



Witness for Peace
Solidarity Collective

COLOMBIA PROGRAM FINAL REPORT 2024



[NOVEMBER 2024]



Who Are We

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

WFPSC believes that social transformation is built from the ground up and seeks to build transnational solidarity to resist corporate and U.S. government policies that contribute to violence, poverty and oppression in the Americas. Among its methods are political education, building bridges of solidarity, advocacy for the change of harmful U.S. policies and physical and protective accompaniment of human rights defenders.

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

Due to long-term difficulties to ensure organizational sustainability, WFPSC is closing the Colombia and Honduras Programs by the end of 2024 and will further review the possible continuation of the Cuba program in 2025.



41 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, 25 of those years in Colombia. Many people coming and going, countless anecdotes, memories, shared pain, and plenty of laughter.

Today, we have the responsibility to speak for the hundreds of people who have come together thanks to the work of this organization, of which we've been a part for some years. It's a tremendous responsibility because we are not only closing an organization but also a process—a process in which, beyond our differences, we have tried to build international solidarity from the north to the south of our Americas.

Sadly, the world hasn't changed for the better in these years; we know that. We are aware that we are leaving at a time when our humanity is witnessing a genocide broadcast live and direct, where violence against the majority to which we belong is stripping us of rights that were hard-won through the struggles of our ancestors.

We know it's hard to leave at this very moment, but we also know it's the most responsible decision. For some years now, we have been trying to sustain an organization that was born over 40 years ago in a very different context. We also understand that for new proposals and ideas to emerge that can respond to today's context, it's necessary to let go of others. This is our case: we need to let this organization go in a dignified and respectful way, honoring the relationships and memories we've built.

It pains us to close, but we also want to honor and give thanks for these years of work and remembrance to those who have placed their trust in us, who have allowed us to accompany them in their struggles and resistance, in their indignation at injustice, in exhaustion, but also in building new approaches to life - for their communities, for women, for the youth, for those who are majority and who won't surrender until dignity becomes a habit.

We also want to remember and thank those who trusted us to learn about resistance processes in our Americas, those who spent hours and hours on a bus, or in a chiva, or on a boat with us, traveling across different territories of Colombia.

Finally, we want to celebrate the encounters, the north-to-south, south-to-north connections that have been life-changing for many, encounters that have opened new paths, new connections, and new beginnings.

Today, we hope this closure—painful as it may be, and one we must process and grieve—also allows us to think about new ways of building international solidarity across our lands.

May we meet again, and may we continue building international solidarity from new places and processes.

What we've built through this collective will not be lost; it will simply take on new forms, and what we have learned will remain in our collective memory.

- Jessica and Lukasz



It is our final annual report, after 25 years of presence in Colombia, and we would like to dedicate to the grassroots organizations and Indigenous, Black and Campesinx communities that we have been invited to get to know and accompany in their nonviolent resistance, defense of land and rights and construction of peace. We hope that some of the south-south and south-north connections that were brought to life over the past years survive the closure of our program, which takes place this November. We hope they can continue to flourish and bring further fruits in the future.

Our Colombian partners are hoping that the transnational relations that were built continue. They hope to find people willing to support their advocacy efforts in the USA, and find others who can accompany their work for justice and peace in Colombia. To them we dedicate this report.



To those who would like to stay in touch with the organizations and communities that we have accompanied, please do let us know. Send us an email: colombia@solidaritycollective.org. You can also fill out [this online form](#).

Or just connect directly with our partners.

2024

PROGRAM WORK & PARTNERS



Comunidades Contruyendo Paz en Colombia

CONPAZCOL

Communities Building Peace in Colombia (CONPAZCOL) is a network of families and communities - victims of the armed and social conflict that under the proposal of restoration and reconciliation become subjects of rights.

