



**Justice for
Colombia**

Justice for Colombia

**ICTU Delegation Report
July 2014**

STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions



**Suggested price: £5/€5
or donation to Justice for Colombia**

Justice for Colombia (JFC) was established in 2002 by the British trade union movement and since 2008 began working with the Irish trade union movement. Almost every British trade union is now affiliated. It was set up primarily to show solidarity with Colombian trade unionists as a response to the violence they face as well as to campaign for peace with social justice.

Since its founding, it has taken over 250 trade unionists and politicians from the UK, Ireland, other EU countries, the United States and Canada to Colombia to see firsthand the trade union and human rights situation and the effects of the 60 year conflict.

JFC also regularly brings delegations from Colombia to the UK, Ireland and other European countries. It has helped to secure the release of twenty one political prisoners - imprisoned trade unionists and human rights activists – over the past ten years and has provided humanitarian assistance to thousands of others.

It also led a long campaign against the EU/Colombia Free Trade Agreement in which it managed to block the agreement for four years. In 2009 and 2010 JFC helped expose the existence of mass graves in Colombia which led to the identification of around 5000 bodies.

After three years of campaigning against UK military assistance to Colombia and the EDM of 2008/9 with the highest number signatures (of two thousand EDMs), JFC managed to secure a change of policy of the Labour Government which stopped elements of the military aid package.

It has supported many industrial disputes over the years and has facilitated the funding of several projects with sister organisations in Colombia, by pairing them with unions in the UK and Ireland. These include projects to support the rehabilitation of the families of trade unionists that have been tortured or assassinated, to support the human rights work of the agricultural workers' trade union, the organising work of the oil workers' union and to support the opposition newspaper in Colombia.

The most recent campaign surrounds efforts to encourage a peace process in Colombia and has involved JFC taking high-profile cross-party delegations from Northern Ireland to Colombia to meet the President and Government peace negotiators, and to Havana to meet the FARC negotiators in order to share experiences, as well as to Washington to lobby for the US to support peace. The campaign has had a huge impact and has been groundbreaking in building international support for the peace process.

JFC is involved in lobbying work of Parliaments (and Governments) both in the UK, Ireland, and Brussels and in the United States and Canada. This has led to the establishment of the 'Parliamentary Friends of Colombia Group' in the UK Parliament which now has over 80 MPs and Peers as members. JFC also has cross-party groups in Stormont and the European Parliament. JFC is managed from an office in Farringdon, in the ASLEF building which kindly hosts it. The management committee is made up of representatives of affiliated unions and the TUC. The TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady is the JFC President.

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We acknowledge the photographs provided by Eric Byrne TD, Irish Labour Party

Front Cover image illustrates the Campesinos campaign of civil disobedience by wrecking small bridges used by oil company tankers (see pages 30-32).



'Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world in which to be a trade unionist'

Foreword

This comment is one we have heard repeatedly from our brothers and sisters active in trade unions in Colombia.

At successive delegate conferences and union gatherings, we have heard directly from Colombian union activists of the horrors inflicted upon their colleagues and the difficulties they face on a daily basis- for no other reason than that they are trade unionists.

I am conscious that at times we in Congress can find it difficult to process and fully appreciate the gravity of what we hear from our colleagues in that benighted country.

Let me assure you that all you have heard and read in relation to the problems faced by trade unionists in Colombia, is entirely true. Indeed, as this report can attest, the reality is often more brutal. Seeing really is believing.

As President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. I visited Colombia with union colleagues from Ireland, members of the TUC, parliamentarians from both sides of the Irish border and Westminster to witness at first hand the reality of life for the majority in Colombia. Our delegation was accompanied by members of the London-based Justice for Colombia organisation.

I would request people to read this report thoroughly and to share it as widely as possible. It paints a bleak but comprehensive picture of the scale of human rights abuses in Colombia and the impunity with which the abusers act and operate, most particularly the notorious right wing death squads that collaborate – openly in

many cases – with both the military and major multinational corporations.

All this takes place under the auspices of an allegedly democratic government and modern democratic state.

It is difficult to convey the many testimonies that we heard from trade unionists, campesino farmers and fishing folk in an unemotional or detached manner.

All trade unions, trade union centres and progressives across the globe should raise their voices in defence of the working people of Colombia, whose only crime is that they want to live with dignity and decency.

I wish to congratulate trade unionists in both jurisdictions who have been actively engaged in campaigning and lobbying on behalf of the people of Colombia.

Furthermore, I wish to congratulate those politicians from all parties in Northern Ireland who have shared their experience of bringing peace to that jurisdiction, with those involved in the peace process in Colombia.

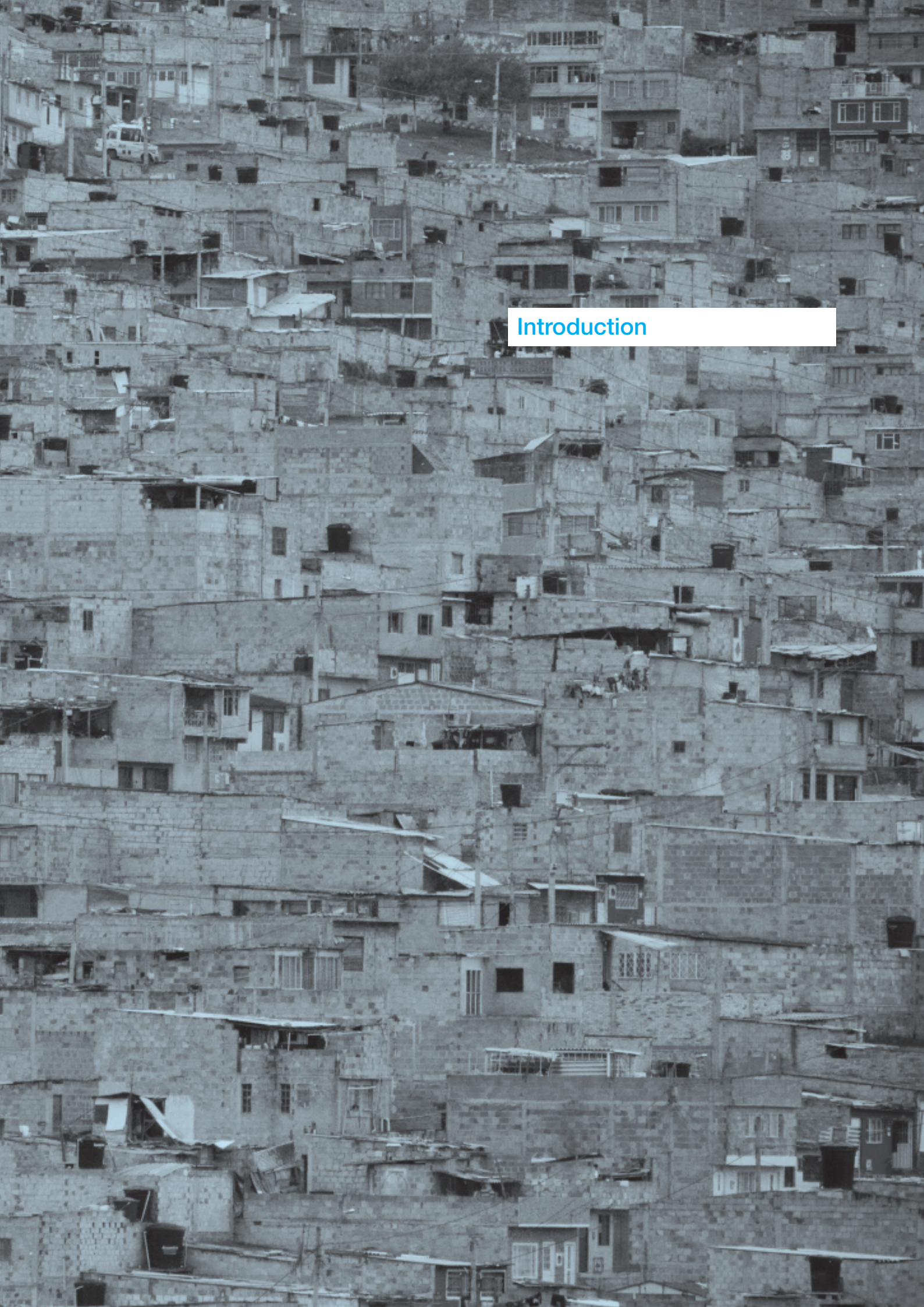
Once again many thanks to all involved not just in the most recent delegation, but also previous delegation visits by senior figures from Congress, particularly Jack O'Connor, Tom Geraghty, Jimmy Kelly, Eugene McGlone, Brian Campfield and Patricia McKeown.

Finally, I wish to record my thanks to the main author of this report – Assistant General Secretary Peter Bunting – and all those involved in its compilation and production, including Gillian Belch, John O'Farrell and Macdara Doyle and Paul McDonnell at Three Creative.

John Douglas,
President, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

May 2015





Introduction

Justice for Colombia Peace Campaign

Peace talks between the FARC and Colombian Government formally began in November 2012 after six months of secret exploratory talks. A peace process with social justice is at the heart of the trade union agenda; as they believe that the violence will only stop when the root causes of the conflict are resolved.

Our trade union colleagues in Colombia and leading human rights campaigners who work under the banner of Colombians for Peace are responsible for having created the conditions for talks; having safely facilitated the release of the remaining FARC hostages.

Despite the talks, the danger for opposition and peace activists has increased as many elements of the military and paramilitary oppose negotiations. The Colombian trade unions are playing a critical role in the development of a new social and political movement, the Patriotic March, which has mobilised millions of people for peace – and which has had around 60 members assassinated since early 2012 and many imprisoned – most recently union leader Huber Ballesteros as well as other opposition alliances created to support the peace process such as the ‘Frente Amplio por la Paz’ or ‘Broad Front for Peace’.

JFC has been active on the call for peace since it’s founding, responding to the fundamental aim of the Colombian trade union agenda to secure

a peace process with social justice. Since 2007, JFC played a leading role in promoting prisoner exchanges and hostage releases, actions which laid the ground work for conditions for peace talks.

In 2009 it began building links with politicians from all parties in Northern Ireland in order to build cross party support and lobby for a peace process in Colombia and exchange useful experiences of a successful peace process. This was followed by visits of delegations from Colombians for Peace and the Patriotic March to Belfast in 2011 and 2012 to learn about the Good Friday Agreement, meeting with political representatives of all parties and hosted by the trade union movement.

JFC’s work comes at a critical time as international scrutiny and support is invaluable to the safety of our colleagues, and is crucial if the peace process is to be in any way successful.

The Northern Irish trade union’s contribution to this campaign has played a fundamental role in helping us to expand and develop this work. The success and reach of this campaign has delivered a huge amount of profile to JFC and to our Colombian partners. We have successfully achieved our aim of building a cross-party group of senior politicians from all sides of the Northern Ireland conflict in order to support the peace process and specifically the demands of civil society; **a ceasefire, civil society involvement, safety for activists**. This would not have been achieved without the financial and political support both from the UK and Ireland union movement, such as NIPSA, Unite, Unison, SIPTU, PSEU, INTO and the ICTU. The campaign has helped to build awareness amongst members about the situation for Colombian trade unionists, and valuable exchanges have taken place.

The campaign has had huge mainstream press coverage both in the UK and Colombia, and



Northern Ireland Parliamentarians Jeffrey Donaldson MP (DUP), Conall McDevitt MLA (SDLP), John McCallister MLA (Independent Unionist), Conor Murphy MP (Sinn Fein) meet FARC negotiators in Cuba 2013.

now also in the US. We have further developed the JFC Northern Ireland work, and it has attracted more cross-party support in Stormont and in the House of Commons. JFC has now expanded its work in the Republic of Ireland and in Washington. Even more importantly, the value of the work done by JFC to support the peace process has been recognised by both parties to the negotiations, the Colombian Congress, the Congressional Peace Commission and civil society organisations. Below is a more detailed outline of some of the work carried out.

Northern Ireland Delegation to Colombia

In 2012 it took the first delegation from all the main Northern Ireland political parties, including negotiators of the Good Friday Agreement including the DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson, Sinn Fein's Paul Maskey and MLAs from SDLP and Ulster Unionists as well as trade union leaders Patricia McKeown (Unison), Pamela Dooley (NIC-ICTU/Unison), Brian Campfield (NIPSA) to Colombia to coincide with the beginning of the peace talks between the government and the FARC. The delegation addressed the Colombian Senate and House of Representatives, met with civil society, met political prisoners, with victims, with trade unionists, and with President Santos and his negotiators. The visit received widespread media coverage.

Meeting the FARC

In 2013 JFC took a similar delegation to Cuba to meet with the FARC negotiators including Sinn Fein's Conor Murphy, Conall McDevitt MLA, (SDLP), John McCallister MLA, (Independent Unionist) and again DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson. This was the first public international delegation to meet with the FARC during these talks.

Visit to the US

JFC's campaign has successfully built international support for the peace process by taking the cross-party/trade union Northern Ireland delegation (who had visited both Colombia in November 2012/July 2013 and the FARC in Cuba in May 2013) to Washington D.C. in March, this time also including Jimmy Kelly, Unite Ireland Regional Secretary and the SDLP MP Mark Durkan. The visit was organised with the crucial support of organisations such as WOLA and the USW trade union.

The aim was to build support for the initiative amongst the United States labour unions and the United States Congress. Whereas some Members of Congress have been very active on the issue of Colombian human rights there was to be an enormous benefit in bringing the work of the UK, Ireland and the U.S. together in a more united international voice in support of peace and against the human rights abuses.

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The support of the labour unions and the Members of Congress with whom JFC met was truly substantial. The AFL-CIO leader, Rich Trumka hosted a reception for the delegation attended by many senior trade unionists. Meetings were held with the US State Department, the National Endowment for Democracy, a briefing was held in the Congress for Members and several bilateral meetings were held with senior Members of the Congress. The visit received huge press coverage in Colombia.

Following the visit, a joint letter was signed by over 250 US, UK, Irish and Northern Irish elected representatives to the negotiating table of Colombia, i.e. the representatives of the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP supporting their initiative, urging them to stay at the table and raising the need for a ceasefire.

This letter was delivered to both 'sides' on Tuesday, May 13th with signatures from 50 members of the U.S. Congress, 84 Members of the UK Parliament, 74 members of the Irish parliament and 38 members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It made front page news in Colombia and main broadcast news. It has been welcomed by the both Colombian Congressional Peace Commission, the Colombian Government and the FARC and was described as 'unprecedented' in the support for the peace process by the Colombian press.

Justice for Colombia was referred to as an *"organisation which has distinguished itself for its solidarity work with trade unions, political prisoners and civil society"*.

Visit of Northern Ireland Delegation to Cuba

In July 2014 Justice for Colombia took a delegation from Northern Ireland for the second time to meet with the Government in Colombia and with the FARC Leaders in Cuba. This further exchange was very valuable and included politicians from Sinn Féin, DUP and the SDLP,

as well as the Northern Irish trade union leader Peter Bunting – AGS of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The campaign had further coverage in the UK press with two articles in the Guardian published over the summer.

Martin McGuinness visit to Colombia

When the Deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness, was invited by President Santos to Colombia on an official State visit in early April, he asked JFC to accompany him in order to set up meetings for him with trade unions, human rights organizations and the political opposition. The JFC Director spent a week out there setting up various meetings with trade unions, human rights organizations such as CCJARAR, Colombians for Peace, the Patriotic March, the Congressional Peace Commission and opposition Members of Congress and accompanied Mr McGuinness for these meetings. The visit again made headline news in Colombia and was seen as an important step in showing international and more balanced support for the peace process.

Patriotic March strike leaders visits

In April, JFC organised and hosted a visit to Brussels, London Derry, Belfast and Dublin for three trade union leaders who led the mass strikes in Colombia last summer, and David Florez, a leader of the Patriotic March.

They gave evidence to the European Parliament's Human Rights Committee which was reported in the Colombian press and broadcast news, addressed a breakfast meeting of MEPs, and had a very fruitful meeting with Cathy Ashton's External Affairs DG. They also had private meetings with the General Secretaries of both the ITUC and the ETUC who have both shown clear solidarity.

At Westminster, members of the TUC Executive and MPs came to hear from them at a reception on the Commons Terrace which received press

coverage in Colombia. They addressed the ICTU Congress in Derry and met with representatives from both sides of the Northern Ireland Conflict in Belfast and enlisted the support of the Ulster Farmer's Union for their human and labour rights cause, as well as meeting Sinn Féin in Belfast.

