

Our partners in Colombia :

Justicia y Paz is a Colombian organization that has worked for 15 years promoting and defending human rights. They accompany the communities of Jiguamiando and Curvarado in their search for Truth, Justice and Rehabilitation. In addition to their legal defense and exposure of abuses, the accompaniment by Justicia y Paz includes a permanent presence in the humanitarian zones, which fosters a relationship of trust with the inhabitants, and better mutual understanding. Their presence on the ground also serves as a mechanism of protection against incursions by the army and paramilitary in these humanitarian areas. Besides giving popular education workshops and literacy courses, Justicia y Paz does psycho-social counseling with adults, youth and children in the communities as well as with families of victims, following the trauma created by armed incursions, disappearances and assassinations.

The **Red de Hermandad y Solidaridad** is a network, born in 1994, composed of Red Colombia (community organizations and initiatives) and Red Europa (European organizations and unions) as well as some North American organizations. Redher endeavors to contribute to the struggle against impunity and the defense of human rights by connecting Colombian and international social organizations, to fortify the international accompaniment process alongside Colombian social organizations and their actual problems, in order to consolidate political solidarity. Redher acts on many levels: The Permanent Tribunal of peoples against transnational firms (TPP), international Tribunal of opinion (TIO), the National School of Agriculture, a boycott of Coca-Cola and campaigns against other multi-nationals, support for the processes of resistance and plans for life of the communities in resistance, notably by international accompaniment, international exposure of abuses and pressuring authorities.

The Colombia Solidarity Accompaniment Project - CSAP - is an independent organization based in Montreal that works to create a direct solidarity network with Afro-Colombian and Mestizo peasant communities engaged in civil resistance.

Our activities:

Distribution of information, education and working to raise popular awareness of the human rights situation and peasant struggles in Colombia.

International accompaniment in village communities: the international physical presence on the ground is an important support for communities asserting their rights as a civilian population living in the midst of an armed conflict. CSAP works on building direct solidarity, which involves political support to the civil resistance of the communities for the right to Life, Land and Self-determination. As well as providing a physical presence to protect the communities, the escorts participate in the organization of activities according to their aptitudes.

Urgent actions and political pressure on Colombian and Canadian authorities when armed aggressions occur against the communities, and to support their demands.

Colombia Solidarity Accompaniment Project



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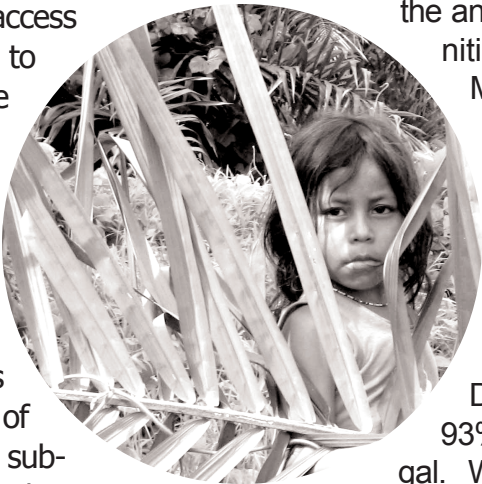
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State Terrorism and Economic Interests

Under the pretext of the struggle against armed leftist insurrection and drug-traffickers, the Colombian government has deployed military and paramilitary units that have violated human rights systematically and with impunity since the beginning of the 1960's. Militarisation has always been the government's preferred method of dealing with conflict arising from social and political inequality, thus feeding the vicious cycle of structural violence in the Colombian armed conflict. State and para-state repression aim to strangle any social struggle; the goal is military control of the entire country to impose a single economic model linked to a minority of private interests. In the era of neocolonialism, the economic mega-projects are portrayed as examples of development and modernization that will reduce poverty, while the facts show that these projects are in fact a new form of slavery. The new offensive is the "demobilization" of paramilitaries in total impunity, which negates the right of victims to truth and justice and legalizes the de facto agrarian counter-reform of recent years.

African Palm : an agribusiness mega-project

The militarisation of the region goes hand in hand with the imposition of economic mega-projects. Thanks to the control of different strategic zones by the army and paramilitaries, the corporations can have access to land for large-scale development. Just to give a few examples, one can cite intensive forestry, open-pit mining, agribusiness and infrastructure mega-projects, as well as large-scale cattle ranching. There is literally an agrarian counter-reform in operation, which aims to dispossess peasants of their ancestral lands to put them in the hands of private investors. This process gravely impacts the ancestral way of life of the communities, as well as the traditional subsistence agriculture that they practice which gives them food autonomy. As well, the environmental impact of agribusiness and infrastructure mega-projects is catastrophic for the region, situated in the heart of a tropical rain forest that is extremely rich in biodiversity.



One sector that makes large profits from forced displacements is the production of palm oil, which is currently planted illegally on several thousand hectares in the heart of the ancestral Collective Territories of the communities of Jiguamiando and Curvarado. Moreover, palm plantations threaten the ecosystem of one of the regions with the richest biodiversity on the planet. Deforestation always precedes the planting of African Palm, and this extensive monoculture, destined for export, profoundly depletes the soil. According to a report by the Colombian Institute of Rural Development (INCODER) in March of 2005, 93% of these palm plantations were found illegal. What is most worrisome is the sudden turn taken by the Colombian government that, 7 months later, stated through the ministry of agriculture that nearly 15,000 hectares of African Palm were planted on "individual private property" belonging to palm enterprises.

Displacement and Resistance

The Afro-Colombian communities of Jiguamiando and Curvarado, in Choco province in northern Colombia, underwent a forced displacement in 1997. At the beginning of the year 2000, these communities decided to return to live on their ancestral lands and succeeded in obtaining a Title of Collective Property. In 2004, they created three Humanitarian Zones, situated in the Jiguamiando river basin, within which they proclaimed themselves as civilian populations. This is a strategy of protection and neutrality within an armed conflict based on fundamental principals of international humanitarian law. However, the communities must continually face new threats, such as judicial proceedings and (para)-military aggressions, pressures of false promises from the State that the communities partner with the palm cultivating companies, all while the palm continues to advance on their territories. In April 2006, a new Humanitarian Zone was created, this time in the Curvarado river basin, with the inhabitants of Curvarado who were dispersed in different cities of the region. It is situated in the middle of the African Palm plantations, where police, military and paramilitary presence is very strong. A second Humanitarian Zone named El Tesoro was created the following October. Furthermore, the communities decided to create Natural Reserve and Biodiversity Zones, which will serve as spaces to cultivate subsistence-based agricultural products and to protect parts of the tropical rainforest. But above all, the creation of the Reserve Zone and two Humanitarian Zones in Curvarado signifies for the peasants a new step in their collective resistance: from the defensive stage consisting in protecting themselves from armed incursions and to denounce the theft of their land, they have now passed to an offensive stage by means of the direct recovery of their lands.