Members of CONPAZCOL are Afro-descendant, Indigenous and Campesinx communities and processes, as well as women, men and LGTBIQ+ population, that live in rural and urban territories across 12 departments of Colombia where the intensity of the conflict and business interests have developed with intensity. The network leaders build on and share experiences of protection through non-violent actions and the application of humanitarian law.

In December 2023, one of the network's leaders and one of renowned leaders of the Nasa people in Putumayo, Phanor Guazaquillo Peña, was assassinated.

#PhanorEsSemilla

+ diciembre 03 de 2023





During 2024, multiple members of CONPAZCOL received threats and in May 2024, María Eugenia Mosquera (Maru), the organization’s legal representative, a renowned human rights defender and recipient of the 2022 International Women Building Peace Award by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), was targeted by an assassination attempt in Buenaventura.

The WFPSC Colombia team provided multiple accompaniments for the members of CONPAZCOL during 2024 and sent out an international petition calling for the development and implementation of collective protection measures for members of CONPAZCOL and shared the signed petition with the U.S. Embassy in Colombia. As result of the increased risk, the team accompanied Maru during her return to Buenaventura and her travel to several events, including meetings of women in Buenaventura and Cali.

The team also nominated CONPAZCOL for the 2024 Colombian Human Rights Defenders Prize which was taking place in Bogota in September. Maru was among three finalists for the prize for human rights defenders of the year. Our team accompanied her with much joy at the ceremony.



- Follow-up meetings on the case of Phanor Guazaquillo Peña, the Nasa indigenous leader and member of CONPAZCOL's board of directors, murdered in December 2023, in Puerto Asís, Putumayo.
- Second annual meeting of the National Ethnic Coordination for Peace (CENPAZ), of which CONPAZCOL is a member, in Puerto Asís, Putumayo.
- 1st Meeting of Popular Women and Caregivers of the Body-Territory-Habitat, which was held within the framework of the COP16 on Biodiversity, in Cali.





- **Gathering (minga) of various peace building processes across Colombia to help with repairs and extension of the Mother's House (Casa madre) in La Blanquita-Murri**

La Blanquita is a remote valley located in Northwestern Antioquia where four distinct communities facing the territorial control and activities of the currently most powerful illegal armed group AGC (Gaitanista Self-defense Forces of Colombia) began to meet together with the proposal to build peace through dialogue. The inter-ethnic dialogue between the Indigenous Embera people, leaders of the Black community, the Campesinx population and a group of former FARC guerilla members who signed the Peace Accord in 2016, gave life to the construction of a Peace refuge with the name of Mother's House (Casa madre).

- **Accompaniment to conference "Colombia Regions of Peace" in Santa Marta and to a human rights workshop** with two campesinx organizations (Asociación campesina de desplazados del Tamarindo - ASOTRACAMPO and Asociación campesina de la vereda Las Nubes -ASOCAVNU) that are living in a situation of forced displacement in Barranquilla and are members of the CONPAZCOL network.



- **Multiple accompaniments in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca.**

The team accompanied members of CONPAZCOL to various places and events in Buenaventura, including the Humanitarian space of Puente Nayero and two communities living in the situation of displacement.

- **Humanitarian Peace Shelter Wounaan Phobor** is a resettled indigenous community in the rural area of Buenaventura that has been facing increasing incursion of armed men and declared a situation of confinement for their protection. The community is currently in the process of seeking and advocating for adequate resettlement in an area where peace and basic services will be guaranteed.

Wounaan Valledupar is a community of approximately 20 families that lost their homes in 2021 in the San Juan river basin due to clashes and incursions of armed groups. They have been living in very difficult conditions in the city of Buenaventura demanding basic services and a process of resettlement from governmental institutions.





- **Gathering of families that keep on searching for their relatives who were forcibly disappeared in Palestina, Huila.** More than 34 people were victims of forced disappearance in the municipality of Palestina. Family Chimonja-Coy, that is closely connected to CONPAZCOL, and whose three relatives were forcibly disappeared, are leading a process of protecting 14 hectares of a biodiverse forest, and the construction of a **Museum of Memory and Reconciliation**. The project is supported by a group of signatories of peace, former members of the FARC-EP, which carried responsibility for the forced disappearance of various persons in the region.