In Dublin they met with members of the Dail's Foreign Affairs Committee, the government and with members of JFC's Parliamentary Group in the Oireachtus. It was a momentous two weeks during which the Colombian delegation felt that the international voices of support furthered their cause and provided some personal safety for them as well.

FARC in UK Parliament

It March 2015 JFC hosted an event in the UK Parliament in which both the Colombian Government, represented by the Colombian Ambassador, and the FARC head negotiator Ivan Marquez addressed an audience of trade unionists, MPs, academics, and the media about the peace talks. **This was the first time both sides have shared a public platform and was covered by all the main Colombian media outlets** and the JFC Director was interviewed on live Colombian television following the event.

Opposition Senator Ivan Cepeda referred to it as groundbreaking and historic.

Meeting with FARC in Havana

Ten days later JFC took a different delegation including trade union leaders Peter Bunting, Brian Campfield, Jimmy Kelly and Patricia McKeown, as well as representatives from the USW and Police Commissioner of Greater Manchester Tony Lloyd and Labour MEP Richard Howitt to Cuba to meet with the FARC and the Colombian Government Chief Negotiators. This is the first time the Colombian Government has

met the delegations in Havana and shows a sign of the growing influence and appreciation of JFC's work to support the peace process.

Parliamentary Work

The peace campaign has been a crucial element of JFC's parliamentary work. Questions have been tabled in every FCO session and there have been several oral interventions highlighting the need for a ceasefire and the need to stop persecution of the trade union and opposition movement by politicians from several political parties, including Labour, DUP and the SDLP. A cross-party EDM was tabled to this effect and the UK Labour Party has official policy to support the peace process after a union backed motion was approved at the party's 2014 conference.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the campaign continues to develop and grow. This success has brought great credibility to the campaign and concrete solidarity to our colleagues struggling for a peace process which truly delivers the social justice and respect for trade union and human rights that is needed. The peace process is at a crucial time and raising it up the international agenda is a priority. Despite the FARC declaring a unilateral ceasefire in December, the army continues to mount operations, and there is serious concern that without more international pressure, this may put the success of the talks at risk. The work JFC has carried out in support of the peace talks has created an alliance of politicians from all political backgrounds, working hand in hand with the trade union movement in Ireland, the UK and the US and it is crucial that this work continues so that civil society is included and protected.



Delegation visit to Colombia Participants 2014

- David Brockett,
UNITE the Union, National Executive Committee
- Peter Bunting,
Assistant General Secretary, ICTU
- Eric Byrne TD,
Labour, Dail Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade
- John Douglas,
President, ICTU and General Secretary ,
Mandate
- Mark Durkan MP,
SDLP
- Tom Geraghty,
General Secretary, Public Sector Executive Union
- Ian Lavery MP,
Labour, Chair of Trade Union Group
- Seumas Milne,
Guardian
- Aileen Morrissey,
ICTU Executive Committee and National training Coordinator, Mandate
- Conor Murphy MP,
Sinn Fein
- Steve Murphy,
General Secretary, UCATT
- Paul Nowak,
Assistant General Secretary, TUC
- Linda Stewart,
Partner and Head of Employment, Simpson Millar Solicitors
- Katy Proctor,
JFC Volunteer and ASLEF

The delegation was accompanied and translated for at all times by:

- Mariela Kohon (JFC Director)
- Hasan Dodwell (JFC)
- Victor Figueroa (JFC)



2015 Delegation to Havana meet FARC negotiators

Delegation visit to Cuba Participants 2015

- Peter Bunting
Assistant General Secretary, ICTU
- Brian Campfield
General Secretary, NIPSA
- Jimmy Kelly
Regional Secretary, Unite the Union
- Patricia McKeown
Regional Secretary, UNISON
- Tony Lloyd
Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner
- Richard Howitt, Labour MEP



The 2015 Delegation meet with Colombia Government negotiators in Havana.





Narrative

Sunday 20th July 2014

15.00 hours

Meeting with Human Rights and victims' organisations:

This meeting served as an initial briefing, bringing the delegation up to speed with recent events in Colombia.

Speaker after speaker acknowledged the value of the work carried out by JFC (Justice for Colombia), highlighting on the international stage the day to day struggle for civil and human rights in Colombia.

All of these groups (progressives - Movice, CCAJAR, CPDH, ANDAS, HIJOS, CIJYP, CSPP) voted for the current President Santos in the second round of the last presidential election, contested by Santos and former president Uribe – who is an ardent militarist opposed to peace. The progressives opted for Santos because they believed that he represented the only hope for completing the peace negotiations.

However, speaker after speaker emphasised that under President Santos there had been no reduction in human rights violations and that the International Community should recognise that an embryonic Peace Process does not equate with an absence of violence by the Colombian police, the military or, more importantly, the right-wing paramilitary groups. The FARC have called numerous unilateral ceasefires.

Economic Policies

The progressives spelt out for us that the same old economic policies were being maintained through the handover of mineral deposits, land and water resources to multinational corporations (MNCs). In pursuit of these policies it

was seen as permissible for MNCs to utilise the police, military and right wing paramilitary units to put down opposition through assassinations, beatings, torture and legal action against trade unions and activists.

Speaker after speaker – all of whom are under death threat and came accompanied by their own armed bodyguards - pleaded with us to listen to the testimonies of the *campesino* groups, trade union leaders and 'fisher folk' we would meet during our visit.

Military Reform Bill

A number of speakers expressed great anger at the offensive nature of this bill, currently being debated in the Congress. The kernel of the proposed legislation is that any military personnel accused of crimes against Colombian citizens will stand trial only in military courts.

This would result in extra-judicial murders by the military being heard before the notoriously lenient military courts, along with other crimes committed by military personnel, such as rape and assault.

Despite the bill being declared unconstitutional by the courts in Bogota, Santos pledged to push through another version. Yet if the military reform bill doesn't pass then they have threatened a 'legal war' against the government in Congress.

A number of other issues were raised during the briefing, issues which we were to hear far more of in the days that followed:

- Some 2500 trade unionists have been assassinated in the last 15 years, meaning Colombia holds the unenviable record of being the most dangerous country on earth to be a trade union organiser, activist, official or member.

- It also holds another unacceptable record – a conviction rate of just 1% for these murders. These murders, arbitrary detentions and ‘disappearances’ have not ended, despite the ongoing peace process
- In addition, some 75 land rights activists have been murdered over the last four years.
- Less than 1% of the target agreed by Government for return of land has been achieved, while the authorities routinely renege on agreements with rural communities and indiscriminate bombings are used to forcibly displace *campesinos* and water supplies are interfered with.
- There is a need for an independent commission to investigate state assassinations of trade unionists, politicians, students, land rights activists and progressives *unconnected* with the guerrilla-state conflict.
- To date, there has been no place on the agenda of the peace talks (in Havana) for key issues such as state crimes and state collusion with right-wing paramilitaries. The state has attempted to portray itself as a minor actor in the conflict.
- The military budget has increased, despite the peace process and conflict resolution being at the heart of stated government policy
- A proposed truth commission has now been replaced by an historical commission. Truth recovery is an imperative for those progressive social organisations stigmatised and brutalised for fighting for democratic inclusiveness. At the time of publishing the report, there were discussions taking place between the negotiators about a possible truth commission.
- Seven million workers in this very wealthy country have no social security benefit.
- Companies force workers into a ‘collective pact’ which ensures organised labour in some enterprises receive lower wages and conditions. The practice of ‘collective pacts’ is illegal under Colombian law, but only three cases have ever been brought to court.
- Riot police are used to oppress trade unions activists on picket lines. On July 7, 2014 a trade union leader was so badly beaten he lost his eye.
- Trade unions are stigmatised and excluded organisations and union density has now fallen below 4%, due to years of state and paramilitary attacks on its leaders and members.
- A law giving protection to workers in co-ops (Agency Workers in the EU), granting compensation to such workers who have accidents at work has never been applied.
- Corruption is rife and a former Agricultural Minister (under ex-President Uribe) has been jailed for 17 years for channelling subsidies meant for peasants to land owners.
- President Santos views multinational corporations as part of the process of developing the ‘engines of the economy’ such as mining and energy sectors and has failed to deliver on promises to reform the Criminal Code in relation to ‘Collective Pacts’ and failed to halt the arbitrary imprisonment of trade unionists.
- The EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) contains no binding clauses protecting the health and safety of workers.
- Despite the negative image of Santos most progressives concur with him that Colombia could deliver a huge economic prize.
- The analysis is premised on achieving something similar to the Northern Ireland

Peace Process: a negotiated settlement that aims at eliminating inequality, political exclusion, redistributing land and bringing an end to the country's 'democratic deficit'.

- Speakers repeatedly referred to the impunity enjoyed by military and right-wing paramilitary groups, who are guilty of the murder of thousands.
- 'False Positives' (*Falsos Positivos*) is the term used to describe the killing of civilians by the army or other state forces, with the dead then dressed as guerrillas and presented as 'combat kills'. At least 3000 civilians were killed in this manner, according to the UN, but that number may be as high as 4000. President Santos was Minister of Defence

when the highest number of 'false positive' murders occurred.

- A successful peace process can only succeed when the state recognises the existence of right-wing paramilitary groups and commits, through signed agreement, to dismantling such groups. These predecessors to these groups were in existence prior to the creation of guerrilla groups. The paramilitary groups rarely engaged in combat with any of the guerrilla groups.
- Paramilitaries only target civilians and deliberately leave signs to terrorise others. In testimonies from numerous paramilitary leaders they admit to having murdered trade unionists, claiming they were linked to FARC.



Meeting with the Delegation in Havana, FARC Womens Group meet the Trade Union leaders.



Lillany Obando and son with Mariella Kohn JFC.

1900 hrs:

Dinner with Lilianny Obando

Lilianny is an activist, single mother and former political prisoner who was imprisoned on August 8, 2008, whilst working on human rights projects with the agricultural workers' union, FENSUAGRO. JFC and unions in Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States campaigned for her release. After almost four years in prison, in February 2012 Lilianny was released while a JFC delegation was visiting Colombia. Despite huge irregularities in her case, she was subsequently convicted of 'rebellion' and sentenced to house arrest, although at the time of writing the order has not been actioned.



2014 Delegation in Bogota with CUT Leaders.

Monday, July 1st

09.00hrs

Meeting with members of CUT (trade union federation) Executive Committee and the CTC (trade union federation)

The delegation divided into two groups to meet trade union leaders from the private and public sectors. In welcoming the delegations, Luis Alejandro Pedraza, the President of the CUT, Colombia's largest trade union federation, explained that many members of the Executive Council were travelling throughout the country to discuss with members and regional officials their views on the documentation circulated for discussion prior to the CUT Annual Conference in September.

The President praised the endeavours of JFC in highlighting the problems and winning support for trade unions in Colombia. He expressed the wish that as they were all one family they could be open and frank with each other, especially as CUT is part of Colombian civil society.

The President spoke of the institutionalisation of violence in Colombia which runs parallel with violence against trade unionists, political persecution and breaches of human rights. He

said CUT continually sent details on all such activity to the ILO, but that the killings were on the increase again and the objective was one of 'exterminating trade unionists'. This is not a new phenomenon but stems from the view on the far right that trade unionists are the enemies of business.

The persecution of trade unionists grew in the 1990's, and then again when then President Uribe (2002-2010) gave MNCs free rein to exploit workers and the natural resources of the Colombian nation.

The density of organised labour when CUT was formed in 1985 was 14%, it is now 3.7%. This decrease is not due to lack of effort, but a result of the psychological war confronting workers who fear joining trade unions, possible assassination or imprisonment. Santos introduced labour legislation inhibiting organising so that the majority of workers were either agency workers or on part time contracts.

CUT brought this information to the most recent ILO Conference (2014) but the Government attempted to challenge it, even though 58% of government employees are themselves on temporary contracts. **CUT succeeded at the ILO in having Colombia put on the list of the top 15 nations for Labour inspection.**

CUT succeeded at the ILO in having Colombia put on the list of the top 15 nations for Labour inspection.

The multinational corporations in Colombia are effectively 'a state within a state'. Take the example of the Canadian Pacific Rubiales Oil Company which has autonomous control over its area of operation. Trade unions are forbidden to enter this huge area and when they do so they are attacked by the riot police when attempting to organise workers there. The CUT President reiterated that the Government had issued a decree banning 'agency workers' but employers still use them, highlighting the lack of enforcement of labour standards.

Reparations

After much pressure from CUT the state did accept the need for reparations to be paid to the families of trade unionists murdered by state forces and their associates, namely the right-wing paramilitaries.

Many state-sponsored seminars were held but nothing practical has occurred other than state representatives visiting families and presenting them with plaques. It's totally insufficient. Meaningful reparations must include a restructuring of labour law. There is also the issue of impunity where in almost 99% of the cases of murder of trade unionists, no-one has faced charges.

The President proceeded to robustly condemn the detention of Huber Ballesteros who was arrested and accused of 'rebellion' and 'financing terrorism' one week before he was due to travel to Britain to address the TUC Conference. A member of the CUT Executive, he is also vice-President of the Agricultural Workers Union, FENSUAGRO. The President appealed for international pressure through the offices of JFC to ensure his release.

International Matters

The support from the International trade union movement is fundamental to the survival of the CUT and the welfare of workers in Colombia. The CUT analysis of the Labour Action Plan contained in the US– Colombian FTA is that the Government has not implemented the clauses on Labour Rights, Human Rights and Environmental issues.

The CUT reported that the second document they presented to the ILO earlier this year exposed government non-compliance with commitments made to the ILO on Labour and Human Rights in 2011. CUT are working on a third document (EU & Colombia FTA) which they will present simultaneously in Brussels and Bogota. This document will detail the impact of FTAs on trade unions, which has in short, caused displacement from the agricultural sector to the informal sector of the economy.

The CUT also stated that their leaders are persecuted by the state which criminalises social protest and that multinational corporations exploit women and young people despite the huge profits they make, and act as if they are self-governing, independent republics in Colombia.

Meeting with Private Sector Unions

The President of the USO (Oil Workers' Union) informed the delegation that USO has 26,000 members. In one national oil company where USO organises, the total workforce is 8,500 employees. 2,200 of which are organised and are in receipt of terms and conditions of employment negotiated under collective bargaining. The remaining 6,600 are covered by a collective pact although such pacts contravene Colombian law. A shocking 107 trade unionists in the union have been murdered

or disappeared. While fighting for the modernisation of the Cartagena refinery, the senior shop steward was kidnapped and murdered by paramilitaries in 2001. USO is defending the sovereignty of the national oil resources of Colombia which employs a total of 76,000 workers, all of whom are sub-contracted labour. The trade union faces major judicial harassment by corporations, bosses and government.

In the largest oil field 74 trade union members have been charged with alleged breaches of the law. The vice President of USO in the Meta region is in prison and another trade union leader there was assassinated in 2012. This particular oil field employs 20,000 workers and produces 260,000 barrels per day. It is 60% owned by the Colombian National Oil Company and 40% by Pacific Rubiales (Canadian). The workers requested USO to organise them. A strike ensued which was brutally repressed, but which resulted in the talks between USO, the Government and Pacific Rubiales. The Government then established a bosses union, none of whose members work in the oil field. Five thousand workers were fined or surrendered their trade union membership. Thirty seven legal cases have been lodged against trade union leaders, which are still on the Attorney General's desk - three have been administratively detained in prison.

