

STONE IN THE SHOE



Spring 2008

La Piedra en el Zapato

Colombia
Solidarity
Accompaniment
Project
www.PASC.ca

Poesía desde la Carcel la Picota Bogota
Contribuido por Cruz Negra Desde Dentro- Carcel la Picota /
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Prisión

"Oh prisión"

!Atajo en mi camino!

!Cuan lento pasa el día!

?Cual día?

- "La noche yo diría"

Sin lumbre, sin canción,

aguza mis sentidos

el dardo del olvido

Oh noche, carnesti

?Eti, Eti, Eti, Lama Sabachtan?



PASC is a collective based in Quebec that works to build a network of direct solidarity with Colombian organizations and communities that struggle for Life, Dignity and Autonomy.

★Our actions★

Accompaniment of threatened communities

International accompaniment on the ground represents an important support for communities who affirm their rights as civilians living within an armed conflict. It is a source of protection against the threat of armed actors and promotes greater visibility of their situation nationally and internationally.

Information and awareness

Through the web site, publications, the film *Palm Empire: State Crimes and Civil Resistance in Colombia*, the list serve and community events, PASC diffuses alternative information concerning State terrorism, Colombian resistance processes as well as economic interests hidden behind the systematic violation of human rights.

Denunciations and Political Pressure

Through our urgent action network, PASC publishes news reports exposing the threats and violations of human rights that the communities and organizations that we accompany wish to denounce to the international community.

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Bush, Democracy continues to be in imminent danger of being annihilated, now by drug traffickers and international terrorists, epitomized by Osama Bin Laden, a former CIA protectee, and groups like Al-Qaida and the Taliban, former CIA partners.

Above and beyond Plan Colombia, The Bush administration announced in 2002 the Andean Regional initiative, a military support package to combat drug trafficking to the tune of 98 million dollars. The handout was destined for the creation of a defense battalion for energy infrastructures, protecting 300 geographic points in Colombia considered strategic for US interests. On the 16th of January, 2002, Bush declared before the Council of World Affairs of the OEC, "We are committed to security: security against terror, security against violence of the drug cartels and their accomplices. Because of this we are committed to countries like Colombia to defend their democracy."

Through legal and illegal structures, unconstitutional laws and a massive increase of military and paramilitary apparatus, power has been concentrated within the Executive and Military Forces. The criminalization of social protest and political opposition and the creation and maintenance of paramilitary groups have been utilized as state terror tactics to instill fear and subsequently control the civilian population. As Soraya Gutierrez notes, the most preoccupying element is the appearance of normality that the fascist apparatus has taken on in recent years⁷. Meanwhile, the warm and friendly US-Colombian relations show that Colombia is a model democracy in the eyes of US foreign policy. However, for the people living in Colombia and looking down the barrel of the proverbial gun, Colombia is far from a model democracy; it is the very model of state terror. And it is the model that the US plans on exporting to many more countries.

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Fear, Impunity and State Power

Colombia's paramilitary regime and social movements

In August of 2007, Paola, a mother, university student and teacher, received a written death threat. She is a member of the Committee for Solidarity for Political Prisoners, a group that struggles for the rights of political prisoners in Colombia. It is a country where state repression has broken the social fabric, where being a human rights defender can have dangerous consequences; since 2002, there have been 955 assassinations committed by the Armed Forces, the highest level of politically motivated homicide in the Western hemisphere.

In a country where repression of social organizations involves selective and collective assassinations, disappearances, detentions and massacres, fear of death is part of daily life. On the bus on the way to the Industrial University of Santander in Bucaramanga, Paola handed me a note sent by the paramilitary organization known as "Aguilas Negras" to 11 student organizers, accusing them of being linked to networks of the FARC and ELN, Colombia's two largest guerrilla groups. The death threat assured their recipients that their actions were being monitored and their days numbered. "You and the organization you represent are a problem for Colombia... The plan to annihilate you all will begin with the very next student strike."

The death threat is a common tactic from this nationwide right-wing paramilitary group. Weeks ago, the local office of SINALTRAINAL, a national union of food workers, received a written death threat under the front door. Fear courses in the veins of the country; a legitimate fear, a well-sanctioned and reasonable fear for the safety of human rights defenders, unionists, peasant leaders, Afro-Colombians, indigenous leaders and community members.