ACCOMPANIMENTS / CONPAZCOL



Delegation with students and staff of The School of Divinity of Duke University in northern Cauca and the Pacific region of Colombia.

11 delegates (8 students and 3 staff members) from a university program focused on the intersection of theology and social activism came to Colombia in March to learn about nonviolent resistance and construction of peace in connection with land.

They visited and met with...



**Delegation
visits**

Foundation **GUAGUA**

The Gallery of Memory or the “Galería de la Memoria Tiberio A. Fernández”, in Cali works to preserve the historical memory of state crimes through the accompaniment of victims’ families, community workshops, popular education and a physical gallery space with exhibitions devoted to major themes of the Colombian conflict as well as to honor the state crime victims.

Therapy, support groups, capoeira classes, documentary, crafts and art are all tools they use to create safe spaces to diffuse their message and help heal trauma in survivors. The Fundación Guagua and its Gallery of Memory receive threats from various armed actors, legal and illegal, due to their perseverance in demanding truth, justice, integral reparations and guarantees of non-repetition for victims and amplifying the message of “Never again!”.



Victims' association **RENACER SIGLO XXI**



A Black civil organization dedicated to supporting, advising and accompanying various judicial and administrative processes of the victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of Buenos Aires in Northern Cauca. It is the largest and first victims' organization in this municipality.

The association's work focuses on strengthening organizational and leadership processes with a differential and gender approach, promoting the defense of human rights and protection of ancestral territory of the Black people.

The work of the defenders of Renacer Siglo XXI has been threatened by the presence of armed actors, massive and systematic violations of human rights, as well as by the economic and strategic interests of extractivist projects of multinational and transnational companies.

Community Council

LA ESPERANZA



A Black community of more than 16 families that have been nonviolently resisting the land theft by armed groups and rich landowners, and protecting a biodiverse forest from destruction in the rural area of Buenaventura.

Currently, members of the Community Council continue to receive threats and experience the increasing environmental damage and new constructions on the Council's collective territory.



Wounaan Community

SANTA ROSA DE GUAYACAN



The delegation visited the Indigenous Wounaan community of Santa Rosa de Guayacan three months after its members returned to their homes in the Lower Calima river basin after living 25 months in forced displacement due to clashes and incursions of armed groups.

During the visit, the community members shared about the difficulties they were facing due to the lack of the fulfillment of promises by various government agencies and the ongoing presence of the armed groups.

In May the Colombia team shared its concerns about the worsening situation of the community in this publication.

Indigenous Community

HUMANITARIAN PEACE REFUGE WOUNAAN PHOBOR

The Humanitarian Peace Shelter Wounaan Phobor is a displaced Indigenous community of the Wounaan Nonam people currently resettled in the rural area of Buenaventura. The humanitarian shelter is a peace initiative, framed within International Humanitarian Law, aimed at protecting the community by prohibiting the presence of armed actors, both legal and illegal, within the community's territory.



In recent months, incursions of armed men were reported in the community's territory and the community declared confinement as a protective measure.

Currently, they are in the process of relocating to a new space where peace, access to basic services and the ability to maintain their traditional means of subsistence would be guaranteed.

La Elvira Farm **ASPROZONAC**



La Elvira is a collective project led by 25 families who are building food sovereignty on lands acquired during the great agrarian strike of 2016. The farm is part of the **Association for the Constitution of the Campesinx Reserve Zone (ASPROZONAC)** and is located in Miranda, northern Cauca. For years, they have been restoring land previously used solely for sugarcane plantations and later for livestock. The project supports women's productive initiatives through the creation of shampoos and creams made from medicinal plants and promotes popular education via the **Capexinx University of Miranda and northern Cauca**.