- The main point for USO is to discuss the terms and conditions of the 36,000 sub-contracted workers, so all benefit;
- The companies EXCO and Pacific must recognise the right of USO to organise and negotiate;
- The USO list of demands are not just centred on terms & conditions but include government oil policy, the environment and responsible use of scarce resource water;
- The ending of Collective Pacts;
- The right to negotiate for workers' pensions to which no worker is in receipt of;
- USO requested the delegation to correspond with the Santos government demanding its right to organise and negotiate on behalf of oil workers without any interference;
- A July 2011 strike culminated in talks on Labour Rights, Environmental Rights and Community Rights at which USO presented 128 examples of violations of worker's rights, the Government promised action but nothing happened;
- Workers and Community went on strike again and the military stormed the area. A second round of talks chaired by two Cabinet Ministers resulted in two new agreements, one for Government, one for Pacific Oil;
- Six issues were agreed - abuses to be dealt with: salaries, organised rights, local labour hire, health & safety training and compensation for injuries through workplace accidents;
- Pacific Rubiales responded by creating a new yellow union and flying in new employees;
- The military expelled strikers and closed all civil and commercial areas with armed blockades and check points;
- President Obama signed the US-Colombian FTA which incorporated labour rights under the US promoted Labour Action Plan;
- New legislation increased the official length of the working day, with finishing time extended from 6pm to 10pm, allegedly to assist in reducing unemployment although it was stated if the measure had no impact it would be withdrawn, but this never happened. The measure means Colombian workers do not get paid overtime for work up to 10pm;

- Representatives of the metalworkers unions said their major difficulties were organising in the mining sector, which was generally located in areas of Colombia with a heavy paramilitary presence;
- Two thousand workers were at that time on strike in one area and the Ministry of Labour and the company were air lifting strike breakers into the area;
- In the Medellin region if you join the union your contract is cancelled and the individuals blacklisted by employers;
- Schindler Lift Company operates a Collective Pact;
- The Colombians said that if things continue as they are, there will come a time when they will all have disappeared;
- In General Motors - which has a Collective Pact - USO have a clandestine union membership of 100 young people, 30 of whom have been fined recently;
- GM is now hiring workers on 50% less conditions than older employees;
- Former GM employees, incapacitated through accidents at work, are camped outside US Embassy seeking adequate compensation;
- In protest they have sewn their mouths closed, buried themselves up to their necks, crucified themselves, but all to no avail;
- We need an international campaign against MNC-leveraged shareholders and we need to work internationally through JFC.

Transport Workers

- The main union **SNTT**, is just six years old and operates in a sector with 1.4 million

employees, of whom 1.2 million are 'informally employed';

- Transport workers – there are no public railways in Colombia - have no social security or pension benefits;
- The union is in discussions with the Minister regarding 7,000 maritime workers with no contracts;
- 8 cases of refusal to concede collective bargaining are
- currently with Labour Tribunals;
- 28 workers were sacked in one company when we attempted to negotiate on their behalf;
- Many drivers operate 18-24 hours per day;
- The new transit system in Bogota (Transmilenio) is now controlled by six families who operate a cartel in terms and conditions for employees;
- The Transport Union received funding and training from FNB, the Dutch transport union;

Mining Industry

- A Swiss Company (Glencore) is responsible for systematic abuses of human rights against workers, has been fined by the Colombian government for this abuse.
- It has divided itself into three separate companies (Prodeco, Carbon de las Aguas Cesar, Carbon el Tesoro) so as to avoid royalties. Colombian law states that on production of 800 million tonnes of coal the royalty is 10%. But by division into separate companies the production figure is divided in three and the royalty is reduced to just 3%. One of the supposed mining companies

(Carbones del Tesoro) doesn't even have any machinery.

- 10% of the workforce - who are injured miners - are housed in a separate dormitory and receive no treatment;
- Those workers with collective bargaining rights have lost them and had their benefits suspended, and a collective pact has been enforced;
- FENOCO, the railway company that transports coal to Santa Marta port is also part owned by Glencore and also has an anti-union policy.
- The mining workers went on strike in 2013 for 98 days, the company tried to have it declared illegal, but the Valledupar court declared it legal. This decision was overturned by the Supreme Court;
- The company is now seeking the dismissal of 80 trade union leaders of that dispute with the acquiescence of the Ministry of Labour;
- Prodeco and Glencore are both implicated in cases whereby paramilitary groups have been used to put peasants off their land to allow further mine exploration.
- Beside every extractive industry operation there is a military camp and the senior military commanders take orders from the managers;
- Where there are disputes and failure of direct negotiations to resolve issues the Ministry of Labour refers dispute to Arbitration Tribunals. Trade Unions are waiting currently for four years for the decisions of the Arbitration Tribunal.

For the past six years I have been repeatedly threatened along with my daughter

Monday July 21st Soacha, suburb of Bogota

The 'False Positives Scandal' & the Mothers of the Disappeared.

Soacha is a poor suburb of Bogota. The 'false positives' scandal broke in Colombia in 2008 when it was discovered that the army had been detaining young men from the neighbourhood, murdering them and then claiming they were guerrillas killed in combat, in order to qualify for financial bonuses offered in return for a higher 'body count'. The killings were also used nationally to bolster the army's claims that it was inflicting heavy losses on the FARC guerrillas.

Testimony of Carmen Gomez Romero (Mother of two murdered sons, Victor Fernando Gomez and John Nilson Torres Gomez)

Victor was murdered by soldiers of the 15th Brigade. He was taken with the son of my sister and the son of another woman. Eight days after he disappeared (23.8.08) we heard they were both dead. We could not understand as he had left to go to north, to the Santander region, as he had been promised work there by a local employment agency. The discovery of the three deaths was pure chance.

The nephew of another woman had commenced work in the national forensic laboratory, in December 2008. He was working on his first case, studying pictures of remains when he came across a picture of his cousin. This man informed his mother so she could tell the other mothers of the disappeared boys. Carmen was ill and her family reluctantly informed her of the news.

She noticed however that the remaining children all had swollen eyes.

Her daughter Norma went to the forensics office to identify the remains of Victor and confirmed this with her sister Jane. Jane then told me to go to the morgue as Victor was dead.

I fainted and the stitches in my leg opened so I awoke in the hospital. I left the hospital with my leg still bleeding and on crutches to attend the forensic hospital. Upon arrival I was asked if I was prepared to see the body. I replied that no mother is ever ready to see her dead child. They showed me a photograph of my son shot in the face. I called my brother who suggested we go to Santander and collect Victor's body.

I was suicidal. I left Bogota on September 2nd in a car that my son got a loan of and travelled all night to Santander, arriving at 5.00am. We had borrowed another car for the coffin. Eventually we entered the morgue at 9.00am where I was informed that my son was killed in combat and that the body had arrived at the morgue on August 25th.

I said this was impossible as my son had only left home on August 23rd and was not a guerrilla. This person told me many young men's bodies arrived at this morgue and were then buried in mass graves. This same man enquired if I wanted to talk to a journalist, which I did, solely for the reason of warning other mothers. We took Victor's body and that of another young man, Diego, home to Bogota arriving, at 1.00am on September 4th. The funeral was held on September 5th.

*Soon after, my other son **John Nilson** went looking for information about what really happened to Victor and how he died. That's when hell started.*

The guerrillas did terrible things: murder, rape, torture. But the state does the same, rather than lead by example

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In October 2008 John survived an assassination attempt. He was kidnapped by three police officers who threw him off a bridge in an attempt to kill him. As a result John was crippled but following surgery and with great determination on his part, John regained his ability to walk.

He again began to seek information about his brother's death. In October 2009 he received a phone call from a local shop. He went out to the shop where two men with a motorbike were waiting for him. They murdered him.

For the past six years I have been repeatedly threatened along with my daughter Janet. I have been told that because I condemned the murders of my sons I too would be found with 'a mouth full of flies', like my son.

There has been no justice for the Mothers of Soacha. Despite the killing of 3,000 civilians only one soldier has been convicted and he is serving his sentence in a military prison, not a civilian one. The Mothers of Soacha did not give birth to their sons in order for them to be murdered. We want justice, not more delays.

*Carmen made a request to the delegation on behalf of another mother, Doris, whose son's remains have not yet been discovered. **Doris is ill in hospital and she simply asked that we help her to find her son's remains.***

Testimony of Gloria Martinez

My son Daniel left in February 2008 with Luz Marina's son and another young man. The three of them had been promised work by a so-called employment agency. After some time, as we had not heard news from any of the three, we became worried and commenced a search.

My daughter - who had a good life in the United States- came home to help as she did not believe he was dead. The Attorney General's Office said he might have run away. As the other

cases began to emerge in the media, I realised that my son had probably met the same fate. We attended the forensic hospital and got confirmation he was dead. My daughter collected the body which had been interned in a mass grave and had rotted so much we could not open the coffin. He was my only son.

To date there has been no legal sentence for his murder. I do not know if I can carry on. I lost my job after this terrible affliction. The only therapy I have is that my grandson was born at the time of the funeral of my son. I have been informed by the authorities that my son's case will be processed after the others. The President and Government do not want to know.

Testimony – X Woman (NO Name)

I am grateful for you coming here to listen to our testimony. My first son was murdered by paramilitaries 19 years ago and my other son ten years ago. My husband and myself were married in Caldas but moved to Bogota, away to what we thought was safety. My son aged 23 was taken with the first woman's son (Victor Romero). His then-girlfriend was pregnant and I have that grandson. My other son Peter was a soldier who had to dig his brother out of a mass grave, an experience which has traumatised him.

*We hope for your assistance as we are very poor but justice is what we seek. I have also spoken to the media and in reply have received lots of death threats. But I am not moving, I owe nothing to the military who murdered my sons. My case along with five other mothers is due in August (2014) but I know nothing about the law and what will happen. I am an old woman now raising a baby, I hope you mention our cases in your countries. Our sons were never guerrillas nor drug gangsters. **I don't know how far the countries are in which you live, but I think very far away. I have no tears left so I can't cry.***

Testimony – Elvira Vasquez

My son left home on January 13, 2008. He was a father of four children who went seeking a job and was fooled into going for this job in Santander. He told me he would be back in 15 days and buy me a house as he and his children lived with me because he was separated from his partner. I heard eight months later he had been murdered by the military. Luckily I have a sister in law who lives there in Santander, so she collected the body and brought it home for burial. I have been constantly ill since his murder and cannot work.

Testimony – Maria Estevan Valencia

I am the mother of Jaime Estevan Valencia. I am engaged in a long struggle through a process of education and am spurred on by my determination not to bow down to those that murdered my son. There have been more than 5,000 extrajudicial executions and my son's case is added to the list of impunity. I have not had the first hearing yet but now I have diplomas I work very hard in schools and universities warning young men about the dangers facing them. It is terrible I lost my son but I have gained hundreds of sons by saving them. But lots of young men are still disappeared.

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Meeting in the home of Maria Estevan Valencia, one of 'The Mothers of the disappeared', Soacha, Bogota 2014.

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Under (former Defence Minister) Santos, there were over one hundred murdered under the guise of false positives and human rights defenders jailed for no good reason. Santos wanted to create 'a silence of fear'. He cannot talk about peace while he represses campesinos. We the mothers denounce him and we travel the country doing theatre and giving our history. We hold workshops for the Mothers of the Disappeared, doing group therapy through the creation of a tapestry in which we embroider and sew our life stories. We are concerned about the proposed movement of our cases from civil to military courts. The Mayor of Bogota has

*been our friend, he has opened up his doors to us. We must keep active - it helps overcome the vacuum in our hearts which time does not heal. Our struggle does not end with reparation. The guerrillas did terrible things: murder, rape, torture. But the state does the same, rather than lead by example. On November 15-16 (2014) we are bringing together victims from all regions. We will show that our children are not guerrillas or narcos. **God is good he sent you to help us against the State. We know our sons were killed by the army's 15th Brigade.***

MY GOD, NO MORE.



Meeting with the Broad Front for Peace, Justice and Democracy, 2014.

Monday July 21st

19.30hrs

Meeting with Frente Amplio por la Paz (Broad Front for Peace) Piedad Cordoba (Former Senator who was impeached and banned from public office in a politically motivated case), leader of Colombians for Peace.

We are all members of the Broad Front for Peace, Justice and Democracy. After the first round of the presidential election we came together to support the Peace Process. For us it is a moral issue to advance a vision for peace, but not the Santos vision. So this initiative is in its infancy and is characterised by defending the Peace Process. We require pieces of legislation to strengthen that process. For many of us the human rights situation is very poor with lots of repression of the Patriotic March social and political movement, indiscriminate bombings and murders you will hear about first hand about when you visit the regions of Colombia on your trip. We need to hear from you, and so does our Government, with regard to issues of decommissioning in Northern Ireland. Your support and involvement in the Good Friday Agreement brings knowledge and experience of how an international Peace Process and associated human rights environment are crafted and realigned. We also need your advice on how the prisoners' issues were resolved.

Congressman Alirio Uribe:

I have just been elected and have been a Congressman for just one day. I support the Peace Process, an end to conflict and the need for a bi-lateral ceasefire. The continuance of the Peace Process is at risk through the behaviour of the military. We need to keep the momentum going so as to have achieved a peaceful

resolution by 2018, the date for our next Presidential election. In the context of not having a Peace Process we will witness the mobilisation of anti-peace, anti-rights, anti-trade union elites to win the election and continue the conflict. In areas where guerrillas have retreated from, we now see them being filled with paramilitaries and an increase of state terrorism. Santos, to his credit, has ousted nine generals from the military along with the head of the Armed Forces. It is crucial that the Government implements policies on mining extraction and economic development because the current policies are an impediment to sustainable peace.

It is also crucial to ensure we have reform of the electoral system to end exclusion of the many. Until such time as it achieves military reform and justice, Colombia should not be admitted to membership of NATO.

Mayor's Office Representative:

We in the Mayor's Office are no longer part of the Government. We withdrew in order to join the Frente Amplio. The current Mayor and myself were members of the M19 guerrilla group. We aligned ourselves with this Broad Front to block Alvaro Uribe from winning.

You could help us to develop a teaching programme around peace so that the agreement with the FARC, and the ELN can be agreed by the people. Together we could train our citizens, so as to avoid what happened in Guatemala, when the peace process was ratified, only 20% of the population voted and 80% of them voted against it. If that happens here in Colombia, Alvaro Uribe will win.

Aida Avella (Presidential candidate for the Patriotic Union)

We have two questions for you – how did you achieve a true ceasefire, did your negotiations take place in peace?

Tuesday July 22nd

04.00hrs

Flight to Puerto Asis, Putamayo Department

We arrived at this small village where we attended a meeting of over one hundred rural activists after crossing the Putumayo on a ferry normally used for oil trucks, then taking a local lorry bus along several kilometres of dirt road. On the way to this village we passed large numbers of military and riot police spaced out along the road. We passed a major oil depot with a military camp located immediately beside it. The *campesinos* had wrecked the small wooden bridges over rivers on the main road between the river and the oil fields. Relatives of four people - including of a fourteen year old boy murdered by members of the 27th Brigade of the Colombian military - gave testimony.

Witness 1: 'Mother' (probably of Brayan Yatacue Secue)



Our boys had met in order to plan for Mother's Day. They were staying the night at Mr Obando's house. At around 2am we heard army helicopters in the area. My son was taken from the house and other boys from neighbouring dwellings were also taken. They had their mobile phones taken. At 4am we heard the shots which we now know killed my son. The media stated there were four guerrillas killed but it was

our children, rural activists (the youths were all members of the a FENSUAGRO-affiliated peasants' association) not guerrillas. (Referring to the cases of Deivi Lopez Ortega, Jose Antonio Acanamejoy, Brayan Yatacue Secue and Jose Yiner Esterilla which are in the Appendix).

Witness 2: 'Andrea' (Mother and Sister here today)



He went to his mother's house to study. He was the President of the local farmer organisation in our village. We have a four year old daughter. Guerrillas do not have homes and land. He was also murdered at 4am that night.

Witness 3: 'Stepfather of one of the four'



My stepson voted in the March elections and to do so he had to come down from the mountain. What guerrilla comes down from the mountain to vote? He was not killed in combat. Any one of us here could be the next victim.

WE NEED YOU TO SPEAK OUT ON OUR BEHALF. SPEAK OUT FOR US AGAINST IMPUNITY.

There are no rehabilitation programmes, no workshops, and no study rooms

Witness 4: Mother of Jose Yiner Esterilla



Jose, my nephew, called to our house to say the soldiers had taken my son. He showed me his bag with a bullet hole through it. What guerrilla goes around with a bag like this one my son owned?

[She holds son's bag with bullet hole in it]

Witness 5: 'Father of School Student, Deivi Lopez'



At 7pm my son had not arrived home as he was visiting a friend. We became afraid as we could hear military activity in the area. We know if the army is around to stay indoors. Soldiers entered the house my son was visiting and confiscated the two mobile phones in the house. The young people were taken away by the army. We heard the shots at 4am. At 6am we went to the area and the police attempted to stop us but all our neighbours came out and police lost control. The bodies had been taken away to a military base. (This case is also in the appendix, one of the youths killed in the Alto Amarredero massacre).