Paramilitary and military forces have honed a method of instilling fear and producing forced displacement throughout the country. Jose Antonio knows this tactic well. An Afro-Colombian peasant, a subsistence farmer until his forced displacement and the theft of his lands in 1997, he and his family have lived it first-

July of 1997, links had been demonstrated to exist between paramilitary groups and the National Army, DAS (Security Administration Department), Incofer (Institute of Agrarian Reform), congressmen, the family of the President, four ministers and the Vice President, according to the Movement for Victims of State Crimes⁵.

With the legislation and legalization of illegal power structures, paramilitarism, impunity and terrorism are not state politics, but are the Law of the Republic of Colombia. These violent measures force us to conclude that there exists the decision of the powerful class to solve structural problems of the country through war.

INTERNATIONAL FUNDING FOR FASCISM

While the ruling regime of Colombia tightens its control of the country through terrorism and impunity, international accords between Colombian officials and wealthy countries solidify the commitment to war and death squads, strategies directed to control popular organizations and people considered dangerous to the establishment. Plan Colombia, a nefarious agreement between the U.S. and Colombian governments, has invested 48 million dollars in order to fortify preventive military intelligence. In a fascist society model, the institutions of education, church, political state structures and ordinary living spaces are vigilated and controlled by military ideology. The discourse of Uribe Vélez during his presidency campaign incorporated a two point argument that was used to justify a fascist regime. In the first element, all is chaos and disorder; democratic institutions are at risk from communists, terrorists and drug traffickers. The second element is to have a modern leader with an iron grip that will recover institutionality and restore order⁶.

Authoritarian rule in Colombia in the past has demonized the "communists" as enemies of the State and of the values most trumpeted by the US doctrine of Democracy and Liberty. Now that the Communist bloc has fallen in Russia, according to Uribe and



MILITARIZATION AND PARA-INSTITUTIONALIZATION



The consolidation of power has accelerated under the current administration of the ultra-conservative President Alvaro Uribe Vélez. He has legalized impunity and ensured the process of para-institutionalization in Colombia with great success. Before his first electoral victory in 2002, Law 684 of 2001 established a fourth power of government and distinguished it from legislative, executive and judicial branches of a traditional constitutional democracy. It gives national power the ability to supersede over all other institutions and mechanisms of order. Article 3 of the law defines national power as "the capacity of the Colombian State to offer all its potential to respond to situations that put in danger the exercising of rights and liberties, and to maintain independence, integrity, autonomy and national sovereignty." The wording of the law is extracted almost in its totality from an anti-guerrilla manual. Law 684 shows that the classic division of power among government branches in the Colombian democracy is false: there exists only economic power, supported by national (military) power: in essence a totalitarian regime.

The consolidation of state power over the judicial branch of government has been achieved violently at times. In the massacre of La Rochela, judicial functionaries investigating a case of paramilitary violence were murdered. The Inter American Court of Human Rights denounced the act, declaring, "The facts of the case [of the massacre of La Rochela] are particularly grave because they were directed to impede the investigation and sanction violations of Human Rights. The massacre effectively intimidated judicial functionaries in the investigation of this and other cases."

In 2007 Colombian media has been covering cases that show the illegal financing of President Uribe's political party Colombia Democratica, linking three of Uribe's close senators to paramilitary enterprises. By

hand. As we walked through the African Palm plantations in Choco, Jose Antonio showed me the former location of his community. Ten years ago, under Operation Genesis, the whole region was attacked by air, water and land, a concerted military and paramilitary operation that massacred, tortured, assassinated and forcibly displaced over 4,000 traditional community-living ancestral lifestyles. He showed me the former location of his brother's small farm, which is now rows of African Palm trees.

Jose Antonio pointed to where there used to be a river and said, "Over there, my brother used to fish."

"He was fishing one day with his four children, when the paramilitaries came to him. They tied his hands behind his back, cut open his chest and removed his innards with their hands. They told his children to leave and not to come back to this land."

The statistics of systematic violence in Colombia show the endemic nature of the problem. The Union Patriótica, a political party seeking a humanitarian accord between the FARC and the government since the 1990s, have suffered the assassination of over 5,000 members. The highest rates of homicide of indigenous people have been among the Embera Katío, the Wayuu and the Kanakamo peoples, who have suffered 234 homicides since 1999. From 1986 to 2006, there have been 2,515 union leaders assassinated. The National Federation of Municipal Councils (FENACOM) reports 251 council members assassinated since 1985. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists, between 1996 and June 2006, 31,656 people were either killed or disappeared. Of these massacres, 83.07% are attributed to State forces.

