

briefing

Colombia

First National Summit of Evangelical Churches for Peace in Colombia

FEBRUARY 13 – 17, 2006



CHRISTIAN
SOLIDARITY
WORLDWIDE
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

PO Box 99, New Malden,
Surrey KT3 3YF

T: 0845 456 5464

E: admin@cswworldwide.org.uk

W: www.cswworldwide.org.uk

REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 281836

Table of contents:

	First National Summit of Evangelical Churches for Peace in Colombia.....	1
1.	Preamble.....	3
2.	CEDECOL	3
3.	History of the conflict.....	3
4.	Objectives of the summit	4
	4.1.1. General objective:.....	4
	4.1.2. Specific objectives:	4
5.	Thematic perspectives of the summit	4
	5.1. The present situation of the conflict and its impact on churches:.....	4
	5.2. The predicament of children facing the armed conflict:	4
	5.3. Internally forced displacement:	5
	5.4. Dialogue, negotiations and demobilisation:	5
	5.5. Truth, Justice and Reparation:.....	5
	5.6. International politics:	6
6.	Our vision for Colombia:	6
7.	Theological analysis.....	6
8.	Action guidelines for local, regional and national churches to be involved in the work for peace.....	8
9.	Investigation.....	8
10.	Our declaration and commitment	9

1. Preamble

While just as over the past few decades new armed actors have emerged in Colombia, the Evangelical Church is also arising as a prophetic voice calling for national peace. We are an institution with a presence in every corner of our country and we are prepared to bring healing, restoration and to redirect the Colombians' hearts with the power of the Holy Spirit, through forgiveness and reconciliation, with the power of the Creator, the principles and values of the Kingdom, and His Word.

2. CEDECOL

We welcome our fellow countrymen and women with hope from our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected, who amidst difficulties and sufferings tells us, "Have no fear. I have defeated the world." The Christ's Church is a vessel of hope, consolation and changes that promote justice, peace and well-being in our country. We invite our Colombian brothers and sisters to seek God while He can be found and call Him when He is close, as change and peace in Colombia begin first with change in our own lives.

The Colombian Council of Evangelical Churches, CEDECOL, has existed for 56 years and is currently the organization that represents the majority of Evangelical Christian churches in Colombia which number about 8000. It groups more than 70% of these churches and institutions, located in nearly every town, village and region of the country and which represent approximately 4million Colombian citizens.

The Evangelical Church has been working and praying for years on the local level to sow seeds of peace and well-being for our country. Through preaching and the spreading of the Gospel, millions of people have expressed genuine repentance and renounced bad paths to accept the good news of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ and his Kingdom of peace and justice. They gather in the thousands of local churches where they seek ways to transform their lives in the community and to serve local society by building schools and colleges, helping drug-addicts to recover, youth ministry, promoting women's dignity, building leaders, working in health and other social sectors. To a lesser extent, some Christian communities have also worked with internally displaced people and worked on conflict-resolution, development, community organization, education for peace and promoted conscientious objection to compulsory military enrolment and others. All these actions have been achieved through a Christian vision of forgiveness, patience, service and love for the neighbour.

However at the same time we must confess that we have been isolating ourselves from the reality in which we live; and have not been involved in the big issues and problems that affect our country. Slowly, the Colombian Church has become aware of the social and political debates going on in the country and of how important it is that we be part of the solution. That is why we have decided to meet at the First National Summit of the Evangelical Churches for Peace in Colombia from the 13th to the 17th of February 2006, on San Andres Island. 110 representatives of different denominations and institutions from all the country and international observers are gathered here.

3. History of the conflict

The most recent phase of the internal conflict that is devastating Colombia began almost 60 years ago. Over these years, hundreds of thousands of people have died and the social cost is incalculable. There have been dialogues, negotiations and demobilisations because of rapprochements between armed groups and the government but none of these attempts has given rise to a lasting and stable peace.

Disaffection from God, and its consequent loss of values, has engendered injustice, social and economical inequalities and all expressions of violence. The authorities are unable to respond to these problems. Therefore, the population has suffered from the political decisions and actions taken by those who are in power; and has welcomed the suggestions made by elected leaders who have failed to fulfil their promises, which have not been solutions. Even though any positive change that occurs now is already too late for thousands of families who have suffered from irreversible losses, there is still the possibility of a better future if adequate leadership is provided, one which would undertake in-depth transformations of economical, political and social structures of the country.