WE ASK YOU PLEASE TO DENOUNCE WHAT IS GOING ON HERE.

Witness 6: Edwin Gonzalez



I worked for a business that provided services to the oil company. Due to a cylinder bomb explosion, I lost hearing in one ear and consequently my employment. Whilst protesting against my dismissal I was tortured and still have the scars to prove this. [shows cigarette burns on hand] The campesino population are very afraid of the army which humiliates us to the extent we sink to our knees and cry.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SOLIDARITY.

Witness 7: 'Young Boy'



I am the son of Esteban Lopez. I am fourteen and have a little brother. We live together. My father was taken from us by the army on July 17, 2014. They planted explosives on him, accusing him of being a FARC bomb-maker. All that my father ever carried was a mobile phone and a bag with papers. He has been disappeared ever since.

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Witness 8: Yuri



We are fighting to save our land which the oil company wants, which will leave us with no way to earn a living. We want the licence for the oil company revoked.

**YOU HAVE SEEN THE MILITARY AND
POLICE OCCUPYING PEOPLES HOMES.
WE WANT THOSE FORCES TO RETREAT.**

I am responsible for human rights in this area on behalf of the Patriotic March. I spend most of my time recording testimonies from the peasants. This particular area is rich with oil.



Campesinos gather to meet the Trade Union Delegation.

It is historic that in the midst of conflict we promote peace and human rights

Wednesday, July 23rd

07.30hrs

The delegation divided into smaller groups and some went to Picota Prison on the outskirts of Bogota to visit political prisoners Huber Ballesteros and David Rabelo, but only after much toing and froing and the assistance of Mariela (JFC). Despite an initial insistence that Prison Officers remain in the room for the meeting, the delegation eventually met the prisoners on their own.

Huber Ballesteros

I am a National Executive member of CUT and also leader of the Patriotic March. Many leaders of the national strike have and are accused of financing terrorism, assisting rebellion and in my case going to Europe to collect finance for FARC activities. The authorities buy witnesses off and use other prisoners to give false testimony against you. These are practices used by the system to persecute and prosecute political opponents and their organisations. The fact of the matter is that I was leaving Colombia to go and speak at the TUC Conference in the UK and then visit other European Countries. I was going there to raise political awareness about the plight of trade unionists in Colombia and raise finance for my trade union, Fensuagro.

Prior to my departure I had a meeting with the President of Congress and three days later I was arrested. I have been imprisoned for 11 months during which time due process has been abused. The Prosecution acknowledge I have never used arms against the state. But as rebellion is classed as more than using arms I am still here. I am also accused of financing terrorism for which I plead innocent but propaganda appears to keep me here. I was

kept here for 117 days before being charged. The state has been investigating me for 4 years. I am a public figure.

In Colombia we have 10,000 political prisoners, divided into two different groups:

a: Political Prisoners of Conscience who never were in guerrilla movements.

b: Combatants who engaged in armed conflict with the state.

*The breakdown of the above is 6,000 combatants and 4,000 civil society prisoners of conscience. **There are in total 125,000 inmates in Colombian prisons which are designed to hold a maximum of 70,000.** The health system in the prison service is terrible. I have been here nearly one year, in which I have had one medical examination, revealing that I suffer from a colon problem and Type II diabetes. There are no rehabilitation programmes, no workshops, and no study rooms. This is best described as a school for criminality. For prisoners to survive they resort to drugs, prostitution, arms smuggling or alcohol smuggling, all which corrupts the prison service.*

This was followed by questions from delegation members:

Has the Government turned over a new leaf by promoting the Peace Process?

It is easy for the Government to be non-transparent. It does not want to incur sanctions from the USA or EU. The Government manipulates reports on situations, versions of which they present to the United Nations or Organisation of American States, none of which reflect the reality confronting the Colombian people.

On trade union issues you have already heard from my CUT colleagues that the Labour Action Plan of the US-Colombian FTA has not

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been adhered to. The ending of precarious work practices has never happened. The official Government contribution to fulfilling the guarantees they gave under the Labour Action Plan was two or three advertisements in the newspapers.

Why do you think you were imprisoned 11 months ago?

I've been a trade union activist for 28 years. We have failed to achieve much, so struggle is still required. I have been a national figure for 20 years during which time I have been on 22 strikes, during many of which I have negotiated with the Government. The last one was August 2013 when I was arrested. I have always been on the left of politics, a former member of the Communist Party and a survivor of the Patriotic Union genocide. More recently I have been active in the Patriotic March. History and my resistance brought about my arrest. The Government thought that by arresting 300 activists it would stop the strike, instead it became stronger: 60 of the 300 arrested are still here in prison.

Has there been a campaign to get all the political prisoners housed together in the prison?

We organise in each prison and wing. Political collectives, we struggle for recognition for political prisoners although after internal debate we commit ourselves to politicising all prisoners. It is hard to disentangle, ODCs (Ordinary Decent Criminals) from political prisoners. All of us are victims of socio-economic conditions. We are trying to build a national prisoners movement.

How can we help your case?

Thank you for your solidarity and compassion. Many of my trade union brothers and sisters, also parliamentarians in the UK, Ireland, TUC and ITUC are very helpful. The more civil rights and labour lawyers protest at our detention, all this helps our political campaign here. I apologise for not thanking you earlier. My message to all is one of gratitude, it assists our capacity every day. We continue our struggle no matter what. We will continue to confront this dictatorship with a democratic face. **Tell the world there is no democracy here.** Workers have been murdered for seeking wage increases and decent terms and conditions of employment. We continue to demand our rights to participate in a democratic society.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE FOR THIS UNTIL THE END.

David Rabello

I am a Human Rights defender, a founding member of CREDHOS, a national human rights organisation. I was the legal counsellor for the Patriotic Union. I have been a member of the Communist Party since 1991. It is a crime in Colombia to hold a political opinion in defence of the people and democracy. I firmly believe in a political solution to the conflict. For our 'crime' we face assassination – legal political assassination. A few of us are lucky to have survived being murdered, so the state uses another option for us (prison). Many of my comrades have been wiped out. In June 2007 I received a video of Uribe meeting secretly with right wing paramilitary groups. I publicly denounced this meeting. The paramilitary command decided to murder me. It was an Organisation of American States delegation which informed me of this – this information saved me.

A member of the paramilitary group currently in prison accused me of allegedly meeting the FARC to arrange killings. The prosecution case was moved to Bogota. The AG, before he left office, assigned my case to the anti-terrorist system. My case was pursued at the highest level by Uribe and the Inspector General. What we discovered from the prosecution was that a Lieutenant involved in the disappearance of a man on March 6th 1991 was the main witness against me— he was convicted by the Military Court. Legally, I should not be prosecuted. Article 207 of the 1996 Law states that if someone is dismissed from State Security Forces he/ she cannot be deemed a legal officer.

Here in my case we had a Human Rights abuser as the witness against a Human Rights defender. I took a legal case against witnesses who lied in my case and proved so. The Inspector General, despite the evidence, influenced my appeal to the Supreme Court. I have just recently been convicted of assisted homicide. My situation is replicated right across the country for thousands of others. I am now the Human Rights spokesperson in my prison wing. I am allowed to go to other areas of the prison. Inmates are sleeping on the floor of the toilets. Many sleep 4-6 to a cell. In the older part of the prison where there is space for 900 prisoners, there are 4,500 people.

An inmate with an aneurism and who is disabled receives care in the form of a shower. Another with brain cancer and who the Supreme Court deemed should be under house arrest is still incarcerated here. A combatant injured in action is now a paraplegic and despite needing hospital care he is still here.

Huber

The Peace Process is not easy although FARC have given an unequivocal pledge to reach agreement. The Government has not yet given such a pledge. Aggression continues on a large scale with constant violations of human rights with continued murder and imprisonment of trade unionists. There is no change or promised change in the Colombian economic model and the MNCs control our national resources. There is a view that we have been fooled into a peace process, but Santos and Uribe represent war. If peace is agreed, we will benefit, hopefully through our amnesty. In the interim, the Government should give a gesture on greater flexibility for prisoners and a genuine effort to address health problems impacting on prisoners.

The state is attempting to manipulate the situation by claiming that it was only the FARC who created victims, whereas the state continues to refuse to acknowledge its history and legacy of murder, torture, forced disappearance and false imprisonment of thousands.

On the issue of decommissioning, the Government demands each guerrilla hand in their weapons. This did not happen when the guerrilla group M19 gave up its military campaign. There is no state position on what should happen to decommission the paramilitary groups, only a denial of their existence. The Peace Process could collapse at any time as the Government seeks a referendum on ratification of any negotiated agreement while the Progressives seek a National Constituent Assembly.

WE WILL STRUGGLE ON.



2014 Delegation meet the Mayor of Bogota, Hollman Morris.

14.00hrs

Meeting with Hollman Morris, Director of Canal Capital, Bogota's Public TV Station

This meeting was attended by Irish members of the delegation, as our British counterparts had a meeting with the British Ambassador. In the midst of all the horrors we had witnessed this meeting was a breath of fresh air, an oasis of progressive thought in a repressed society.

Hollman Morris:

You are very welcome to Canal Capital in which we operate a philosophy centred on culture, peace and human rights' promotion. This is the first media source to promote such a philosophy in Colombian history. This is all credit to the Mayor Gustavo Petro who has a policy called 'Humane Bogota'. The outlet is designed to remove the stigmatisation led by then President Uribe of social leaders, journalists and those involved in other cultural and art programmes. It is historic that in the midst of conflict we promote peace and human rights. I understand most of the media in Ireland gave support to your peace process; we are doing the same here.

Of course we have problems, with plenty of death threats to station staff, an area of Bogota

which is controlled by the Conservatives do not want to have our channel viewed by residents there. The Inspector General opposes our policy of promoting gay rights. Our programming is divided between various issues:

- LGBT Programmes;
- Indigenous Journalists on TV;
- Promotion of Women's Rights Programmes;
- Promotion of Human Rights;
- Promotion of Indigenous Ethnic People;
- Youth Programmes – New Citizens (Art-Pop Music-Hip Hop);
- Current Affairs Programmes – (best analysts in Colombia);
- Children's Programming – (everything but Disney). As not being a reactionary owned media source we tell many stories on our own historical culture.

News agenda on Canal Capital is different from all other media channels. We ensure participation by:

- Victims Organisations;
- Social Organisations;
- Human Rights and Peace Organisations;
- Promote the Peace Process and Analysis of Developments;
- Promote values of the 1991 Constitution.

For the first time in Colombia we are creating a model of public TV which incorporates multi-ethnic, diversity and culture differences in building the new peace. We are grateful to Justice for Colombia who hosted me in England and Ireland where I learned a lot.

This was followed by questions from delegation members:

Do the politicians participate in your programmes?

That is a very good question. I am a journalist by profession and was involved in defending human rights and promoting the peace process. The then Uribe Government did all in its power to silence me, accused me of terrorism and had my US visa withdrawn by the US Administration. I have been exiled twice due to this repression and only returned to Bogota to take on this job. We are not going to behave as those who attempted to silence me. We, in our programming, invite both opponents and proponents of the peace process. We are not afraid of criticism. We are an open media channel.

Opposition politicians and those in Government do come on our panel debates because we produce the best TV shows in the country. They can't refuse. Why oppose Uribe and not expose his views to public scrutiny by not interviewing him.

One of the big problems is that we see the wealth coming in and going out, but none of it stays here

What level of viewership does Canal Capital TV have?

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We do not have the same systems as you do in public TV to measure viewers. There is no payment to us by viewers. One million people watch the most popular shows. Our Twitter followers increase every week. We try to broaden our reception to outside Bogota but we need a receiver to do so. We are vulnerable due to these reasons but my goal is to create such a high standard of production that it will become impossible to remove the station.

Are your staff in need of protection?

We continue to receive death threats from the Uribe faction. Since 2005 I have had armed bodyguards and an armoured plated jeep for transport. We have had two attacks on the channel when our website and then Twitter were hacked. We have now changed those. Journalists don't leave Bogota unless protests are in rural areas. We do not have security there. 80% of viewers favour our programmes, 20% dissent.

Your employees are all very young, why is that?

Yes, the majority are young which gives us a creative energy and allows opportunities for young people. When Uribe was in power, he damaged the mind-set and educational system so the youth here are directed towards progressive values. You should remember:

- **Argentina – Dictatorship – 30,000 disappeared or murdered;**
- **Chile – Dictatorship – 3,000 disappeared or murdered;**
- **Colombia – Democracy – 50,000 disappeared or murdered.**





Thursday July 24th

04.30hrs

Visit to Buenaventura

Buenaventura is a city on Colombia's south west coast. It serves as the major port on Colombia's Pacific coast and has become ever more central to commerce and trade in the region as a result of recent free trade agreements (with Canada, the US, South Korea, and the Pacific Alliance). It has also witnessed some bitter territorial disputes between right wing paramilitaries for control of the area. There have been major atrocities committed in Buenaventura, including the discovery in the past year of the 'Casas de Pique' (Chop Houses), where victims were routinely dismembered. The dismemberment is carried out by paramilitary groups ensuring the screams of the victims are heard and will terrorise local people into submission.

The delegation was transported by bus on arrival at the airport. On the route to Buenaventura we witnessed huge road expansions to allow easier access to the port which is undergoing a huge expansion programme, thanks to the forced displacement of the local, mostly Afro-Caribbean and indigenous people from their traditional dwellings. These sit on stilts above the water and allow them to fish the rivers, lagoons and the ocean - activities central to their livelihoods - alongside wood cutting, and small scale crop cultivation in the jungle.

The delegation was first of all joined by a local afro-colombian leader who bore testimony to the fact that lands which were in the way of major road developments were summarily confiscated after the population had been displaced by paramilitary groups and the military.

En route to the port we visited a relocation settlement of concrete constructed houses to which some of the fisher folk had been displaced to make way for port expansion. This area was at least 8 kilometres from the sea. As they were merely relocated to this site without re-skilling and no employment of any kind provided, the displaced were naturally leaving and returning to their original sites for fishing.

To the untutored eye it might appear that these new sites provided a better class of housing for the inhabitants. However this is to ignore the fact that they are now cut off from earning a living and from the lifestyle that had been theirs for 500 years.

We were told that *H.H.* - a paramilitary commander - informed the United Nations that they (paramilitary groups) came to Buenaventura at the request of some MNCs. In 2004 the paramilitaries were allegedly demobilised but instead they morphed into two major groups who compete for control of areas and land. They occasionally change their names, but comprise the same personnel. **It is important to stress that there are no guerrilla forces in this area.**

The area of Buenaventura is controlled by state and paramilitaries. There is clear collusion with the navy, army and paramilitaries. All of the violence here is predicated on economic gain - economic gain outweighs human rights.

On occasion the high and middle command of the paramilitaries 'disappear' their own lower ranks to ensure they do not reveal what actions they have participated in. Faced with this future some individuals from the lower ranks have testified to human rights groups as to the actions of paramilitary groups. There are regular attempts to force communities into co-operation for new road works. New roads are solely for the transport of goods not for local peoples' good. The farmers who live here have their right to the land and the

right to prior consultation enshrined in the constitution, but their rights are not being respected.

Most of the victims the delegation met were from areas where the access roads to the new port and the port itself are being built, as well as from rural areas around the city. In the appendix there is a detailed description of the cases of dismemberment from the chop houses in Buenaventura itself provided by local human rights organisations.

Local Leader

Where you see the road now being constructed these and other routes were our ancestral routes. The first major company to come here in 1961/2 was - [REDACTED]*. Their mission was to access wood for export. Since 1993 local communities have had their right to the land recognised under Law 70 [which recognises the right of afro-colombian communities to collectively own and administer their ancestral lands], yet the municipal authorities dispute this. Commercial companies in the new port operate behind the backs of communities and consultation can be ignored on the basis that it is not legally required. Our rights and livelihoods are threatened by private security organisations which have stopped us using our lands.

Units of the Marine Infantry came to our area and occupied our homes while we were out in the fields working. This occupation still goes on as the military can take over our homes as billets at any time. The Inter Church Group I am attached to was advised by the authorities 'to leave well enough alone'.