The Consultation of Human Rights and Forced Displacement (CODHES) has stated that between 1985 and 2005, there were 3,720,428 citizens registered as forcibly displaced. According to the Ideas for Peace Foundation, members of the AUC--a former paramilitary organization--have invested in three million hectares of land, while drug traffickers have bought one million hectares. Seventy per cent of landowners are small-scale farmers who possess only five per cent of total land area. The reality of forced displacement by State forces and the subsequent purchasing of large quantities of land by paramilitary members are facts that demonstrate the illegal appropriation of land through

violent means. Meanwhile, most small-scale farmers are forced either to find smaller parcels of land to cultivate, or join the growing waves of urbanization. In either case, they continue to face the threat of violence.

A traveller passing through the cities of Colombia might see a moderately developed country, an urbanized population and a burgeoning middle class. Liberal economic journals describe Colombia's economy as a prosperous, growing market, rich in natural resources and ready for investment. But many Colombians under-

tand the situation as an ongoing civil war. The state apparatus of control and repression--legitimated through impunity and maintained through the consolidation of executive military power in all branches of government and a broken social fabric with violence being a continual threat in all levels of society--has maintained a state of siege and atomized the Colombian countryside. Informants and paramilitary forces create local fiefdoms, regional strongholds of ultra-right-wing power. Urban centres are infiltrated by networks of informants and surveiled by police and military.

"The most preoccupying factor of the situation is the appearance of normality which this military and political project has acquired", says Soraya Gutierrez Arguello, president of the Jose Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective. Specific elements of social control, such as paramilitarism, impunity and state power, have kept much of the country's population in a state of terror.

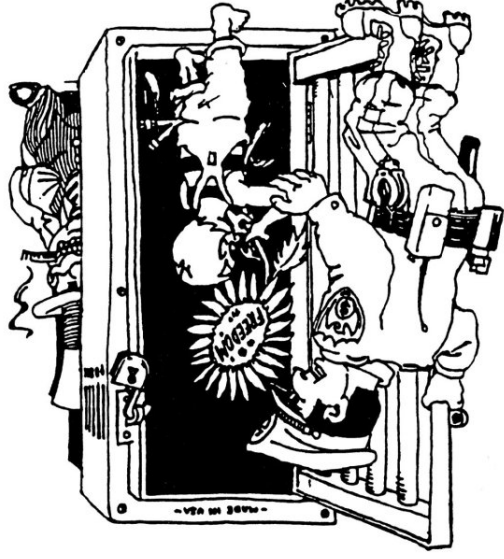


bitants and the people who visit, come and go..." Furthermore military forces are capable of preventive arrests without judicial order, thus institutionalizing norms of military power above local and regional civil authorities.

Since the creation of Law 975 of 2005, erroneously named the law of Justice and Peace, the government has 'demobilized' a large number of paramilitary members. This has allowed former paramilitaries to re-enter society as civilians with little or no jail time, to take ownership and develop the land that has been stolen from the civilian population, thus consolidating their power and absolving them of their atrocities⁴. Law 975 establishes juridical instruments for those who confess or are processed as political criminals - under the new law their actions are portrayed as having 'altruistic ends'. Thus the authors of horrible massacres can receive a maximum of 8 years of jail time. Meanwhile for the crime of rebellion, social organizers - human rights defenders, students, unionists, journalists, for example - receive 6 years behind bars.

Further worsening the situation is Decree 2767 of 2004 which establishes certain economic benefits for those who abandon activities within armed illegal groups and collaborate with Public Forces by providing information. Those who comply are today part of networks of informants and cooperators res-

"We better keep that in a safe place"



possible for the prosecution against hundreds of social organizers and human rights defenders. This tactic breaks the fabric of trust and confidence between neighbors and creates a climate of fear where anyone can make quick money by informing on anyone else. Due to the complicity and corruption between the judicial, executive and legislative branches, the national government has offered amnesties and benefits to over 10,000 demobilized ex-paramilitaries.

