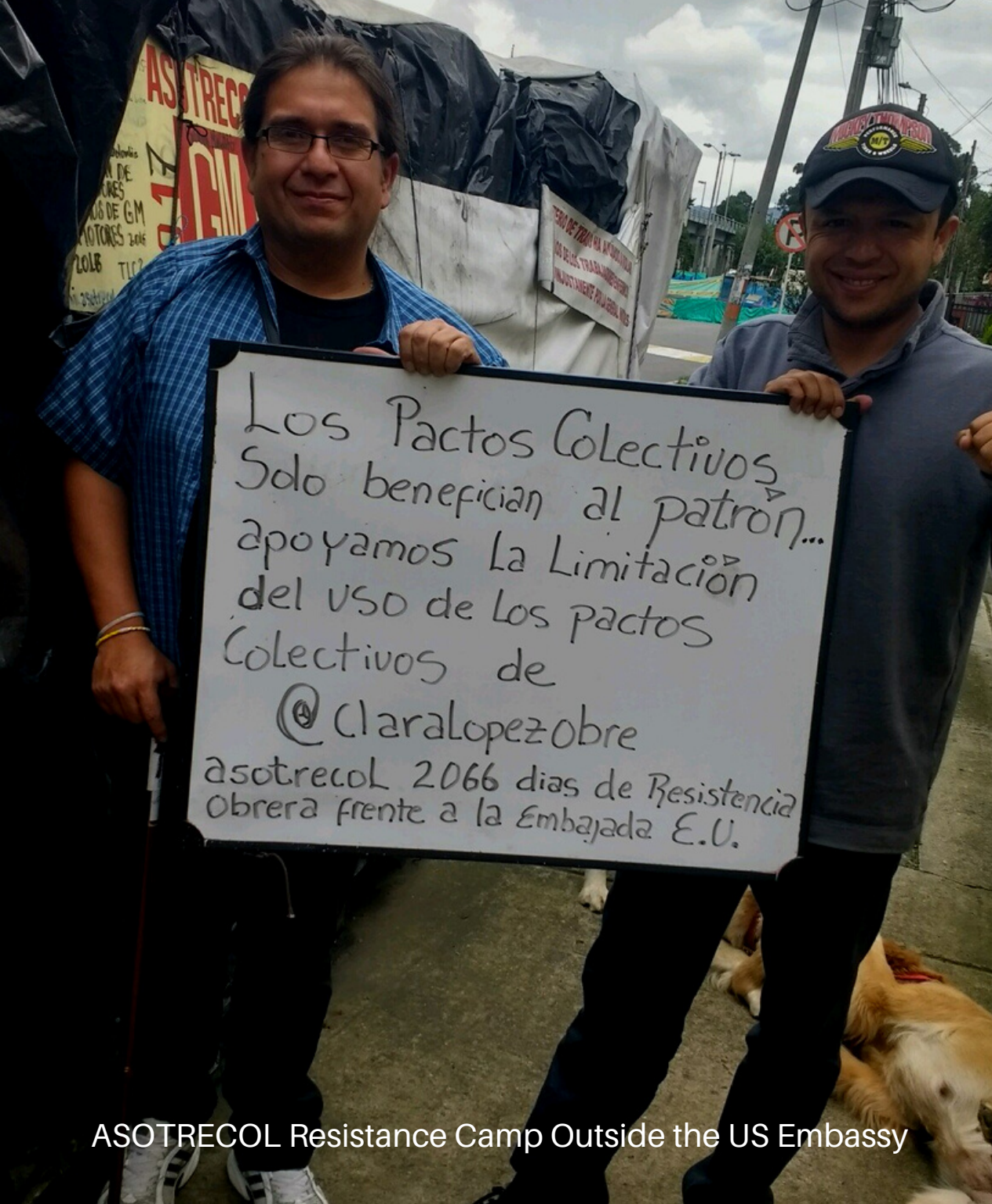
Jessica Garcia accompanies the Consejo Comunitario in Bajo Calima

THE STRUGGLE FOR LABOR RIGHTS

On August 2, 2011, the Association of Sick Workers and Former Workers of General Motors Colmotores (ASOTRECOL) was established in front of the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá to continue the struggle for labor rights and denounce violations committed by the company, a subsidiary of General Motors in the United States. In 2022 they celebrated their 11 years of resistance.

The approval of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Colombia and the United States meant countless negative impacts on workers, therefore, the Labor Action Plan (LAP) was designed with 37 concrete measures on 10 issues that were signed on April 7, 2011 by the presidents of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos and his US counterpart, Barack Obama. The FTA entered into force on May 15, 2012. However, the Colombian government at the time failed to comply with the LAP and nonetheless once the FTA was ratified by the US Congress and entered into force, the LAP measures would not be binding.

The make-shift camp of the ASOTRECOL members is still installed in front of the US Embassy in Bogotá, and protest continues to be the only means they have left to claim their rights in the face of the impunity for the crimes which General Motors Colmotores has committed against its workers.



ASOTRECOL Resistance Camp Outside the US Embassy

UNITED STATES TOUR OF THE AIB INDIGENOUS SPOKESPERSON

The tour was originally planned to take place in 2021 but due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, it could finally be realized in 2022. Together with Violet Medina Quiscué, a Nasa indigenous leader and spokesperson for the Indigenous Authorities in Bakatá, WFPSC toured North Carolina and Washington where Violet was able to share with grassroots organizations, universities, human rights organizations and members of congress about the situation of indigenous communities in Colombia, and in particular, of the communities of 14 indigenous peoples from different regions of the country who live in a situation of forced displacement in Bogotá.

Maria Violet Medina Quiscue Presenting to an Audience in North
Carolina, USA



UNITED STATES CITIZENS DELEGATION TO COLOMBIA

The delegation of ten U.S. citizens to Colombia that was scheduled for 2022 had to be moved for contextual reasons to January 2023. The delegates came to learn firsthand about the nonviolent resistance of communities and grassroots organizations that defend their territory and pursue peacebuilding in the Cauca and Valle del Cauca regions.

THANK YOU

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective would like to express profound gratitude for the solidarity that the people in the United States have shown in multiple ways and to all those who in one way or another took action to change U.S. policies that negatively impact Latin American countries.

We would especially like to thank:

The delegates who have come to Colombia to experience the reality of the black, indigenous and campesinx communities and who have continued providing support upon their return home, and to all those who made the tour in North Carolina, United States, possible so that people could learn about the reality of the indigenous peoples in Colombia.

Gail Phares, founder of Witness for Peace, for so many years of solidarity, good work, and love for the Americas, to John Walsh and David Pegg for their experience and presence in Colombia. To Consorcio OAXACA and CRLN for their extraordinary and unparalleled collaboration.

Each and every one of those who have called their representatives in action alerts, published posts remembering Colombia, spoken in their communities about what is happening, offered accommodation, company, and help with formalities, various events, translation and countless actions.