We are crushed and have no recourse to justice either at regional or national level. The first twenty homes burned down by the military received compensation but none after that. We have nowhere to WORK, FISH, OR CUT WOOD. Some young people get work, the rest

of us, NOTHING. I have received death threats and one of our leaders was assassinated in 2012. These threats continue which affects our struggle as it reduces our numbers. When we mobilise peacefully we are accused of being guerrillas. This is a heavily militarised area. Neighbourhoods have also been displaced to make room for warehouse and storage developments. There have been 800 million tonnes of produce exported already this year. On the peace talks we have sustainable proposals for communities here. These proposals have supporting studies and we have also put forward proposals which show alternatives for tourism projects around the area.

Meeting with Bishop of Buenaventura

Bishop

I am very pleased that you are here. Buenaventura has been marginalised by the Government which cares about the development of the port and not the citizens of the city. A capitalist mentality dominates leading to an accumulation of problems. The modus operandi is to promise a lot but not to deliver. Some 80% of the population is Afro-Caribbean, with 17% mixed race and 3% indigenous.

It is the biggest port in Colombia, a scene of conflict and an area under military and paramilitary control. There are organisations here which expose the realities of life for people living here, the Church being one of these. In October 2006 we presented then-President Uribe with a report on the underlying reasons for conflict here. Nothing was ever done.

In 2011 after many protests a dialogue on the conflict here began between the vice-President and civic organisations. Again nothing happened. In October 2013 the main two

*Redacted for legal reasons



2014 Delegation meeting with the Bishop of Buenaventura.

paramilitary groups fought each other for control of the area. The Church made representation to the local authorities on seeking an end to such behaviour only to be told that we - the Church - were isolated. The major issue here has been the high number of citizens 'disappeared'. There are so many forced disappearances that many go unreported due to fear.

Between five and ten thousand citizens have been displaced, many disappeared, many assassinated as paramilitaries fight for territorial control. The most painful and horrific issue has been the barbaric dismemberment of people in the so called 'Chop Houses'. This year to date the official police figure is given as 12, but we believe there have been lots more. Extortion of family run businesses is rife, leading to the closure of neighbourhood shops. People live in fear. People from here end up in Soacha, in Bogota. Our analysis is that the mega projects on the expansion of the port push people off the land.

There is so much displacement, violence and fear that people are forced off the land. In March 2014 President Santos ordered in more troops, although they have mostly left now. Police captured some paramilitary leaders but others surfaced and nobody appears capable of catching the crime bosses. I've told the authorities the real leaders are not in Buenaventura. On February 19 last we held dignified mass demonstrations led by civic society and the

Church. Over 25,000 people attended and this was followed on March 12 by a demonstration of local shop owners supporting our demands. Our primary demand was to request the Government to declare the city 'an emergency'. The President's response was to inform us that the Constitutional Court did not agree that there was an emergency here. Buenaventura is the capital of the Pacific Alliance (a free trade integration agreement between Colombia, Peru, Mexico and Chile with Costa Rica and Panama set to join. It will also be the main entry point if Colombia joins the US project of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, another free trade project for the Pacific rim countries), but people live in conditions of poverty and violence.

We believe policies are all about getting people off the land for the Free Trade Agreement. People are filled with fear and desperation.

Buenaventura has a population of 400k and 60% of all Colombia's import/ export trade comes through here. It contributes some 4bn Pesos, \$2bn US dollars to the National Treasury, but thanks to government corruption and priorities none of it comes back here. Many NGOs ask for money for Buenaventura but nothing is done for us. This hurts. It's corruption. The MNCs are removed from the development of the city. One of the big problems is that we see the wealth coming in and going out, but none of it stays here.

Our communities have been displaced and some of our leaders have been killed

There is forced recruitment of minors into ranks of paramilitary groups. The children aged 12, 13, and 14 are taken from the schools by the paramilitaries. The Government promised investment for neighbourhoods but the plans were never implemented, due to the corruption of the local administration. **Almost every family here have had members assassinated or disappeared.** How do we treat victims for psychological problems and trauma?

Large NGOs receive funding to deal with problems here but we never see them. We are having a David and Goliath battle with the authorities who consistently maintain this is a non-violent area. We move to the rhythm of solidarity and peace.

During September 2013 we held demonstrations during the 'Week of Peace'. The day after

the first demonstration we discovered the head of a 23 year old man, whose body had been dismembered. Civil Society is gradually coming to realise the horrors being perpetrated here and are beginning to participate in the demonstrations. I was awarded an honour for humanitarianism by the Chamber of Commerce.

This was followed by questions from delegation members:

Why the presence of paramilitaries when there are no guerrillas here?

The paramilitaries have no ideology. They are here for the sole reason of greed. They do operations for what we call the 'far right' who fund them to persecute those who organise for Human Rights. We believe the MNC's pay paramilitaries although we have no hard evidence.

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Local residents give testimony through song, poetry and dialogue. Mark Durkan MP, (SDLP) in foreground.

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However, there are testimonies from the likes of H.H. (ex-paramilitary) who has been extradited and has stated that his orders came from the MNC's and the army.

We make sure the gains in the work we do are collaborative with the trade unions and civil organisations. One such positive result was that through our joint working we ensured the Labour Ministry forced the Port Authorities to pay workers who had been underpaid 1 million pesos. Citizens feel we give them hope. The church was the first to denounce Chop Houses. **We have over 1,000 disabled here receiving no monies from any source. Due to threats to my life (2006), I was advised to remember what happened to the Archbishop of Cali,**

who was assassinated. I went into exile for 2/3 months. I am in poor ill-health, but request you to make representations for our victims and demand the Government to fulfil its promises of social investment for Buenaventura.

Visit to 'Humanitarian Area', Buenaventura

The delegation visited this area in which the local community has declared that it wishes to live in peace without violence. The ground of the area is formed by shells and other refuse deposited over many generations by local people, each street on the shore juts out into the sea like a finger, washed by waters on three sides. The area is adjacent to other fingers of land inhabited by local people and controlled by paramilitar-



Local children perform for the Delegation in space once occupied by a 'Chop House'.

ies. The Humanitarian Area is characterised by having a presence of members of a Christian NGO Group which comprises of three young women, two from the USA and one from Austria. Their presence ensures some protection for the locals.

The delegation received a very warm welcome with traditional music and dance performed by the local children. This welcome and performance took place on a stage in front of the space where a Chop House once operated but had been demolished, to commemorate our visit.

Orlando (An afrocolombian local community leader, former port worker and trade unionist from Buenaventura)



Thank you for visiting our community which is confronted by a complex humanitarian crisis. There is no guerrilla presence in Buenaventura, only state and paramilitary forces.

Three projects have triggered this crisis:

1. *The intention to build a seafront esplanade for tourists in an area where we live;*
2. *The building of numerous hotels along the esplanade;*
3. *An expansion of the Port.*

The black and mestizo communities have borne

the brunt of everything that has occurred here especially the human rights abuses. The mega projects mentioned have resulted in us being forced off our land. Both the state and MNC's get the paramilitaries to do their dirty work:

- 70% of community unemployed;
- 15 people forcibly disappeared;
- 30 more not included in official statistics;
- 115 members of community assassinated this year to date;
- In every other area except here, paramilitaries live and terrorise.

We have publicly denounced the cooperation between the paramilitaries with national, regional and local authorities. Over 500 families were moved to Son Antonio (the new settlement the delegation had visited earlier by bus). Local fishermen were targeted for assassination and abandoned by the state. In Son Antonio they had their boats and engines stolen. When those fisher folk then turned their hand to wood producing, they were jailed.

WE SUPPORT THE PEACE PROCESS – WE WANT JUSTICE.

Johnny from the La Gloria Neighbourhood Association (afrocolombian)

Arms in this area have been used against the young people. Here we have 250 unemployed young people who have to engage in informal mining to survive. We cannot go along the river banks (Rio Dagua) anymore as there are paramilitaries there. Once we grew our vegetables along those banks, now it is too dangerous to go there. Everyone who lives where we do is at risk, armed groups go around killing people. In 2014 the situation has calmed down a little –

the communal council has worked hard. Many young people have joined it because we have created an educational programme for the local children and they have nowhere else to study, but they need to if they want to leave.

Emilse and Demarcia from Bajo Calima (afrocolombians)

I came from the Bajo Calima neighbourhood where to facilitate the megaprojects we were forced off 11,200 hectares of our land by armed groups- by paramilitaries and the ESMAD riot police - to facilitate the expansion of the Sweetwater Port. We were evicted and displaced. We had badly built houses that weren't like the ones we are used to as replacements for our homes. For denouncing this displacement, members of our group were murdered and we receive threats. The paramilitaries and the army have killed many people.

Marcia Mejilla Olivira (indigenous woman from Bajo San Juan)

I live in one of the two indigenous reserves which are located near the water. We are plagued by the Colombian army and by paramilitary groups who take control of the rivers and do not allow us to do our traditional activities. In 2011 we declared a Humanitarian and Environmental Zone and have no armed actors there. We also have suffered from violence and displacement.

Manuel and Roberto

Thank you for your visit. We belong to the Esperanza settlement but due to the economic projects have been threatened and displaced. We have found no echo in the municipal or departmental authorities. So we want your help with this so that they might pay attention to us. We want you to help our community to get protection through preventative measures and land. The

*struggle is also for my family. I am a leader, my son is a lawyer, but we cannot return to our village which has been destroyed and is now controlled by paramilitaries who say they are backed by the authorities, which we think is true because we have been to see the Secretary and the Ministry. They destroyed our village... we used to protect the environment through forestry and agriculture, this was all destroyed. We also protected the water – which may be the reason for the next world war – we had lots of natural pools, but we can't return there now...**Help us get them out so we can return there.** [shows a map of the settlement as it was before]*

HELP US GET RID OF INVADERS.

Isabelino Valencia and Luis Alfonso Celario from the Rio Naya Community Council

Our community has been here, in the South West of Colombia since 1680 – that's over 330 years. In 1999, under the new law that recognised our right to the lands where we lived, we requested 190 hectares of land which was rightly ours (the afrocolombian community's) but which had been claimed by others (the university of Cauca). The university in 2000 put forward a legal obstacle saying that the land was theirs. In 2001 while we were in discussions on this matter, there was a horrible massacre and 144 members of our community were murdered by the Bloque Calima paramilitaries. This can be confirmed by H.H., the paramilitary leader referred to earlier. The victims were all black or indigenous.

Jorge Veloza: 14 years later we continue to resist although 30% of our people are displaced and the Government displays no willingness to help. With political and legal help from the Inter Church Peace and Justice Commission we've won various cases in the Council of State and the Constitutional Court against the University of Cauca. By not allowing the recognition of

our collective ownership of the land this means foreigners can come in and force us to grow coca and bulldozer the forests.

Luis Alfonso Celario

The current context of the situation in Naya is that at the moment we have the formal request for the recognition of our collective title to the land, there is lots of resistance to increased mining in the valley of the river because of the effect it has on the river. Our communities have been displaced and some of our leaders have been killed. Our boats and goods have been confiscated by the army, in violation of our most important traditions - which means we can't transport food anymore, our culture uprooted and our leaders killed. Thank you for your presence here today.

Elsa, Legal Officer of Community Association

The greatest problem we face is the continuous fumigation of our food crops by the military. This happened quite recently again on July 16 and 19 in San Pablo. As well as this difficulty is the migration of young people due to the absence of employment. In March of this year (2014) I was tortured here in the 'chop house' and thrown in the river. Here in this house Junik suffered the same, also Pauline. Since the Humanitarian Area was established there have been more than 50 death threats, seven directly to named leaders here.

The HQ of the paramilitary group is 300 meters from here. They have attempted to invade this community many times, always through an area we term the 'box', which is 250 metres from here.

On April 12th the day after we set up the zone, 16 year old Carlos from our community was murdered and his body dismembered in the street 20 metres from the entrance to zone.

Last month one of the two paramilitary groups was demobilised but a new group immediately appeared. This group controls the adjacent neighbourhood and regularly attempts to invade here. We have documented and reported these attempted invasions to Government. However, the State has not complied with its duty to protect its citizens. We still remain vulnerable to paramilitary attacks.

Here in the past there is no visible trade union presence. The workers receive 150 per month and are employed as agency workers. They are not permitted to join trade unions, they are not in receipt of any benefits other than the basic 150.

Witness from Rural Area

Where I come from was the scene of one of the worst massacres in Colombia. In 1965 a huge monster came to our region, it is called [REDACTED]* Over 26,000 hectares of pine trees were planted on our land. To enable this to happen 324 peasants were murdered, 17 of whom came from my small hamlet. **Many of these were dismembered by chainsaw and thrown into the river.**

*Redacted for legal reasons

Marlene

I come from a neighbourhood situated in the way of the planned dual carriageway as part of accessing the Sweetwater project. My husband was murdered for objecting to this project as it was planned to cut through our land. No one was even charged with his murder.

Raul Palacio Salas (Carmen del Darien, Bajo Choco)

We are part of CONPAZ, thanks for being here. It is our belief that peace must be built from the ground up in Colombia, where we as organisations have been victims of war and human rights crimes. CONPAZ is made up of 117 organisations from 9 departments of Colombia, mostly victims' communities which came together in an act of solidarity. We have spent 14 years building up that solidarity everywhere. We have met victims of humanitarian rights abuses from around the world, including the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, to tell them about Operation Genesis which saw thousands displaced from the Bajo Atrato area in 1996-97, and we proposed the creation of an Ethical Truth Commission to rescue the memory of our communities.

So we need to build peace. There can be no peace without truth. Our proposal for the ethical truth commission is important today because of the peace process. Your presence in the negotiations is important. There can be no peace without truth and no peace without stability and social justice. We have been working on our truth commission proposal for many years, working with international experiences like that of Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, South Africa and others from the EU. We want the events clarified and have proposed to the Juan Manuel Santos government, to Colombian society and to the FARC and ELN and EPL that these be discussed at the negotiations table.

On April 4, 2014 we launched our proposal in Bogota. We requested the National Committee for Peace attend. We participated in the UN forums which have been held and in which victims participated and to which we presented our proposals:

- 1. We demand a ceasefire by all actors in the conflict; (they had suggested a pilot ceasefire in their territory to the government)*
- 2. An end to idea of the 'internal enemy', re-examine the training of the military and the doctrine which drives terrorism by state forces and paramilitaries against us, their own people;*
- 3. A Truth Commission with compensation and reparations for the victims based on a study of who has benefitted from the violence;*
- 4. Reform of the judiciary and an independent enquiry into the role of Department of Justice into its culture of impunity and along with necessary reforms;*
- 5. Creation of a Land Commission which should include victims and adjudicate on land restitution;*
- 6. On the subject of development projects and FTAs it is an imperative that MNCs are not allowed to abuse human rights of citizens. The Government must adhere to the Colombian Constitution, its international commitments and United Nation's policies;*
- 7. The participation of community representatives in the peace talks and meetings with President Santos and the Peace Commission.*

Thank you for coming and please use your influence to ensure our voice is heard.

Friday July 25th

Meeting with Spokespersons on Human Rights from a Variety of Colombian Government Ministries, including Foreign Affairs, Justice, Defence, Employment, Police, President's Office

Department of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson

The spokesperson commenced the meeting with an explanation of what the peace process is about.

The Government agreed the agenda with FARC to end armed conflict and build peace. There has been a history of disastrous human rights abuses throughout Colombia over the years.

There are five agenda objectives:

- 1. Remove the reasons for armed conflict. We need a national development plan with three major components.*
 - a. Land Act Programme which allows peasants to access land, which will serve productive and social purposes.*
 - b. Major programmes on health and education for the regions affected by the conflict.*
 - c. Engagement of local communities in preparation of state budgets which should ensure greater distribution of finances to the marginalised.*
- 2. Greater political participation for all, including those demobilised when conflict ends. A guarantee for the protection of all politicians. Through citizens participation*

communities determine own priority. Small political parties will not lose any legal rights if they receive a low percentage of votes.

- 3. The ending of prostitution and trafficking of illegal drugs which in certain circumstances is admitted by FARC to have financed the conflict. NB this is something that was stated by the government, but to date we have never seen any acknowledgement by the FARC of involvement in either of these two activities. The substitution of illegal crops for legal crops.*

- 4. Victims' rights have to be addressed, especially in the context of armed conflict. Never before have we as a nation addressed victims' rights including the State's responsibility by action or omission.*

All sections of society including private MNCs have responsibility.

In the process it is intended to have a delegation of 12 victims' representatives present at the ongoing negotiations in Havana and look at the redress victims demand and how to build the peace.