Legalized Impunity and Consolidated Power

Within Colombia there is an almost complete impunity for state-sponsored crimes, including grave human rights violations, crimes against humanity, massacres, and what has been called 'political genocide' (the extermination of the Union Patriótica, a legitimate opposition party all but wiped out in the 1990's). Impunity is an important structural component, a necessary condition that allows for the execution and repetition of these crimes; in Colombia, 99.5% of crimes go unpunished¹. A mechanism of governmental corruption, it enables dominant sectors of society to repeat cycles of violence and repression of social movements. One effect of impunity is that violence against women and sexual violence continues as a recurring practice by armed forces, allowing women to be treated as war booty².

Impunity for illegal state actors - paramilitary death squads - has been legally sanctioned since 1968 under Decree 3398³. This decree allows public forces to organize a 'civil defense': to train, give arms and indoctrinate civilians in conflict zones in order to involve them directly in confrontations. In 2001, Law 684 was created which sanctions the establishment of civilian militias. Article 7 declares that, "Civil service for national defense... must be completed by citizens to support authorities in the preservation of citizen's security." Article 76 of the same law states that, "When considered necessary, vigilance services and private security can support the goals of Security and National Defense, under the control of the Ministry of National Defense... At the solicitude of municipal authorities in charge of municipal funds, the National Police can personally recruit local persons most adequate who cooperate for the maintenance of order. These personnel will be under their direct command the same as regular personnel."

Though spying on civilians is unconstitutional, the collection of information to observe and monitor citizens has been legalized under Decree 717 of 1996, creating Special Zones of Public Order, where Public Forces can "Collect, verify, conserve and classify information around the place of residence and the habitual occupation of the inha-

Paramilitarism: Infiltrating Civil Society and Rending the Social Fabric

Most socio-political studies agree that the origins of contemporary violence in Colombia began in the mid-1940s. Institutional and rural violence, stimulated by the Conservative Party, left 300,000 dead without investigation and left thousands without homes. The resulting armed uprising from rural sectors precipitated an internal conflict that to this day continues to spill blood. The State doctrine since the 1960s has been one of counterinsurgency and has authored systematic, generalized violations of human rights and crimes against humanity. A key element of the counterinsurgent strategy has been paramilitarism, which uses terrorist tactics and benefits from state support.

Paramilitarism has worked to annihilate social resistance and democratic opposition of civil society, creating new agents of capitalist accumulation while generating forced displacement. According to Arguello, paramilitarism has united the anti-insurgent struggle with drug trafficking and State support under one apparatus of "irregular right-wing war, constructing paramilitary corridors, owned territorialities, zones of consolidation, eruption of local para-states, interlinked into a national phenomenon of power."

Armed right-wing paramilitary groups have had ample support from corporate sectors, large scale farmers, merchants, State security institutions, Armed Forces, police and regional government. They have even benefited from significant representation in Colombian parliament and share a profound affinity with the current administration of President Uribe Vélez. The Colombian Office of the United Nations' High Commission of Human Rights has signalled the ongoing connections between paramilitary groups and the State.



The paramilitary strategy is excused with claims that victims are suspected guerrillas or guerrilla collaborators. In reality, the victims are systematically targeted members

of the civilian population. According to a follow-up mission conducted by the Organization of American States in July 2007, paramilitaries maintain and exercise an authoritarian criminal control, which inhibits the possibility of citizen action without coercion, making municipal and departmental elections very problematic. Relying on a network of informants, paramilitary infiltration into communities and authorities at all levels of society has broken the social fabric, creating suspicion and mistrust among communities, neighbours and even family.

According to Leonardo Jaime M, a lawyer with the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSP), it is common in penal processes to observe lists created by militias-ries that include many people (students, small farmers, unionists, civilians) accused of being guerrillas.

"No one knows how these lists are formed, what criteria are held, or what proof exists to conclude guerrilla participation. The majority of these listed people are later assassinated or disappeared by State agents or paramilitary groups."

Canadian and other foreign companies certainly figure prominently in the paradigm of State violence for economic development. According to Maria Jimenez of The Globe and Mail, Canadian investments in Colombia are an estimated \$1 billion from 17 corporations, making Canada the 10th largest investor in the world. The investments are concentrated in the sectors where repression of unionists is greatest: oil, gas and mining.