The Colombia team has maintained a long-standing relationship with ASPROZONAC, especially with one of its leaders, Briceida Lemos Rivera, and her family. **Briceida, who was a driving force behind the Campesinx University, participated in a tour in the United States with WFPSC last year, where she spoke about the community's resistance and land recovery efforts. Sadly, Briceida passed away this past May after a rapid battle with cancer.** The Colombia team accompanied Briceida in her final months, attended her funeral, and has since stayed in contact and visited her family.

Briceida's legacy of resistance will continue to inspire us.

ADVOCACY SPEAKER'S TOUR IN THE U.S. SOUTHEAST



WITH DEYANIRA PEÑA CARABALÍ





After months of planning and organization, in September, Deyanira Peña Carabalí, a Black maroon woman, social leader and member of Renacer Siglo XXI from northern Cauca was able to visit several locations in the southeastern United States, including cities and rural areas in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

There, Deyanira shared insights on the healing and territorial defense efforts undertaken by Black communities in northern Cauca. She also learned about the history of Black communities in the southeastern United States, their historical resistance processes, and the intersection of various struggles across the Americas.

The tour was organized in collaboration between the Colombia team and the Southeast Regional Group of Witness for Peace. Deyanira was accompanied during the tour by Tirzah Villegas (National Director of WFPSC), Georie Bryant (WFPSC Board Member), and Jessica García (Co-Director of the Colombia Program).

For more information about the tour, [read our report](#).





EXPLORATORY HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATION TO LA GUAJIRA WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY EL CERREJON COAL MINE AND OTHER MINING PROJECTS



In June, the team joined an exploratory delegation to La Guajira alongside two U.S. professors, Avi Chomsky and Emma Banks, who have had a long history of organizing delegations with Witness for Peace and wanted to reconnect with their former partners.

The collaborative work carried out between 2006 and 2019 focused on supporting the struggle and building transnational solidarity with numerous Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities whose lives had been disrupted and profoundly affected by the El Cerrejón coal mine.

The team met with leaders and members of the **communities of Tabaco, Tamaquito, Provincial, Roche, Sabana en Medio, Nuevo Espinal and Manantialito**, who have spent years living in displacement or under the threat of losing their homes, land, health, and livelihoods due to the expansion of operations by one of the largest open-pit coal mines in Latin America, owned currently by the Swiss company Glencore.



A large portion of the coal mined in La Guajira was being sold to Israel, which energy production depend on coal imports from Colombia, until President Gustavo Petro banned all coal exports from Colombia to Israel this year as a sanction for the ongoing genocide in Gaza.



The team visited the **Community Council of Cañaverales**, which has been **fighting to protect their territory and water sources from a new mining operation by Best Coal Company**, a subsidiary of a Turkish company that benefits from Turkish state's war against the Kurdish people. Emma Banks published an in-depth story about the **Canaverales' nonviolent resistance**.

The team met also with the leaders of the **Cerrejon Workers' Union (SINTRACARBON)** to learn about the difficulties and concerns with the 10-year-plan to close El Cerrejon mine.

The delegation learned about **the struggle of the artisanal fishing community Luask in Northern Guajira that is facing a projected construction of a wind farm that would destroy their livelihoods**. In the meeting with a leader of the organization of indigenous human rights defenders **Wayuu Womens' Force**, the team learned about the expansion of multiple energy and mining projects that **keep on exploiting La Guajira resources to make great profits while keeping the indigenous Wayuu population impoverished and oppressed**.

After the visit the team shared its learnings and concerns in an article titled: **Extractivism for death, resistance for life**.





Collaboration in Nonviolent Resistance to Militarization

The Colombia team has collaborated in various activities and conferences focused on the nonviolent resistance of individuals and communities to militarization and war, including the ongoing "No More Expodefensa" campaign. The team participated in anti-war conferences and gatherings organized by World Beyond War and the Colombian Conscientious Objectors Association (ACOOO) and other antimilitarist organizations. Additionally, the team published an **analysis of the military cooperation between Colombia and the United States**, including the militarization of Gorgona Island, a project opposed by the affected communities.