The UN has organised over 500 victims' organisations. A national forum for victims will be organised.

- 5. Truth and reparation programme which will be supported by FARC.*

The non-repetition of violence needs to underpin, all of the above.

When victims' rights have been addressed reconciliation will flow.

All issues will be dealt with from a rights-based approach which will also result in socio-economic rights for all in Colombia society.

There will also be three commissions established:

- a. Gender commission
- b. Commission on weapons
- c. Commission on history of conflict

(Delegation question)

We have heard a consistent theme from those who we met about a lack of confidence in the Government with regard to developing a genuine peace process. How do you demonstrate Government sincerity?

Department of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson

We completely agree on the necessity of building trust with each other. Many distrust Regional Governments, many distrust FARC. The President accepts the need to keep the citizens apprised of issues discussed at the negotiations, unlike before when the sole issue was decommissioning.

Nothing will be agreed until everything is agreed.

Police and army need to protect people on the ground therefore it is impossible to have a bilateral ceasefire.

We are attempting to halt the violation of human rights by state forces.

We got elected on a wide range of issues which comprises the manifesto for our Peace process.

A discussion ensued on how the meeting should progress with the Ministerial Personnel preferring they finish their various presentations before taking any further questions from the delegation.

Meeting with Attorney General's Office

The delegation put forward a summary of issues from the various meetings held during the week. These included due process, impunity, political prisoners – updates on Huber Ballesteros and David Rabelo, Miguel Angel Beltran and Lilianny Obando.

The representatives of the Attorney General's Office (of whom there were at least 11) began with a one by one response outlining the work of each of their departments.

These included specific measures taken with regard to Buenaventura (an 8 point plan), the creation of 2 new investigative units in the city, 8 new prosecutors, 3 specialist prosecutors, and other new officials with the task of dealing with displacement, dismemberments and other human rights abuses as well as organised crime. The officials noted 33 cases in which 25 individuals had been found, and two arrests made. The delegation noted that while in Buenaventura they had heard nothing from the Bishop or the communities about the activities of these new units and their work, and they asked who exactly the Office was working with in the city.

They said that they work with the Presidential Programme on Human Rights, the High Commissioner for the regions and that their work had been widely disseminated and was easily verifiable. The delegation also brought up abuses that had been reported in Putumayo, particularly the case of the 4 youths recently killed. **The AG's office responded that it appeared the army was responsible** and that it was in preliminary investigations under the 9th Prosecutor of Pasto.

Delegation also asked about Soacha and the investigations there. The response was that the

cases are heard in the human rights department, the cases are held in five processes, 3 are in preliminary investigation, 2 are at the oral hearing stage, there are 758 army members and another 21 officials not from the army being investigated. They explained that to find the bodies they needed the cooperation of the perpetrators and these were usually reticent, and that by 2012 *nearly all* the mothers had received the bodies of their sons.

The delegation then asked about the transfer of cases into the military justice system. The AG's office officials responded that the AG's office had taken the cases that had begun from the military justice system and begun to investigate them under the civilian penal code. The reforms in most cases have been declared unconstitutional by the constitutional court – which has said that where doubt exists cases should be heard in the civilian system, and to the human rights department of the AG's Office if possible.

The delegation asked for clarification regarding the military justice system reform. The officials responded that it was a political decision, but insisted that in their criminal code there were specific laws in the constitution and in international law that Colombia is signatory to, which ensures that future legislation cannot contradict these parameters.

The officials also clarified that in cases of delay of investigations one of the early problems was institutional overlap and 'competition of competency' which took time to sort out. In other cases the military lawyers have skilfully presented delaying tactics. **With regard to the false positives there are 4785 cases being investigated – 39 officers of whom three are colonels, three lieutenant colonels and 11 majors – who are senior officers who will have good lawyers who are experienced in delaying investigations.** There were 779

sentences for cases of extrajudicial executions in all of Colombia. In Soacha two cases are at the oral hearing stage. The official emphasised that the human rights department of the AG's Office deals with all human rights cases and cases of violations of international humanitarian law.

He added that the Cundinamarca court deals with second cases because of the systematic nature of the cases it declared them crimes against humanity. The officials also underlined that in the cases of the four political prisoners mentioned by the delegation, these had been exhaustively investigated, they have been allowed lawyers, an adequate defence and in many cases allowed to present cases of habeas corpus, the Attorney General's Office investigates, the court decides. They also added that the Inspector General is involved in invigilating and ensuring the rights of citizens. They stated that they expected further information from the delegation in writing before responding in more detail.

The delegation asked who defines how long prisoners stay imprisoned on remand. The officials responded that the criminal code determines this and that the right to habeas corpus existed. The length of time is determined by the type of crime and the number of those sentenced. In some cases habeas corpus is denied because it is seen as a delaying tactic.

In the Colombian system you can be detained after you have been accused, but before you have been sentenced. The delegation enquired about the situation of impunity with regard to trade union victims. The officials responded that at the moment a tripartite commission of government, Attorney General's Office and the CUT and other trade union federations existed to follow up investigations. In 2011 the human rights department created a special unit (the ILO unit) and it has 25 prosecutors that investigate

crimes against trade unionists. These have initially looked at 1545 cases which were chosen because they are from two complaints made to the ILO. Of these 198 cases are in hearings, 366 have resulted in sentences. The reason they have only looked at 1545 cases is that the ENS (National Trade Union School) which is represented at the tripartite commission had promised to present cases on other crimes against trade unionists, but they had yet to do so, although they are apparently working on this with the international department of the AG's Office.

Part of the reason is that the cases from before 1994 have expired under Colombian law, therefore they need to be studied individually and contextualised. If they are then categorised as crimes against humanity they can be re-opened.

Conclusion



JOINT DELEGATION STATEMENT

We, a group of MPs, trade unionists and lawyers from Britain and Ireland have been in Colombia since Saturday 19 July 2014 on a delegation organised by the British NGO, Justice for Colombia.

Over the last week we have met with a wide range of civil society organisations, politicians and government officials. In Bogotá we met with the human rights organisations CCAJAR, CPDH, and the victims' organisations Hijos y Hijas and MOVICE, as well as with the CUT and public and private sector trade unions. We held a meeting with representatives from the Broad Front for Peace, we travelled to Soacha to meet the Mothers of Soacha and we visited La Picota prison where we spoke with the political prisoners Huber Ballesteros and David Ravelo. We also met with former political prisoners Liliany Obando and Miguel Angel Beltran whose cases continue to cause concern.

In Putumayo with the accompaniment of the Patriotic March we were able to witness the humanitarian and social crisis in the region as well as hear testimony of the continuing impact of the armed conflict on the population. We also travelled to Buenaventura where we met with the local Bishop, and visited Humanitarian Space for an event organised by Conpaz and The Interchurch Commission for Justice and Peace. We have heard testimonies of widespread displacement, murders by state forces and para-state forces, forced disappearances, paramilitary control and the horrific violence of the "chop houses".

Throughout the entire week we were inspired by the resolve and determination of those we met to continue in their struggles for justice and for peace. In order to support those objectives we make the following conclusions:

- The killing of trade unionists continues to be of fundamental concern. Trade unions are an essential part of any democracy, and will be crucial to a stable and lasting peace. These killings must stop, the culprits must be brought to justice and the stigmatisation of trade unions must end. There needs to be far greater focus on complying with international labour agreements – at present even the limited control mechanisms stipulated in the Labour Action Plan are not being met. We call on the Colombian government to enforce the right to freedom of association and to guarantee the protection of trade unionists.
- Both the high level of impunity for crimes committed against civil society activists and the repeated reports of the involvement of state actors in some of these crimes demonstrates that more must be done at state level to ensure full guarantees for civil society activists.
- We oppose efforts being made to widen the reach of military courts: we believe that this will only further entrench impunity.
- We call on the Colombian government to release all political prisoners of conscience and address the humanitarian crises in the prisons.

- We believe all these points directly impact upon the ongoing peace process. The Colombian government should be bold in implementing measures such as the provision of guarantees for the political opposition, expanding civil society participation and agreeing a bilateral ceasefire, all of which would contribute to building trust between the negotiating parties.
- Members of the delegation from Ireland who were involved in talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement will continue to meet with both sides of the Colombian negotiations.
- In reference to the upcoming decision in Ireland on the ratification of the EU Colombia FTA, Eric Byrne TD will make representations to his colleagues in the Irish government regarding the continuing human rights and labour rights violations in Colombia.
- The British section of the delegation would also like to express its appreciation to the British Ambassador for commitments made, including to visit the Mothers of Soacha. However, they are also concerned at the continuing lack of transparency surrounding Britain's military cooperation with Colombia and the ambassador's recent visit to La Macarena – the site of a mass grave – with the Colombian Military.

July 2014





Appendices

Appendix 1

Cases Logged by the Putumayo Human Rights Network

- 28 April-24 July. Constant launching of guided munitions from the military bases of Cuhembi and Quillasinga on the Puerto Vega-Teteye corridor. These affected pastures and homes.
- Edwin Gonzales suffered a workplace injury while working for the oil company, he has not been attended as required. On the 4th July he and others began a peaceful protest but were met by the security forces who humiliated and beat them, detaining Edwin. He was released the following day, but he has had no response from the Vetra-Consorcio Colombia Energy Company.
- Tuesday 20th June 2014, at approximately 12.22am in the settlement of Tres Islas in the San Miguel municipality of Putumayo, a helicopter gunship of the Colombian airforce strafed the area for 15 minutes without there being any military target in the area, putting the lives and property of the civilian population at risk. Among these was the house of Carlos Chapuel, a local leader and 'peace advocate'. Herminsul Chapuel, Javier Chapuel, and Merleny Medina (adults), Euler Chapuel (2yrs), Alejandro Chapuel (5yrs), and Nereida Chapuel (7yrs) suffered the strafing for 15 minutes. The family had to embrace the children and desperately wait for the shooting to stop.
- Sunday 8th June 2014 at 12.45am, agents of the SIJIN (judicial) police arrived to the settlement of Puerto Bello in Piñuña Blanco in order to carry out searches and unjustified mass arrests. After carrying out the searches and taking the supposed material found in some houses they arrested several peasants - Policarpio Gonzalez Tapia, Segundo Gilberto Montilla, Mireya Martha Ordoñez, Uvadel Berocal, Mariela Ballecilla Gamboa, Emil Diovani Pivitola Trespacios and Pedro Guillermo Zambrano.
- 4th June 2014 at 12.00pm, SIJIN agents carried out a heavy operation of registration and requisition in Puerto San Pedro Putumayo. Between 4 and 5pm a 'chiva' public transport vehicle that was heading towards Puerto Caicedo from Arizona was stopped by hooded men, at a crossroads on the main road. These men took Ms Esperanza Gomez off the bus, killed her, and abandoned her body, leaving it exposed to the elements. She was a member of ATCAM, a social and political organisation that is part of the local Patriotic March section. In previous days it was revealed that Ms Gomez had recently received threats from the security services.
- 1st June 2014, a shot fired directly at Mr Oscar Armando Toro, who lives in the settlement of Buenos Aires, on the Puerto Vega-Teteye corridor, as he was passing by the Quillasinga military base which belongs to the 27 Jungle Brigade, Santa Ana, Puerto Asis, Putumayo.
- 29th May 2014 residents of the settlement of Teteye felt explosives falling in their fields and gardens, which had been fired from Quillasinga military base by army troops of the 27th Jungle Brigade. As a result of these actions explosives fell on the farm of Mr Henser Alfredo Ortega Melo, ID98340093 of Narino, who was with his wife and 4 children. The bombardment killed a 250 kg breeding bull and wounded a cow that was hit in the horn with a piece of shrapnel.

- At 16.45 on Wednesday 28th May 2014, residents of La Union reported that about 15 members of the military arrived at three homes on the San Miguel river without introducing themselves or showing identification. They aggressively interrupted the tranquillity of the people in their homes, intimidating them, forcefully entering the houses damaging doors and stealing 5 mobile phones, 1 transistor radio, an MP3 player and a shotgun, as well as the savings of one of the homeowners, which amounted to 2 million (Colombian) pesos (600 GBP). This money was intended to take the daughters of Mr Robert Valencia to the doctor. The women who observed all this were forbidden from making calls and told that “if they continued getting in the way the men would shoot the houses to give them something to complain about” and they then broke the remaining undamaged chairs. The children, particularly the 3 year old daughter of Robert Valencia, were questioned about illegal armed groups. The damaged houses belong to Luis Edinson Murillo, Lilian Gutierrez, and Robert Valencia; the phones belonged to Maryuri Castillo, Yorlany Castillo, Sandra Patricia Cortez and Yerly Cuellar (who had two phones stolen).
- 17 May 2014 at about 1.30am the inhabitants of the Alto Amarredero settlement heard the sound of helicopters overflying the area. Then they realised that a large group of soldiers was landing in the settlement, and that they belonged to the 13 Mobile Brigade and the 9th Energy and Roads Battalion ‘General Jose Maria Gaitan’ that are part of the army’s 6th Division. As a result of this military operation called ‘Operation Marshall Nemesis 3’ three youths were killed, Deivi Lopez Ortega, Jose Antonio Acanamejoy, Brayan Yatacue Secue and Jose Yiner Esterilla.
- 7th May 2014. The inspector of the Piñuña Negro communities reported that Marines under the command of a Captain Barreto were boarding two private boats that were preparing to transport people belonging to the ASCAP grassroots organisation who were meant to be participating in the regional mobilisation planned for the 7th-9th May in Mocoa, the departmental capital. This activity was planned as part of the national mobilisations around the National Agrarian Summit. This action prevented the communities from participating and showed the sabotage and lack of respect of the armed forces towards any form of political organising. This action was reported to the regional Peoples’ Ombudsman. Captain Barreto said that people aren’t allowed to travel without the required paperwork.
- Saturday 26th April 2014, troops of the 55th Jungle battalion reported having found a cache containing ideological political material ostensibly belonging to an illegal armed group. The authorities reported that they found 165 books called “100 proposals in Havana”, 12 posters of the Patriotic March, 400 Patriotic March raffle tickets for a 4x4 truck, 42 illustrated popular defence booklets and several human rights documents.” They added that they also found military intelligence material and they insist that the materials belonged to Edgar Segundo Daza aka ‘Daza’, a ‘member’ of the logistical network of the FARC’s 48th Front. News like this directly affects the physical and moral integrity of our comrade, who has been a community leader for more than 10 years in the Puerto Bello settlement, and a member of the Patriotic March, a known human rights defender and head of family.

- 10th April 2014, while Luis Albeiro Guetio Zetty, a Nasa councillor in Puerto Asis was near his home alongside his wife and six children, a man in dark clothes and wearing a military hat opened fire on him. Luis Albeiro ran to hide in his house, but he then met a second man, who was also wearing a military hat and was coming towards him. With no other way out, Luis threw himself into a large water storage tank. There the two men mortally injured him in the chest, and having confirmed he was dead, left without saying a word. The wife of the Nasa comrade saw the whole thing but has no information on the two men. She just repeats that Luis was being threatened because of his work as a councillor who sought the welfare of his community and who was forced to confront the various armed actors that are present on their territory.
- In the Piñuña Negro inspectorate the Navy carries out a continual and systematic harassment of the local JAP (neighbourhood committees) and other organisations. We have the case of ASCAP, which as a consequence of this persecution has 11 legal processes against its leaders: 3 of them have been sentenced to 54 years of prison in Jamundi in Valle del Cauca, 2 have fled and have arrest warrants out on them, 6 are in Mocoa prison in Putumayo at the stage of oral hearings, among them Wilmar Madronero who is the leader.
- There is a constant persecution of the departmental leadership, to the extent that they appear in leaflets titled 'List of Those Supporting Terrorism' and in threatening leaflets stating that the leaders of the roundtable are delegates of the FARC – people like Aquileo Mosquera, Carlos Chapuel, Nercy Lorena Castro, Luis Adriano Rodriquez, Luis Olmedo Mosquera Alvarez.
- We have a total of 40 social leaders and leaders of JAP neighbourhood committees arrested between 2011-12.
- Luis Aureliano Melo was killed on 1st February 2005, while president of ACSOMAYO organisation as a result of the fight against the expansion of the oil companies.