While scandal erupts in Colombia over President Uribe's ties to narco-traffickers and paramilitaries, Canada is putting trade negotiations with Colombia in overdrive by signing a new Free Trade Agreement. The FTA will open up Colombia for more foreign development and resource extraction for the profit of Canadian companies at the expense of the basic civil rights of Colombians.



ple by any means possible: through criminalization, legal prosecution, detentions, assassinations and terror."

15,000 inhabitants were forcibly displaced in 2001 when the paramilitaries arrived and those who stayed are forced to endure the threat of state violence. Nonetheless, teachers, workers, labourers, peasants, the Bart people, women, children and the elderly are deciding not to leave.

"Even though the Colombian government does not care about its people, but rather its resources and the riches of Catatumbo that make transnational companies even richer, we do care about life," affirmed the community leader.

The Committee for Social Integration in Catatumbo (CISCA) was created in 2004 during an encounter that reunited 400 people from all sectors of society in Catatumbo. CISCA attempts to create a proposal to remain on the land and defend the lives of its inhabitants. "It seeks to oppose the Colombian government's intentions of removing people from the land in order to exploit its resources," the community leader declared.

The Plan de Vida (Life Plan), articulated by CISCA, is a reflection on what Catatumberos want and what their rights are, as well as an understanding that there is a government responsible for the violence and imposed poverty.

"Here we are doing what we have to do in order to be recognized as people living on a land rich in natural resources but abandoned by the state. The little that we have gained has been a result of self-management and community initiatives. The least we expect is to be allowed to live in these remote regions."

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most productive oil-extracting region of the Americas.

According to a Catatumbo community leader in an interview in November 2007 (whose name is withheld for safety reasons), there is a direct link between the emerging exploitation of resources in the region and the criminal paramilitary phenomenon that affects the lives of those who live in Catatumbo. "[The paramilitary strategy] is to clear the region to acquire its riches such as carbon and petroleum and to implement strategic crops such as palm oil, cacao, rubber and higuera (castor-oil plants). They have been offering us this option of displacement but we have not accepted."

15,000 hectares of the Catatumbo region are slated for open-air carbon exploitation, which the community leader affirms will destroy life in the region and surely destroy the indigenous Barti population.

In 2001, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (a former paramilitary organization) came to cleanse the Catatumbo region of 'guerrillas'. Acting in concert, the military set up road blockades to strangle guerrillas, force out NGOs and human rights organizations, causing 12,000 Barti people to be deprived of food and medicine.

Since February 2007, the situation has become apparent as "...a systematic decision to execute those who live in the Catatumbo region," the community leader said, referring to the joint paramilitary and military operations.

The military pretext of fighting a counter-insurgent war against guerrillas has led to an increase in extra-judicial executions, exceeding more than 30 in 2007. The victims were far away from any armed conflict but presented by military forces as guerrillas who died in combat, according to an international humanitarian mission to Catatumbo in 2007.

The fact-finding mission also reported military and paramilitary complicity. Often army troops leave their posts and fail to report any activity on the days when paramilitary squads move through military road blockades.

"The Colombian army go from one small town to the next, saying that cases they have asked the peasants, 'Why don't you go away, why don't you leave the region?' This shows their interest in displacing the peo-



Beyond the walls:

Solidarity campaign with political prisoners

About 7200 people are currently detained in Colombian jails for political motives. Political prisoners are comprised of members of guerrilla groups, but also of human rights defenders, lawyers, activists and community leaders. Packed like sardines in poor conditions, these are men and women who refused to stay silent and decided to speak up and stand up for their ideals, and ended up secluded and erased from history. In many cases, political opponents are condemned following a trial full of judicial irregularities, such as the use of false witnesses or a conviction without any clear evidence. Rendered invisible, they are denied the fundamental human rights that are granted to any citizen of a democratic state and are victims of many violations, such as the right to judicial safeguards, the presumption of innocence, the guarantee of due process of law, freedom of movement, of opinion and expression, and the right to physical and moral integrity.

On January 8th 2008, 7 political prisoners from the Palo Gordo high security penitentiary in Girón started a hunger strike in defense of their human rights. Another 160 political prisoners decided to join the hunger strike on February 5th, 28 days later.