Documentary I Scream for All

In April, the documentary about **Olga Castillo** was screened for the first time. Olga, who passed away last year, sought justice and non-repetition of sexual violence against women perpetrated by U.S. soldiers and military contractors. The documentary was produced by the Olga Castillo Collective, a group that continues to carry forward Olga's fight and message. Jessica García, co-director of the Colombia program, was interviewed for the documentary. **You can watch the documentary here.**

Accompaniment and promotion of the Humanitarian Caravan organized by Network of Solidarity with Colombia (REDHER).

John Walsh, a long-term member of WFPSC from Portland, Oregon, USA, joined a portion of the **Humanitarian Caravan** which was meeting with communities and human rights defenders across regions of Colombia that are the most impacted by violence (Magdalena Medio, Antioquia, Arauca, Choco, Cauca), to learn from and support the human rights defenders and the communities' nonviolent resistance. The Colombia team promoted the caravan and its findings. The final report will be published on December 10.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT WE PARTNERED WITH IN RECENT YEARS



In this section, we would like to mention some of the organizations we have accompanied or collaborated with at some point in the practice of international solidarity.

We cannot name them all, as we have been present in Colombia for 25 years and, unfortunately, have lost a significant part of our historical records. However, we wish to highlight the initiatives we have connected with in recent years and with whom we still maintain contact.

Community Council of the Lower Calima River Basin

In early 2022, the forced displacement of several communities that are part of this Community Council began. As of May 2022, almost all of the communities were displaced to the city of Buenaventura due to the armed confrontations between the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in the Council's territory. Today, after two years of forced displacement, most of the displaced families are back in their territory.

However, the humanitarian conditions remain complex and the State has not provided adequate responses to ensure that the return is safe and with conditions for the communities to be able to remain in the territory.



Association of Injured and Former Workers of General Motors Colmotores (ASOTRECOL)

On August 2, 2011, the Association of Injured and Former Workers of General Motors Colmotores (ASOTRECOL) set up camp in front of the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá to continue the struggle for labor rights and to denounce labor rights violations committed by a subsidiary of the U.S. company General Motors, against fired sick workers. Thirteen years later the encampment continues, as the claim for their labor rights has still not been recognized nor the inflicted damages repaired.



Indigenous Authorities in Bakatá (AIB)

Urban organizational process formed by indigenous communities living in the situation of forced displacement in the city of Bogotá. **On September 29, 2021,** more than 1,000 people from various indigenous peoples in Bogota arrived at the National Park in protest against the lack of response from the local and national government to the humanitarian situation which the indigenous people were experiencing in different parts of the city. They spent almost a year in the park demanding answers from the State. Today many of them are still displaced and living in overcrowded conditions because the State has not provided adequate answers according to the demands of the communities.



Lxs Sin Techo (Those without a roof)

An organizational process born in Popayán, Cauca, to demand the right to land and decent housing. **The group has organized at least three camps** (La Estrella, Tejido Popular and the eco-village Sinai) where they have begun to build housing for displaced persons, victims of systematic violence and impoverished people. The cost of their struggle has been persecution and repression by the repressive forces of the State. Some of the leaders, such as **Andrés Maíz**, were forced into displacement due to threats.



Daira Quiñones - Asociación Mutual para el Desarrollo Integral y el Emprendimiento (AMDAE)

In 1999, after helping her community La Nupa, Nariño, to gain legal access to 176 hectares of land, land that continues to be of interest to the palm oil industry, Daira began receiving death threats. In 2001, following the assassination of the president of the Community Council, Daira was forced to leave her land to save her life.