Appendix 2

Buenaventura Cases

- Since 13 April, after destroying a 'Chop house' and setting up the humanitarian space, the paramilitaries have known our demand to leave Puente Nayero. The paramilitaries say that they have been told about this decision by police agents, but that they were going to be vigilant. Since that night, amidst the threats and the regular incursions by paramilitaries, the families have been able to recover their traditional evening customs and are able to sleep, somewhat tense but with less fear.
- Within the 'Space for Life' we have come to know of seven cases of forced displacement from November to the 13 April.
- We have learned that the police authorities maintain a complicit silence, not just over cases of sexual violence, but also with regard to the responsible paramilitaries, who in the majority of cases are known by the police. Moreover, some of the paramilitaries have been seen socialising with police units.
- The few shop owners of the sector are victims of daily extortion by paramilitaries, who ask them for a 'quota' so as not to kill them. The shop owners have had to displace because of the constant pressures and threats – there are now 5 food shops in the Puente Nayero sector. Some of the victims of the 'chop houses' were small business owners who refused to pay the paramilitaries.
- 10 November 2014 in La Playita neighbourhood, Buenaventura, paramilitaries killed a 30 year-old man known as Papoyo.
- 2 January 2014 in the Piedras Cantas sector 24 year-old David Estiven Gamboa was killed and dismembered.
- 11 January 2014, in the La Ramiro neighbourhood 28 year-old Cesar Augusto Mosquera was killed.
- 19 January 2014, in the Playita neighbourhood, a youth died after supposed confrontations between police and paramilitaries. Local residents affirm that nothing of the sort happened, and that they only saw police agents shoot.
- On the same day paramilitaries in the 12th ward told people that those driving cars should do so with the windows down – if they refused they would be considered a military target. The measure is part of a set of restrictions from 2013 that stated that any vehicle entering the neighbourhoods after 6.00pm had to have its headlights off, its windows open and its interior lights on.
- 20 January 2014, from 2.30am-3.30am in the Alfonso Lopez and Playita neighbourhoods where there is an invisible border line, there were shots and an as yet to be identified young man was shot and killed.
- 21 January 2014 at one of the invisible border lines between the neighbourhoods of Playita and Alfonso Lopez, we heard of a meeting between the army and the police at which armed civilians were present, who when seen by the community claimed that they were members of the SIJIN police. After the meeting there were shots and one person was killed.
- 21 January 2014. The remains of Yadis Hurtado (33yrs), who had been dismembered in the La Playita neighbourhood, were found in the sea. She was taken from her home in the

Pueblo Nuevo neighbourhood along with her companion on January 19th.

- 20 March 2014. On two occasions there were clashes between police and paramilitaries in the La Playita neighbourhood. One of the incidents happened when community leaders were showing North American visitors around the sector.
- 21 March 2014, at around 2pm four military servicemen on motorbikes entered the Lleras neighbourhood of Buenaventura. One of them shot a dog that barked at them. The soldier got off his bike, picked up the bullet casing and they then withdrew.
- 13 April 2014. Carlos Andres Angarita, a 16 year old youth, was killed by paramilitaries in the Brisas sector, less than 50 metres from the Humanitarian Space of Puente Nayero. The young resident of La Playita worked selling coconut milk. On Saturday 12th he left his home at about 8pm after having finished his daily labours. His lifeless and dismembered corpse appeared in the Piedras Cantas neighbourhood on the Sunday morning. His body parts were covered with a sheet by the paramilitaries who phoned in the morning to say that a 'monkey' had been killed, meaning Carlos. On the Saturday night, that is, a day before he was killed and before the Humanitarian Space was set up in Puente Nayero, the paramilitaries established there expressed their anger to local leaders, that the afro-colombian community had not told them about the presence of US citizens, and the national and international human rights NGOs that accompanied them.
- 15 April 2014. Paramilitaries threaten leaders of the Puerto Nayero Humanitarian Space in the La Playita neighbourhood. The paramilitaries said that they should shut up and stop causing

problems with the Humanitarian Space, that they weren't going to allow the loss of their territory. The threat was also directed at the human rights defenders of our Justice and Peace Commission, warning that they already know what we do because the police agents tell them. They added that the Humanitarian Space should be dismantled. "Don't cause any more problems with that Humanitarian Space, or you'll have problems, you didn't say anything it was the police that passed us the information." Despite the presence of the police and the Marines, the paramilitaries continued to maintain their presence.

- 22 April 2014. A paramilitary called Fernando and known as 'Nano' ordered the murder of Orlando Castillo, a local leader and resident of Puente Nayero. This afrocolombian had a risk study from the National Protection Unit that doesn't take into account the high level of risk he confronts. Orlando is a resident of Puerto Nayero and he leads the communities' actions against social control and violence, and against the ignoring of the communities' land rights by investment projects in Buenaventura. That same day, the human rights defender, Danilo Rueda of the Justice and Peace Commission was threatened by a paramilitary who entered the Humanitarian Space of Puerto Nayero. The paramilitary took a machete to attack the HRD when he saw that this man didn't fear him and when he saw that several people were coming to Mr Rueda's assistance he fled with the machete in his hands.
- 23 April 2014, a member of the paramilitary structures gave the wife of Luis Yasmani Grueso, a leader and human rights defender, a warning and a death threat "Your husband is not a troublemaker, but if he continues to insist on this process of the humanitarian zone then we cannot answer for him" said the paramilitary.

Appendix 3

Agenda

Saturday 19th July

- 06.40 Flight to Bogota via Paris
- 14.40 Arrive Bogota, go straight to hotel
- 19.00 Dinner with Dr. Carlos Lozano
- **Dr. Carlos Lozano**, the editor of the Communist Party newspaper VOZ – one of the only opposition newspapers in the country. He is one of the National Spokespersons of the Patriotic March movement. He is a noted expert on the conflict in Colombia and has played a key role behind the scenes in the current peace process. During the last Colombian peace process (1999-2002), he chaired the 'Commission of Distinguished Citizens' – a body established to oversee the process on behalf of civil society. He was awarded the 'Legion of Honour' by former President Sarkozy of France in recognition of his work for hostage releases and peace. He is one of the most threatened opposition figures in Colombia and must travel everywhere accompanied by bodyguards.

Sunday 20th July

- 04.00 Rest of delegation arrive Bogota
- 12.30 Lunch on the top floor of the hotel for a delegation meeting.
- 15.00 Meeting with human rights organisations – **MOVICE, CCAJAR, CPDH, Andas, Hijos y Hijas, CIJYP, CSPP**
- 19.00 Dinner with Lilianny Obando

Notes:

- **MOVICE – the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes**, is a coalition of more than 200 of Colombia's human rights and victims' organisations, including some trade unions.
- **The Jose Alvear Restrepo Human Rights Lawyers Collective (CCAJAR)** is one of Colombia's leading lawyers' organisations working on cases of prisoners, victims of state crimes, and abuses by multinationals. They have taken several high-profile cases to international courts and represent the victims of the DAS (former intelligence services – see thematic brief).
- **Permanent Committee for Human Rights (CPDH)**, Colombia's largest human rights organisation, with regional offices in twelve areas of Colombia. As well as documenting and denouncing human rights abuses, representing prisoners and victims of state and paramilitary abuses, the organisation works with victims and relatives. Many CPDH leaders and activists around Colombia have been threatened, forced to flee their homes or even assassinated. Several Irish unions including PSEU and Impact have sponsored a project with CPDH in recent years.

- **ANDAS** is a human rights organisation that works to provide support to displaced civil society activists who have been forced to flee their homes. More recently they have been working with the mothers of the victims of Soacha.
- **‘Hijos y Hijas’ (Sons and Daughters)** is a group that brings together the children of murdered trade unionists and other civil society leaders. It was founded by Yessika Hoyos, the daughter of assassinated trade union leader Dario Hoyos. Yessika is now a lawyer with the CCAJAR human rights collective.
- **The Interchurch Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJYP)** is a longstanding human rights organisation with more than 25 years experience accompanying community organisations and particularly working with afrocolombian and indigenous groups. CIJYP provides humanitarian, legal, and psychological accompaniment to communities working to assert their rights through nonviolent means.
- **The Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP)** is the leading NGO working to highlight the conditions of political prisoners and the lack of due process they endure.

Liliany Obando is an academic and activist, single mother and former political prisoner who was imprisoned on August 8, 2008, whilst working on human rights projects with the agricultural workers’ union FENSUAGRO. A week earlier, she had issued a report documenting 1500 union members murdered or disappeared since 1976. JFC and unions in Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States campaigned for her release. After almost 4 years in prison, in February 2012, during a JFC delegation - she was released. Despite huge irregularities in her case, she has subsequently been convicted of rebellion and sentenced to house arrest, although this hasn’t yet been ordered to begin.

Monday 21st July

- 07.30 Breakfast in patio restaurant (ground floor of hotel).
- 08.00 Leave hotel
- 09.00 Meeting with members of the CUT Executive Committee and the CTC, the smaller confederation.
- 10.00 The group will split into two groups to meet several trade unions from the private and public sectors. The Unions invited include: **USO** (oil workers), **SUTIMAC** (Construction), **ANTHOC** (Health), **FECODE** (Teachers), **SIN-TRAMINERGETICA** (Miners' union), **SINTRAIME** (Metalworkers), **FENSUAGRO** (Agriculture), **ASDTEMP** (Public Sector), **FUNTRAENERGETICA** (Energy/Mining sector), **UNEB** (Finance), **SINALTRAINAL** (Food and Drink)
- Lunch will be served during the trade union meeting.
- 12.30 Leave for Soacha.
- 13.30 **Soacha**, a poor neighbourhood south of Bogota where we will meet with the families of victims of the '**false positives scandal**' – see the thematic briefing for more detail. The journey to Soacha is 1 hour and may take longer coming back due to traffic. This visit will be accompanied by **Alfonso Castillo**, the leader of **ANDAS**, and **Diego Martinez**, the Executive Secretary of **CPDH**.
- 15.30 Leave Soacha and head to hotel

- 19.30 Dinner with leaders of the Frente Amplio por la Paz (Broad Front For Peace) at hotel including **Senator Ivan Cepeda**, **Piedad Cordoba**, **Carlos Lozano**, **Congressman Alirio Uribe**, **Mauricio Ramos**, and **Aida Avella**.

- The **CUT** is the largest trade union confederation in Colombia. Its executive is made up of 21 members, representing a broad range of sectors. The executive are full time positions. Several members will receive the delegation including **Domingo Tovar** (Head of Human Rights), **Fabio Arias**, **Alirio Garcia** (who sits in on behalf of imprisoned leader Huber Ballesteros) and **Alberto Vanegas**. The CUT has around 700,000 members in around 700 affiliated unions. The CUT is affiliated to the ITUC. Members of the **CTC**, the smaller confederation, also affiliated to the ITUC, will also attend.
- **USO** is the oil workers' trade union and one of the most high profile unions in the country having led several large industrial actions to defend the state oil company, **ECOPETROL** from privatisation. It has had over 100 members assassinated over the years and the leadership face many threats. **SUTIMAC** is the union representing workers in the construction industry. **ANTHOC** is the national trade union representing workers in the health sector. The General Secretary **Carmen Mayusa**, is a former political prisoner who JFC along with **UNITE** campaigned for her release. She was held for two years without trial. **FECODE** is the largest union in the country and represents teachers. It has also had, alongside **FENSUAGRO**, the most members assassinated. **SINTRAMINERGETICA** is the miners' union and has led several strikes in recent years protesting health and safety conditions, it has had several members assassinated and threatened.

SINTRAIME is the metal workers' union and is currently on strike. **FENSUAGRO** is the union representing agricultural workers, both agro-industry workers and peasant farmers. It has had well over 1000 activists murdered and its Vice President Huber Ballesteros is currently imprisoned alongside over 100 other members. **FUNTRAENERGETICA** is the federation of trade unions representing workers in the mining, chemicals, metals, energy and petroleum sectors – including in multinationals such as General Motors, Drummond and BP. **ASDTEMP** represents workers in local government in north-east Colombia. Its President Martha Diaz was UNISON's guest at this year's conference and JFC has invited her to attend TUC Conference and to speak at the ICTU's Global Solidarity school in August. She has survived being kidnapped and shot. The union has exposed collusion of local authorities with paramilitary groups. **SINALTRAINAL** represents workers in the food and drink industry, many working in multinationals such as Nestle and others.

- **Soacha** is a poor suburb in southern Bogotá. The 'false positives' or extrajudicial executions scandal broke in Colombia in 2008 after it was discovered that the Army had been detaining young men from the neighbourhood, murdering them and then claiming that they were guerrillas killed in combat – in order to qualify for the financial bonuses offered for high 'body count'. The thematic briefing gives an overview of the scandal. We will be meeting with the mothers of the young men that were murdered and hearing from them about their struggle to secure justice. Many of them have been threatened as a result of their campaign to have the soldiers responsible brought to justice.
- **Frente Amplio por la Paz** (Broad Front for Peace) was formed on June 5 this year

following the first round victory of right-wing anti-peace presidential candidate, Oscar Zuluaga, who threatened to call off peace talks if he won. The initial aim of the Frente Amplio was to defend the peace talks by calling on their supporters to vote for Juan Manuel Santos in the second round run-off election on June 15, despite most of them being strong critics of Santos' program and suffering persecution for being in opposition. They did this to ensure that the peace process did not collapse. Partly thanks to its votes Santos did win the second round. The Frente Amplio is now working towards a longer term vision of an alternative to the dominant neoliberalism of Colombian politics. The Frente Amplio is made up of a number of political parties, social movements and organisations as well as trade unions. Among them are Colombians for Peace, the Progressive Movement, the Patriotic March, the Patriotic Union, the Communist Party, the ONIC indigenous peoples' organisation, some sectors of the Alianza Verde party, the FECODE teachers' union, the USO oilworkers' union and a variety of socialist and civil society groups from across the country. It is a very broad and heterogeneous spectrum and it is in its early days, but it may become an important political force in future.

- **Senator Ivan Cepeda Castro** is of the opposition Democratic Pole Party (PDA). He served in the House of Representatives until being elected to the Senate in the March congressional elections. He is also one of Colombia's highest profile human rights defenders. Senator Cepeda is also the Director of the human rights organisation 'Fundacion Manuel Cepeda Vargas', named in memory of his father, a Senator for the Patriotic Union Party (UP) murdered in 1994. His father was one of the 5000 activists, local councillors and members of congress, including two presidential candidates of the

UP who were murdered by the Colombian military and paramilitaries after being founded in the mid-1980s. A recent ruling by the Inter American Court of Human Rights recognised the role of the Colombian State in his murder. He is one of the most high profile and threatened members of Colombia's opposition and has been forced into temporary exile on two occasions due to death threats.

- **Piedad Cordoba** is one of Colombia's highest profile politicians and is famous throughout the Americas. She is the leader of Colombians for Peace, and also one of the national spokespersons of the Patriotic March. She has been the official mediator in negotiating the freedom of all the remaining military and police hostages held by the FARC. This has played an integral role in laying the ground work to the current preliminary peace talks. She receives constant death threats and has survived two assassination attempts. A particularly worrying plot involved a micro-chip was to be planted which would home a missile directly towards her. In 1999 she was held hostage by right wing paramilitaries for several weeks. In 2009 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was a Senator until the Inspector General impeached her for 18 years accusing her of 'terrorism' in an administrative case, ironically as a result of her work to secure hostage releases by the FARC.
- **Dr. Carlos Lozano**, the editor of the opposition newspaper VOZ and one of the four National Spokespersons of the Patriotic March movement. He is a noted expert on the conflict in Colombia and has played a key role in the peace process. During the last Colombian peace process (1999-2002), he chaired the 'Commission of Distinguished Citizens' – a body established to oversee the process on behalf of civil society. He was awarded the 'Legion of Honour' by

former President Sarkozy of France in recognition of his work for hostage releases and peace. He is one of the most threatened opposition figures in Colombia and must travel everywhere accompanied by bodyguards. He has travelled to Britain and Ireland several times.