4. Objectives of the summit

4.1.1. General objective:

To create a space to enable the Evangelical Christian Church to reflect theologically and biblically on the Colombian reality with the aim of coming up with a proposal for peace with social, economical and political justice; and to define strategies and compromises which would contribute to the establishment of that peace.

4.1.2. Specific objectives:

- Promote unity of the Church especially in the search for peace in Colombia
- Establish a network of solidarity with the national and international Christian community and other organisations engaged in the pacific resolution of the Colombian conflict
- Design strategies which will contribute to the establishment of a culture of peace that puts an end to the armed conflict and other expressions of violence that are inflicted on the population
- Systematise the experiences and reflections to guide the actions and experience of Churches

5. Thematic perspectives of the summit

During the summit, we have highlighted the present situation focusing on six major topics:

5.1. The present situation of the conflict and its impact on churches:

We share in the sufferings of our impoverished nation which is carrying a double burden; enduring the anguish of daily survival as well as bearing the heavy weight of the armed conflict. Our Church suffers from the same reality, especially the rural congregations, which for the most part are composed of poor and marginalised people. We have listened to moving testimonies regarding the impact of the conflict on both secular and religious communities. It is important that urban communities should identify themselves with this human tragedy and respond with prayers and actions of solidarity.

5.2. The predicament of children facing the armed conflict:

The situation for girls and boys within the conflict is dramatic. It is estimated that 11,000 children are recruited unwillingly into the armed groups. They are forced to use weapons, to kill, to torture and to participate in kidnappings. Both boys and girls are being exploited sexually or being coerced into labour. Not only do they represent half of the internally displaced people, they are also witnesses to deaths and massacres of beloved ones.

In addition to the armed conflict, violence against boys and girls is also caused by juvenile gangs; many children have also been mistreated at home or have been sexually exploited for profit. It has been estimated that 35-45,000 children are involved in prostitution.

For all these reasons, we maintain that the Church should pay more attention to this problem and design programmes for the protection of our young people as well as providing opportunities for development within this vulnerable population.

5.3. Internally forced displacement:

Forced displacement is one of the greatest tragedies of the country. Over the last decade, nearly 3million people have been internally displaced, and over the last 20 years, the number totals approximately 3.5million.

The cost for human beings and Colombian society is enormous. By its nature, the armed conflict causes displacement. But most distressingly, not only is there displacement because of the conflict, but there are also the violence is also being used to take over the properties of the internally displaced, to gain total control of territories in certain regions. This means that some people and groups are seeking economic gains at the expense of millions of people.

Once they have been internally displaced, people face rejection and indifference from society, even sometimes on the part of the Church, precisely when they most need the consolation and hope of the Gospel. The state has also failed to demonstrate political willingness to attend to their needs properly.

After reflection, we conclude that forced internal displacement is a sin against our neighbours. Far from being God's will, forced displacement is the product of avarice and the desire to obtain what is not ours; as it is written in the Bible, James 4:1-2: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war." God, however, has not abandoned the internally displaced people but is ready to save and help them. The Church must see the face of Jesus in the face of every internally displaced person.

The situation requires not only our solidarity with the persons who have been displaced, or the victims; but also the prophetic action of denunciation from the part of the Church regarding the causes of the displacement and regarding the authorities' negligence to provide solutions for the victims. But our voice must also include hope, the Good News from God, keeping in mind that accepting the Gospel is not a precondition for receiving aid.

5.4. Dialogue, negotiations and demobilisation:

We welcome any attempts for dialogue between the fighting groups and the government; especially when a person or an armed group gives up their weapons for the purposes of peace, justice and dignity. We encourage those groups who are in the process of doing so, the ELN and the AUC, to move forward with sincerity and a genuine desire to build a lasting peace in Colombia.