Through AMDAE, Daira works with other displaced communities to recover their culture, memory, identity and rekindle hope. In 2021, she organized the first Plantain Festival, a pedagogical strategy that, through plantain, strengthens the historical memory, resistance and resilience of the African diaspora in Colombia and the world.



The Mennonite Christian Association for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action - Justapaz

Justapaz was created in 1990 as an expression of the Mennonite Christian Church in Colombia to respond to the violence and injustice that plagued communities. Since 2011 it has been an autonomous organization which has managed to position the voice of the churches in spaces of advocacy and fundamental decision-making to improve the living conditions of communities that have lived in the midst of the armed and social conflict in Colombia.



Process of Black Communities (PCN)

Organization Proceso de Comunidades Negras unites more than 140 Afro-descendant entities across Colombia that have been working on transforming the country's political and social reality since 1993.

PCN focuses on the defense of ancestral rights of black communities in Colombia.



THE PERSISTENCE OF STRUGGLE BEYOND DEATH: BRICEIDA'S LEGACY

In 2024, we have lost a dear friend who we admired for her commitment to nonviolent resistance and work for justice. We would like to share her story. Her memory lives on. May the seed she became grow to be many.



“The cocaine doesn’t leave for the United States in a matchbox; we, the campesinos, aren’t the ones sending it.” This is one of the phrases that captures the political clarity and courage with which Briceida spoke wherever there were people willing to listen to the voice of a campesina leader and FENSUAGRO member who never held her words back, as she liked to say.

Over years of visiting Briceida and her family at La Elvira, a farm won through campesino struggle in northern Cauca, we learned about their struggles, resilience, and her deep conviction about the need to strengthen campesinx processes and to connect this community work with Black and Indigenous communities as well as with ex-combatants of the FARC-EP.

Through Briceida, we learned to understand the importance of community organization in the care and healing of the land and the essential role that campesina women play in this process.

With Briceida, we also learned that major changes are driven from below and that achieving them requires immense strength and courage, especially for women like Briceida, who refused to submit or give up. Briceida faced threats and persecution multiple times because of her efforts to establish a campesinx university in northern Cauca. However, she never gave up and continued fighting until the end of her life.

Briceida may be gone, but her legacy will endure; what she planted will continue to grow and bear fruit. Her words and actions remain in our memory, and her spirit of struggle and resistance will keep guiding many of us.

Presente! Presente! Presente!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Colombia team of Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective wishes to express profound gratitude:

- **to all our partners in Colombia** who have been, and will remain, on the frontlines and who have shared their struggles with us and our WFPSC community in the USA over the past 25 years.
- **to all our supporters across the United States** whose solidarity and generosity have sustained our 25-year presence in Colombia. We could not have accomplished this without your willingness to share limited resources and engage in a wide range of actions to change U.S. policies that negatively impact Colombia and other Latin American countries.
- **to everyone who has ever been part of the Colombia team of Witness of Peace in one way or another.**

WE WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE TO THANK:

- **All our friends and partners from organizations and communities that are named in this report** for your friendship and invitation to become, even if for a short period of time, a part of your ancestral resistance and struggles for dignity, rights and peace that are changing the world.
- **Liz Hacker and James Doernberg** for believing in this organization and keeping us alive and strong for so long.
- **Tirzah Villegas and Georie Bryant** for their love for Colombia, friendship, sharing of their home and their commitment that gave life to three amazing speaker's tours.
- **John Walsh** for his unending support, energy and presence when we needed support.
- **All those who made Deyanira's advocacy tour possible** so that people in the Southeast region of the United States could learn about the struggle for peace of the maroon women and communities in Colombia.
- **Delegates from the Duke University's School of Divinity** for coming to Colombia to connect with struggles of our partners, and for your continued solidarity and support.



Contact us:

colombia@solidaritycollective.org

<https://www.solidaritycollective.org/>



Report created by:

Jessica García and Lukasz Firla

Colombia Program Co-directors

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective