



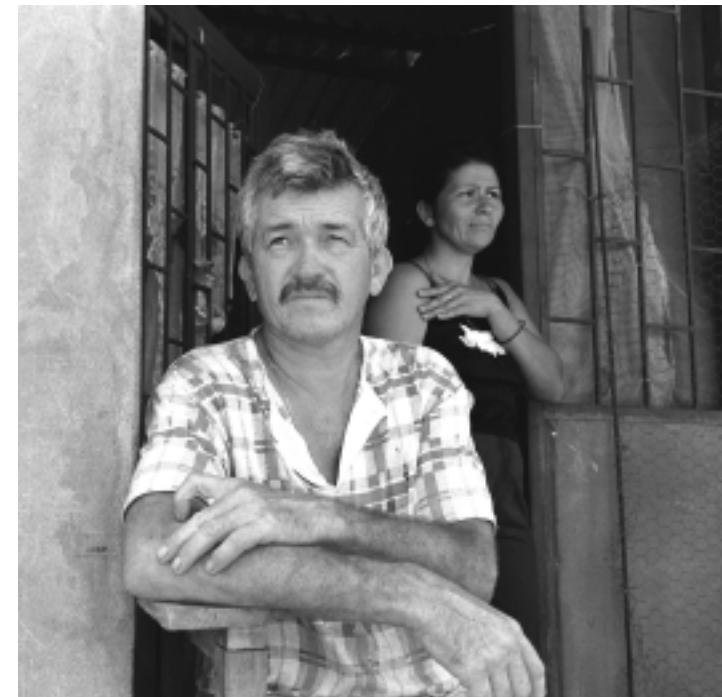
MCC U.S. Washington Office Guide to U.S. Policy on Colombia

COLOMBIA FACTS

- FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)—The largest left-wing guerilla group in Colombia.
- ELN (National Liberation Army)—Second largest guerilla group in Colombia.
- AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)—Right-wing paramilitary organization. This is an umbrella group for most of the paramilitaries in Colombia.
- Colombia is rich in oil, minerals and gems; however most of this wealth is controlled by an elite minority and large multinational companies from North America and Europe.
- Colombia is the world's largest producer of cocaine. A government survey showed that production level was higher in recent years compared to 2000, which is when the U.S. began Plan Colombia to curb drug trafficking.
- Colombia is home to the world's second largest population of internally displaced people with over 3.8 million, surpassed only by Sudan.
- More union and labor organizers are assassinated in Colombia than any other country combined worldwide.
- Government security forces have on many occasions worked in collusion with the AUC or paramilitary, often committing gross human rights violations.

More on the Internet

- MCC Washington Office—mcc.org/us/washington
- *Justapaz*, MCC partner in Colombia—justapaz.org
- Latin America Working Group—lawg.org/countries/colombia/intro.htm
- Center for International Policy—ciponline.org/colombia



mcc.org/us/washington



**Mennonite
Central
Committee
U.S.**

MCC U.S. Washington Office
920 Pennsylvania Ave SE, Washington DC 20003
phone: (202) 544-6564; fax (202) 544-2820
E-mail: mccwash@mcc.org

mcc.org/us/washington

000000bo5m Printed in the USA on recycled paper.

*“We know that one of the strongest
tools that Christians have is prayer.*

But prayer must be accompanied by action.

*The people must lead their government
to sow justice and harvest peace.”*

RICARDO ESQUIVIA,
Colombian Mennonite church leader

The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capitol Hill, providing and encouraging prophetic witness to the way of Christ on matters of U.S. public policy.

Country profile: Colombia

Colombia is a beautiful country rich in culture, beauty and resources. However, Colombia has been in a state of civil war for over four decades. Fought between various armed actors, Colombia's war has displaced over 3.8 million people making it home to the world's second largest population of internally displaced people, surpassed only by Sudan. Each year many are assassinated, kidnapped, threatened and displaced. A rural Colombian church member explains, "What you experience only in your nightmare is our daily reality."

Colombia is notorious for its human rights violations carried out by all the armed groups, including the government forces. The drug trade is a crucial part of Colombia's war; it finances the illegal armed groups—the guerillas and paramilitaries.

The war is deeply rooted in an unequal economic system. The vast amount of wealth and resources are controlled by an elite minority and multi-national corporations leaving many Colombians desperately impoverished. The government forces have, on many occasions, worked in collusion with the paramilitary; often suppressing worker rights movements, labor union organizers and human rights defenders. The cycle of violence and economic injustice go hand-in-hand.

The United States has supported the Colombian government by giving aid. Since 2000, the United States has appropriated over \$5 billion; most of this has been in the form of military and police support to ostensibly eradicate the flow of cocaine and to fight terrorists. This policy of aid to Colombia, termed "Plan Colombia," has exacerbated the war while proving ineffective in curbing the drug trade.

Faith reflection

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." —Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3

The prophets of old shared the same sentiment; they were looking ahead to a day of peace and justice. They prophesied about a day when nations will abolish war. The prophets also exhorted the people to "seek justice [and] rescue the oppressed . . ." (Isaiah 1:17). The psalmist and the apostle called on God's people to ". . . seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14 and 1 Peter 3:11). Jesus, when tempted, rejected military glory and chose the way of peace to usher God's kingdom (Luke 4:6, 8).

Anabaptists are part of a sacred tradition of peace and nonviolence; from objecting to the bloody wars in Europe to the Revolutionary War in America to the Vietnam War. Peace is an Anabaptist value and it must be passed on. Colombian sisters and brothers are facing difficult choices and U.S. Christians must respond and stand with them. How will your faith guide you to be a 'faithful witness'?

How should Christians respond?

1. *Pray* for Colombian sisters and brothers. The church is a crucial voice for justice and peace but they face difficulties. Pray for courage, strength and endurance. Also pray that the armed groups and the government will stop the violence to usher in peace.
2. *Take action* on behalf of those suffering. Contact the U.S. government and call for peace in Colombia. Crucial to achieving peace is a radical shift in U.S. policy.
3. *Become a sister church* to a Colombian church and build a relationship with a suffering congregation.
4. *Stand* with Colombian churches on the International Day of Peace, when they celebrate Pan y Paz (Bread and Peace)—a celebration and call for peace and economic justice.
5. *Encourage your congregation* to participate in the Days of Prayer & Action for Colombia, which MCC organizes annually with other church groups in the spring

How should public policy respond?

1. *Cut military aid, increase economic aid.* Military funding to Colombia has been detrimental. A solution to the conflict requires a holistic approach. Economic and development aid must be increased to address the underlying issues of poverty and internal displacement.
2. *Practice fair trade.* Any trade agreement with Colombia must mandate protections to Colombia's small farmers from dumping of U.S. commodities. This will prevent Colombian farmers from losing their livelihood and turning to illicit drug crop cultivation. Trade agreements must also make provisions for fair labor standards and environmental protections.
3. *Protect human rights.* Any aid package to Colombia must affirm human rights protections. The aid must support programs that strengthen the judicial system and independent human rights sectors.