Moreover, we urge the FARC, other armed groups and the government to listen to the demands of civil society to end the conflict so that we can work together for the construction of a sustainable peace that would put an end to the social violence that our impoverished and suffering population must endure. A first step towards dialogue should be the release of those have been kidnapped. We need to move towards the construction of an inclusive society (with all the actors of the conflict) democratic and participative free from fear of armed reactions.

5.5. Truth, Justice and Reparation:

We value the establishment of a Reconciliation and Reparation Commission, which even though it has a long way to go, has put these themes that are so important in the search for

the healing of the country on the nation's agenda. The Christian Evangelical Church has elaborated proposals that we believe can contribute to the implementation of the process. The ultimate goal of our call and proposal is reconciliation for all Colombians and an acknowledgment of the harm that has been committed, reparation for the victims of those crimes and changes in the minds of attackers.

More concretely, the Church can effectively contribute to themes like peace, truth, reparation, forgiveness and reconciliation and rehabilitation of the victims and those responsible.

5.6. International politics:

The Christian Evangelical Church is committed to analyse, propose and announce the consequences of international politics that affect or contribute to the consolidation of a real state of peace.

We suggest that our country and the international community continue to analyse and investigate the structural causes of violence in Colombia and offer solutions to the armed conflict.

An integral analysis must include topics like globalisation, the Free Trade Agreement, Plan Colombia, weapon trafficking, drug trafficking, etc. It must also seek the good of the general population and social and economical justice in our country.

We urge the international community to ensure that governments do not support the conflict in Colombia but rather design actions to help us build peace.

6. Our vision for Colombia:

Faced with the problems and suffering that paralyse our country, but without being over-optimistic nor closing our eyes to the national reality, we would like to give an alternative vision for our beloved nation. Here we give some guidelines, however, it is the responsibility of the Church to continue to develop it and work with God to implement it.

We have the vision of a country where weapons become tools of production, where everyone can live in peace, free from fear, and where everyone can express his/her identity while respecting each other's identities. We believe in equality, respect for men and women, ethnicity, cultures and different political and religious views. We believe in a society based on pluralism. We believe in the possibility for social justice, a legal justice which functions and ends the culture of impunity. We believe in civil servants who fulfil their duties with honesty. We believe in respect, equality and full participation. We believe in economic opportunities that would give housing and incomes for all, opportunities thanks to which national resources are equally distributed without discrimination or distinction. We believe in equal opportunities for all, through which everyone could have access to health, education and basic services.

7. Theological analysis

We understand that the violence that wracks Colombia is a consequence of sin, of disaffection from God, of idolatry of gods like money, power, prestige, and trust in violence, selfishness and avarice. This sin requires individual repentance, changes of mentality and behaviour, and conversion to the Lord who is great and merciful.

Furthermore, we recognize that sin is present in every Colombian institution; in our laws, our social and national actions. We realise that our society is founded on pillars of exclusion, injustice, avarice, impunity, inequality and poverty, which need to be redressed to have a lasting peace. These things hurt God and we recall His words to Moses: "I have surely seen

the oppression of My people ... and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them.” Exodus 3: 7-8.

Reflecting on God’s Word on the state of violence that we endure and regarding the peace for which we cry out; to direct our work towards peace, we have learned that:

- He Himself is a God of peace, Ephesians 2:14;
- For the Kingdom of God is ... peace, Romans 14: 17;
- His Gospel is the “Gospel of Peace,” Ephesians 6: 15;
- His children are peacemakers, Matthew 5: 9.

The Lord wants peace, and integrated peace, that embraces the individual, family, community, nation, world and Creation. That is why it is essential that we, as Christians, play a role in this; modest but clear and committed to the search for peace in Colombia.

According to the Bible, peace must be built together with social justice (Isaiah 32:17 and James 3:18). The Lord says in Isaiah 58:6-8 :

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hunger, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from you own flesh?”

The result for the nation will be: “... your light shall break forth like the morning.” Peace is possible when love and obedience towards God are expressed in terms of solidarity and love for the poor, the vulnerable and beggars of society. In II Chronicles 7:14, the Lord invites us to repent and pray promising that “If My people who are called by My Name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

The Bible says that peace is built on truth (John 8:32). There cannot be peace based on concealment of the truth and on lies. Truth about the horrors our population has suffered from must be made known; the authors of such crimes must be identified and face their victims.