For two years the 7 strikers have been classified by INPEC (Colombian national penitentiary institute) as medium security prisoners. The 7 were in the midst of an administrative struggle with INPEC to be transferred to a medium security penitentiary. This issue is important because there is more space to organize as political prisoners inside the walls of a medium security jail than in a high security one. But in the last years,

most of the political prisoners have been transferred to a new high security penitentiary. Palo Gordo penitentiary is situated in a remote location, making it hard to access for families and friends.

The 7 political prisoners were granted Provisional Measures from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to recognize the risks they face and to prevent further human rights violations. Since these Provisional Measures were not respected by the penitentiary director or the general administration of INPEC, the 7 prisoners went on strike on January 8th. By January 25th, already exhausted and in a fragile health condition, they radicalized the strike by stopping their oral serum intake and declared that they would accept food if they were moved to reception area cells (used for prisoners arriving or leaving the facilities), awaiting their transfer. They gave an ultimatum of 15 days, seeing that INPEC was only planning on meeting 10 days later to discuss strategies to end the strike.



Their violence has a house where my brothers and sisters sharpen their dreams on the bars of the cage

On February 5th, another 160 prisoners (including non-political prisoners) from various jails wings decided to join the strike. This action proved to be very efficient, since the 7 original prisoners were moved to the reception area later that day, and their demands were met by the following day. The battle was won, but it did not stop there. Various new hunger strikers that were in the same administrative situation decided to continue the strike started on February 5th, in order to be transferred out of high security. As of March 6th, 8 of these political and civilian prisoners were still on hunger strike and in a state of deteriorating health, with severe loss of cognitive and motor functions.



almost 4 million displaced living in the country. Rural Colombian communities practicing traditional lifestyles are systematically victimized by the state, pitching vulnerable populations into poverty, homelessness, and alienation.

In order to consolidate the wealth of land stolen from its rightful owners, the strategy in Colombia has been to silence the victims by criminalizing their resistance movements and legitimate struggles for justice. This is what communities have experienced in Catatumbo.

CATATUMBO, THE HOUSE OF THUNDER

The Catatumbo region (Bart for 'House of Thunder'), a vast area of land comprising 8 municipalities and a population of 250,000 in northeastern Colombia, is very resource-rich and lucrative for transnational interests. As well, it is situated in a key geopolitical region on the border of Venezuela. Catatumbo is principally very mountainous, with lush forests, inaccessible villages and simple mud and rock roads dispersed over the descending slopes and hills of the Andean mountain chain. It is criss-crossed with various rivers that feed into the Catatumbo river and drain into Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela, the

Only months ago, Canada finalized negotiations over a new Free Trade Agreement with Colombia, part of Canada's policy of support and trade with select Latin American nations that have "embraced democracy and open markets".

Yet despite the purported democracy of Colombia, it continues to have the worst track record of human rights violations in the hemisphere, according to reports by Amnesty International. The very same social and environmental disasters that threaten native and non-native residents on the Canadian west coast are an ongoing reality in many regions of Colombia. It is precisely the 'open market' advocated by Colombian president Uribe and Canadian Prime Minister Harper that is the modern cause of perennial problems like capitalist exploitation and colonialist oppression.

Capitalism operates on a profit-based logic. As neo-liberal world markets increasingly focus on obtaining a maximum profit at lower costs, investors compete for access to cheap labour and finite resources. Through bilateral trade agreements that protect the investments of transnational corporations, labour and land rights of the global poor are negated.

In a neo-liberal economy, land is no longer a right; it is a commodity to be bought and sold, and the cheaper it is, the better. In Colombia and Canada, as elsewhere in the world, transnational investors and corporations know that the cheapest way to get the land is also the bloodiest; to displace the indigenous and peasant populations by fear, intimidation, violence and massacre, then claim to own the land. In Canada, displacement and massacre effectively began 500 years ago during colonization, but the violence continues to this day in the negation of land rights and land treaties made with indigenous nations, and the criminalization of indigenous struggles perpetuates the ongoing injustice.

Theft and human rights abuses are an integral part of the appropriation of land. Stealing land from peasants and indigenous creates land-less poor, further entrenching poverty and adding to the number of internally displaced in Colombia. Human Rights Watch affirmed

Political prisoners have won many struggles to improve their living conditions within prison walls, but conditions are still mediocre. Running water access is limited to 45 minutes a day for 140 prisoners in the prison wing, and few of the prisoners have access to work or study. Beyond the prison walls, their fight is for the world to acknowledge the truth about political crime and the incarceration of human rights defenders struggling for better living conditions for people in their communities.