- **Congressman Alirio Uribe** was elected this March. He is formerly the leader of the CCAJAR human rights lawyers' collective. He has represented victims of state crimes in some of the most high-profile cases and has been one of the most threatened human rights figures as a result. He was famously the target of some of the most vehement persecution by the DAS former intelligence services.
- **Mauricio Ramos** is a member of the Executive Committee of responsible for international relations for the Patriotic March. He is also a leader of the ACVC peasant organisation in north east Colombia, one of the most well known peasant organisations in the country which have defended the rights of peasant farmers to land and campaigned for peace with social justice.
- **Aida Avella**, was the Vice Presidential Candidate for the Patriotic Union and running mate to the Democratic Pole's Clara Lopez in this May's Presidential Elections. From 1991 to 1996 she was president of the Patriotic Union Party until she was forced to flee the country after an attempt to assassinate her amid the killing of thousands of party members by state forces and paramilitaries, including two presidential candidates. In 2002, the party had its legal status revoked after the violent campaign had reduced the party's electoral success in the 1998 election to below the electoral threshold. Aida returned to Colombia in 2013 after 17 years in exile, after a judge ruled that the party's elimination

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from politics had been illegal and the UP was allowed to take part in the 2014 elections. According to the judge, the cause of the UP's loss of electoral support was due primarily to the killings and the intimidation of supporters

Tuesday 22nd July

04.00 Coffee in patio and leave hotel for airport

06.32 Flight to Puerto Asis, Putumayo Department (attached more detailed briefing). The region is in southern Colombia, near the Ecuadorean border, a heavily militarised region at the heart of the conflict. Here a hearing is being organised by the Patriotic March and the CPDH (human rights NGO) for peasant activists to come and give testimony regarding human rights abuses in the area including the recent army massacre of four trade union activists on May 17th. Meetings with the civilian and military local authorities have been requested. During the flight you will be able to see the extensive mountain ranges and jungles that cover the region south of Bogota.

16.20 Flight leaves for Bogota

17.56 Arrive in Bogotá and go to hotel

20.00 Beers and takeaway on top floor of hotel

Leading activists who have helped to coordinate the day and will be in Puerto Asis to receive us:

- **Jeison Pava** is a human rights lawyer working with the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CPDH). CPDH is a close JFC partner and one of Colombia's oldest human rights lawyers' collectives providing legal support to trade unionists, political prisoners, and victims of state crimes.

As a result of his work Jeison has been on the receiving end of numerous death threats.

- **David Florez** Former General Secretary of the Colombian Federation of University Students (FEU), a law graduate and national spokesperson for the Patriotic March, Colombia's largest civil-society organisation promoting peace and increased social equality in Colombia. David has been to Britain and Ireland several times, Earlier this year, he addressed meetings of MPs at Westminster and MLAs at Stormont, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Irish Dail and the Human Rights Committee of the European Parliament. Last year he was invited to address the International Seminar at Labour Part Conference



PUTUMAYO

Putumayo is a department of Colombia located along the border with Peru and Ecuador. It is a tropical region that is mostly flat, although it is mountainous to the west. The department has a population of 250,000. The region has a large indigenous population and an active civil society movement. The region has

little infrastructure, and a poor road network, with virtually no links to the centre of the country.

Putumayo's economy is mainly based on oil extraction and some gold mining, as well as agricultural production. According to the Colombian government it is also a centre for the cultivation of coca. The oil industry has created serious environmental problems, and there are often mobilisations in opposition to the construction of oil pipelines and roads. Fumigations of coca plantations have also caused serious environmental damage, and have resulted in displacements of rural people.

The workers of the main industries are largely unorganised, yet the peasant movement is very well organised. The unions that do have a presence are USO, the oil workers' union, and FENSUAGRO, the agricultural workers' federation. During 2011, Putumayo was the scene of large industrial mobilisations in Puerto Asis, as oil workers went on strike over pay and conditions. In March 2014 peasant organisations organised strikes and blockades as part of a national mobilisation to protest at the lack of government response to peasant demands made during the massive national protests of June-August 2013. In May 2013 seven peasant leaders were arrested. They are the latest victims of a sustained campaign to persecute peasant leaders. Since 2011-12 at least 37 local leaders have been charged with rebellion, terrorism and narco trafficking, with 3 convictions for rebellion. The region is also an important theatre of the war. It is heavily militarised and is often the scene of fighting between FARC guerrillas and the military. In June 2014 local human rights organisations reported multiple violations of international humanitarian law, including the bombardment and machine-gunning of civilian homes, illegal searches of homes. There are also paramilitary

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groups present in the region who have carried out massacres and who routinely threaten local inhabitants, such as the head of Puerto Asis council who reported death threats in October 2013.

The department has tens of thousands of displaced persons living in precarious conditions around the main towns. Recently, graves of unidentified bodies have also been discovered. In February 2011 a Human Rights Hearing was held in the region to highlight military abuses of human rights in the region. That same day there was a massacre; victims included a 5 year old girl who had her hands chopped off. In May 2014, 4 Fensuagro members were killed in another massacre by the army.

Wednesday 23rd July

07.30 Leave Hotel for prison

09.00 **La Picota prison** to visit political prisoners **Huber Ballesteros** and **David Rabelo**.

At the time of writing this, the prison authorities had only given permission for the entry of 4-5 people. We are trying to overturn the decision but if it isn't possible, the rest of the delegation will visit the National University with the Students Union.

13.00 Lunch with **Hollman Morris**, Director of Canal Capital, Bogota's public TV station.

16.30 Meeting with the **British Ambassador** - there is no Irish Embassy in Bogota. If the Irish delegates wish to do something else, it can be arranged.

19.00 Delegation dinner in restaurant 'El Patio', an Italian restaurant which was frequented by murdered political satirist **Jaime Garzon** and has his favourite dish named in his honour.

- **Huber Ballesteros** is one of Colombia's most well known trade union and opposition leaders. On 25th August 2013, one week before he was due to travel to Britain to address the TUC Conference, he was arrested and accused of 'rebellion' and 'financing terrorism'. A member of the CUT executive, he is also the Vice President of Fensuagro, the Colombian Agricultural Workers' Union. Huber is also the National Organiser of the 'Patriotic March' and at the time of his arrest he was one of the spokespersons of the mass strikes taking place across Colombia which included agricultural, health, transport and energy sectors. His case has been mirrored by

a lack of due process and no trial has yet begun. In November 2013, JFC handed in a petition signed by over 13,000 signatures for his release. He was nominated for the Norwegian 'Arthur Svensson' trade union prize, and Labour MEPs are currently working to nominate him for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize.

- **David Rabelo Crespo**, human rights activist and journalist was detained by the Colombian authorities and imprisoned in September 2010, accused of conspiracy to commit a crime and aggravated homicide. He was convicted in December 2012 and sentenced to 18 years in prison. David is a member of the executive board of a well known human rights organization, the Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) in the Magdalena Medio region and one of the foremost human rights leaders in the country. He is also an opposition activist and a columnist for the Rural Press Agency (Agencia Prensa Rural). The evidence against David is based on testimony from the paramilitary Mario Jaimes Mejía, alias "El Panadero", convicted of two massacres. Testifying against David allowed him to reduce his prison sentence from more than 40 years to a maximum of 8 years. The prosecutor in David's case, William Pacheco was a former police official, responsible for the forced disappearance of a young man. Members of human rights group CREDHOS, continue to be targeted as a result of their work. On 13th January 2012 in Barrancabermeja Mr. Abelardo Sánchez Serrano, an executive member of Credhos, was threatened by armed men on a motorbike who warned him "We should stop denigrating state forces, we already have one son of a bitch guerrilla from Credhos in prison and if it's necessary, we will do it to the others to silence them." The Inter-American Commission awarded Credhos

with "cautionary measures", obligating the Colombian state to provide them with protection; however this is yet to be fulfilled.

- **Hollman Morris**, Director of Canal Capital – Bogota's public TV station is a renowned journalist who has covered many different human rights issues. The channel is known for its progressive coverage. Hollman is one of the most threatened journalists in Colombia and has been forced into temporary exile in the past. He has won awards for his 'Contravia' programme which has exposed many cases of human rights abuses. He has been to Britain as a guest of the NUJ and JFC.
- The British Ambassador is **Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby** and has been there since January 2013. Before that, he was Principal Private Secretary to former Foreign Secretary William Hague. He has also worked in the embassy in Caracas, Venezuela.

Thursday 24th July

- 04.00 Coffee and rolls in the hotel patio
- 04.30 Leave hotel
- 07.00 Flight to **Buenaventura**, the city on Colombia's south west coast to meet with community activists and local port-workers' and fishermen unions. The town is the central port which will be receiving trade through the free trade agreements and has seen dispute for territorial control amongst right wing paramilitary groups. There have been huge atrocities committed in the last year including the discovery of the 'Casas de Pique' - houses where victims were dismembered. (see attached more detailed briefing) The visit is being coordinated with a church based human rights organisation called The Interchurch Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJYP). We will go into the emergency zone which has been set up for the local communities to hear testimony.
- 8:30 Tour to review the impact of the implementation of large scale transnational projects (megaprojects):
- Agua Dulce Port (Freshwater Port).
 - Warehouse for storage of coal from the open cast mine, TRENACO.
 - Logistics and Container Terminal.
 - Port administration body.
 - Waterfront "slum" (Bajamar), tourist pier, and hotel chain.
- 10:30 Enter the Humanitarian Zone.
- 11:30 Presentations from several communities, local unions and organisations about the human rights crisis in the area

including indigenous, women's groups, displaced community activists. Meeting with CONPAZ, broad community peace coalition.

- 13:30 Lunch in the Humanitarian Zone.
- 14.00 Meeting with the Bishop of Buenaventura.
- 21.00 Flight leaves Cali.
- 22.05 Arrive at Bogota and go to hotel for food.

- **The Interchurch Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJYP)** is a longstanding human rights organisation with more than 25 years experience accompanying community organisations and particularly working with afrocolombian and indigenous groups. CIJYP provides humanitarian, legal, and psychological accompaniment to communities working to assert their rights through nonviolent means.
- **CONPAZ: Communities Constructing Peace in their Territories** is an initiative started by communities in areas where the armed conflict and national and international economic interests coincide. It is a support network between communities aimed at promoting the nonviolent protection of the community and the implementation of International Humanitarian Law.
- **Humanitarian Zone:** In April 2014 local residents with the support of human rights organizations declared a Humanitarian Zone in response to the extortion and murders carried out by drug traffickers and paramilitary organizations in the area. The Bishop of Buenaventura and the Catholic Church was also involved in creating the zone. The threats and murders have continued in spite of the zones creation.



Buenaventura

Buenaventura is a city port that lies on the South Western coast of Colombia, not far from the city of Cali which lies further inland. It is one of Colombia's most important ports handling 60% of the country's imports and exports. Since 1994 the port has been run by large transnational

companies which are now looking to expand the port. After privatisation the companies dismantled the port unions, and today only a third of the port workers are unionised.¹ The port is likely to become even more important thanks to the expansion of imports that will come from Colombia's free trade agreements. The city is also an important shipment point for drugs. Little of this economic activity benefits the residents.

The city's social situation is horrifying. According to the UNDP "Buenaventura is one of the saddest examples of poverty and social under-development in Colombia. Its health, education, employment and income indicators are disheartening". More than 80% of the population live in poverty, unemployment officially hovers at around 30% but is probably higher, and electricity and water supplies are unreliable. 90% of the population is of African descent. 65% of the population has no access to sewerage.

According to Human Rights Watch entire neighbourhoods of the city are now under the control of the 'Urabenos' and 'la Empresa' paramilitary groups, and it suffers from widespread human rights abuses, including forced displacements, disappearances and assassinations. In recent years over 50,000 people have been displaced. The rival gangs control extortion rings and drug trafficking in the area. Since 2013 around 150 cases of disappearances have come to light, and the city has become notorious for the cases of dismemberments and torture that see body parts regularly washed up onshore.

¹ <https://nacla.org/article/buenaventura-colombia-where-free-trade-meets-mass-graves>

74 The paramilitaries have imposed a law of silence on the city, as well as dividing it to such an extent that people cannot freely move around.

In March 2014, after strong international pressure and a damning report from Human Rights Watch, President Santos ordered nearly 800 troops into the city to retake control from the paramilitaries. However, it appears that the paramilitaries have merely laid low, awaiting the withdrawal of the troops. Others allege that the troops and city authorities are at worse cooperating with the paramilitaries, or at best turning a blind eye to their activities.

Friday 25th

We have requested other meetings with the government which we are still waiting for them to confirm, including President Santos and the High Commissioner for Peace, Sergio Jaramillo, who is one of the negotiators in the peace talks with the FARC.

09.00 Meeting with representatives of several government ministries, including the **Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Defence, Office of the Peace High Commissioner and the Presidential Program for Human Rights.**

14.00 Meeting with the office of the **Attorney General.**

We have left the afternoon free as we are waiting for other government meetings to be confirmed. Once we have the times we will arrange a **press conference** for the delegation.

18.30 Dinner in hotel

20.00 Leave hotel for airport

23.24 Avianca flight back to Heathrow



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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 2014



13th May 2014, Washington, London, Dublin and Belfast

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NEGOTIATING COMMITTEES, HAVANA

Humberto de la Calle and other members of the Negotiating Committee of the Government of Colombia

Iván Márquez and other members of the Negotiating Committee of the FARC-EP

Dear Members of the Negotiating Table,

We, the undersigned elected representatives, write to express our support for the Colombian peace process currently taking place in Havana, Cuba.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for having entered into negotiations and initiating a process that we hope reaches a successful conclusion of peace with social justice leading to the end of Colombia's almost 50 year armed conflict. We congratulate both sides on the historic agreements made so far and recognise the commitment of both sides to staying at the negotiating table and encourage you to stay there until a final agreement has been made.

It is our firm belief that the only route to bring an effective and long-lasting peace to Colombia is through dialogue and compromise and we urge both parties to continue in this momentous endeavour regardless of the future difficulties that may arise.

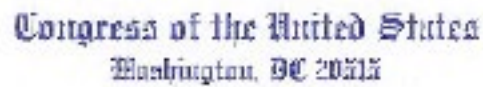
We encourage you to consider the possibility of a ceasefire and to take the necessary measures to minimise the humanitarian cost of the conflict and guarantee the safety of civil society. We applaud the efforts made to include the views of civil society and we hope that this participation will be deepened and extended as the process continues. As politicians, some of whom have been involved in other peace processes, we are firmly committed to supporting the peace talks.

We will continue to increase awareness of the talks, and offer our experiences, to emphasise the extremely positive achievements that have been made so far by both sides, to ensure the international community puts its full weight behind the peace process.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Congress of the United States:

Earl Blumenauer Member of Congress (D), Suzanne Bonamici Member of Congress (D), Julia Brownley Member of Congress (D), Michael E. Capuano Member of Congress (D), Tony Cárdenas Member of Congress (D), Matt Cartwright Member of Congress (D), Judy Chu Member of Congress (D), Katherine Clark Member of Congress (D), Emanuel Cleaver II Member of Congress (D), Steve Cohen Member of Congress (D), John Conyers, Jr. Member of Congress (D), Danny K. Davis Member of Congress (D), Rosa L. DeLauro Member of Congress (D), Lloyd Doggett Member of Congress (D),



Donna F. Edwards Member of Congress (D), Keith Ellison Member of Congress (D), Elizabeth H. Esty Member of Congress (D), Sam Farr Member of Congress (D), John Garamendi Member of Congress (D), Raúl M. Grijalva Member of Congress (D), Luis V. Gutierrez Member of Congress (D), Michael M. Honda Member of Congress (D), Sheila Jackson Lee Member of Congress (D), Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr. Member of Congress (D), Marcy Kaptur Member of Congress (D), Barbara Lee Member of Congress (D), John Lewis Member of Congress (D), Stephen F. Lynch Member of Congress (D), Jim McDermott Member of Congress (D), James P. McGovern Member of Congress (D), Gregory W. Meeks Member of Congress (D), Michael H. Michaud Member of Congress (D), George Miller Member of Congress (D), Gwen Moore Member of Congress (D), James P. Moran Member of Congress (D), Richard E. Neal Member of Congress (D), Eleanor Holmes Norton Member of Congress (D), Beto O’Rourke Member of Congress (D), Chellie Pingree Member of Congress (D), Mark Pocan Member of Congress (D), David E. Price Member of Congress (D), Charles B. Rangel Member of Congress (D), Bobby L. Rush Member of Congress (D), Janice D. Schakowsky Member of Congress (D), José E. Serrano Member of Congress (D), Louise McIntosh Slaughter Member of Congress (D), John F. Tierney Member of Congress (D), Maxine Waters Member of Congress (D), Peter Welch Member of Congress (D), John A. Yarmuth Member of Congress (D)

Members of the Parliament of the United Kingdom:

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