But Truth is not sufficient; we need compassion. If we need to know the truth, it is not to exert vengeance or revenge, but to seek repentance, forgiveness and well-being. We need to interrupt the vicious circle of violence; but this cannot happen if we bury the truth, only if we are aware of it, take it in and forgive it.

We understand that forgiveness is not cheap. It is precious. Peace has a price. For God it cost the life of his Son. And for the victims, it will be costly to break the vicious circle of violence by forgiving. For the nation it will cost material reparations and especially moral reparations aimed at those who have lost so much in this war. To those responsible for the violence, it will cost them to recognise their crimes and in some cases, they will have to give restitution. Reconciliation demands justice, justice demands repentance; repentance demands restitution; restitution demands mercy.

The promise of the return of Jesus Christ’s, the Prince of Peace, is associated with the burning and destruction of the “warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood” (Isaiah 9:5). Peace must be built with actions of peace. The Lord is asking us to abandon our trust in the power of weapons and that we humble ourselves to serve our neighbor, even the enemy, with the most powerful forces in the world: love and non-violence.

In brief, justice, truth, mercy, forgiveness, restoration, love and non-violence are Biblical directions that are necessary for the construction of a social network, reconciliation and the restoration of the Colombian community.

Peace means a change of life on a personal level to live the ethical values of God's Reign by the power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus Christ taught us (Luke 14: 25-27). The Lord Jesus Christ invites all Colombians, male or female, who have experienced the emptiness that comes from taking wrong paths to take his Word seriously, to live as he taught in His Sermon on the Mount, and to practice the community of brothers and sisters.

8. Action guidelines for local, regional and national churches to be involved in the work for peace

This work should be done through the Associations of Pastors, denominations, churches and different ministries. They are not absolutely binding but rather opportunities for everyone to be involved as God would tell them to be.

9. Investigation

National investigation to measure to the effect of the armed conflict on the Christian community

1. Education

- A. Education to peace and co-existence in Sunday schools
- B. Conferences and seminars in colleges, schools and universities
- C. Religion courses should encompass courses on principles and values
- D. Promote the values of life, family and community
- E. Training pastors and leaders on topics like peace

2. Production of materials on co-existence

- A. For children, young adults, couples, families and ethnic/cultural groups

3. Prayer

- A. Organize days of prayer on a national, regional and local level
- B. Establish moments of prayers for peace in local churches

4. Mobilisation

- A. At some dates, summon national, local and regional Church

5. Ensure the Church's presence

- A. In the peace-making negotiations
- B. Establishing chapels in colleges, prisons, hospitals and armed forces headquarters

6. Transform temples into sanctuaries of peace and conciliation

- A. Training pastors and leaders conflict resolutions
- B. Establishing counseling teams for solutions to the conflict

7. Establish days of commemoration

- A. Establish a national day of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation
- B. Day of prayer for boys and girls
- C. National day for peace, non-violence and cease fire

8. Create centers for treatment of the trauma

- A. Training pastors and leaders on treatment of children, young and adults especially for widows and orphans

9. Creation of a culture of peace

- A. Broadcast programs on principles of peace, forgiveness and coexistence

10. Reproduce and promote projects that are already functioning in other fields of the nation

- A. Asvidas
- B. Bread and Peace Days (Pan y Paz)

C. Justices of the Peace

- 11. Annual regional summits for peace and a national summit every two year**
- 12. Summon relevant ministries to share information and strategies, and involve other churches and ministries**
- 13. Summon a national and international roundtable of donors for the work of churches towards peace**
- 14. Seminaries on how claim one's rights before the State and advocacy**

10. Our declaration and commitment

Peace cannot be achieved by solely putting down guns but also by establishing conditions, promoting a culture and spirit of peace. The Evangelical Church is committed to bringing in spiritual bases to create a suitable ground for peace, co-existence and social justice.

We call on churches to recognize that our mission is to participate in the transformation of our society into God's will; also to be involved in the formation of new citizens who would be the social basis of a new Colombia where justice prevails and human rights are respected. Respect for human rights would also engender peaceful co-existence.

We commit to Colombia and our churches with God's help to construct this moment while we wait for eternity.