Lawyers from the CSPP (Solidarity Committee with Political Prisoners) are working with them on a lot of these issues, but they have also asked for support from the international community to put pressure on INPEC and on the jail administration, so that the fundamental rights of prisoners are respected. Furthermore, we can bring moral support by writing solidarity letters to political prisoners, which helps to reduce the isolation they are feeling and gives them the courage to keep fighting for their rights.

Behind the walls, their fight is to make the national and international communities know about the existence of political prisoners in Colombia, the consequences of speaking out and rebelling against a criminal, violent and oppressive state, the truth behind the concept of "political offense" and its implications. President Uribe intends to get rid of this judicial concept, a law which gives members of armed insurgency groups the right to obtain political status. In the current Colombian regime, where the only political opinion allowed is the one supporting a paramilitarized society and neoliberalism, members of guerrillas as well as civilians who participate in movements of political opposition and in resistance processes would then go from being given the title of "rebels" to being "terrorists". Moreover, it is the very existence of prisoner solidarity groups that is in danger, since it the concept of political offense disappears and all political prisoners become terrorists in the eyes of the Colombian government, groups like the CSPP will be criminalized and persecuted accordingly for supporting terrorists.

In this global context where the anti-terrorism crusade has become a priority, any opposition to the powers that be has become very risky. There is therefore an immense fight that has to be lead inside the walls, within our cities and countries,

to inform the population about the existence of political prisoners, the issues surrounding their treatment and the importance of such human rights-based laws as the political offense, based on people's right to rebellion against an oppressive, repressive and unfair state, a right recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



PASC's involvement with political prisoners is multifaceted. In Canada, we work to sensitize the population on the reality of political prisoners by creating spaces to discuss the state terrorism problem, repression, criminalization of political actions, security certificates, etc. In Colombia, we visit prisons in order to show the government that the prisoners have international support. We also visit the families of convicts, to support them in their quest against social marginalization and to denounce the threats and persecutions they face.



The majority of political prisoners were social militants who from one day to the next ended up cut from reality, without any information or any possibility of participating in important events or debates about public issues. By sending them letters, we contribute to alleviating their feeling of isolation. We also publish their writings and support the majority of their claims. Through this document as well as on our web site and in brochures, we will regularly publish analytical texts and poems received from Colombian political prisoners.

If you are interested in supporting solidarity work with political prisoners in Colombia, contact PASC by visiting our website www.pasc.ca.

"We already have 500 Native women murdered in Vancouver's downtown east side, and we don't want to lose anymore," he declared.

On Feb. 24th of 2007, Harriet Nahanee, a native elder, passed away in a Vancouver hospital shortly after serving a 14 day jail term. She had been convicted of contempt of court for participating in a 2006 blockade of the Sea-to-Sky highway expansion for 2010. She had contracted pneumonia in jail, and her death brought media attention in BC to the 2010 resistance.

Pellkey firmly believes that Canada and the corporate world had everything to do with her murder. "Every time we try to stand up for our land, we're jailed. The RCMP raid our homes and put us under constant surveillance. But we continue to instill the warrior spirit in our children and our youth. We keep on fighting for our land, our water, our mountains, our medicine, our moose and our deer because those things make us who we are."

Although the Olympic Games are often seen as a simple sports event, it is clear to colonized peoples of the Coast Salish territories in so-called Canada that it is a power structure supported by the global capitalist economy and a colonial state.



GIVE THEM BACK THEIR LAND!

COLONIZATION AND STATE REPRESSION IN CANADA AND COLOMBIA

Although development is well underway for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and Whistler, native and non-native resistance is making a significant impact on business as usual.

In January and February of 2008, two native warriors from west coast territories came to visit the Great Lakes region of so-called Canada to spread the message of their resistance efforts and to gain solidarity and support from native and non-native communities.

"The issues are land and freedom. This is what we are fighting for, and we're letting the world know it is not welcome to our territories," declared Kanahus Pellkey of the Native Youth Movement Warriors Society (NYM). Pellkey and Dustin Johnson, members of the Native Youth Movement Warriors Society, spoke at a press conference in front of Montreal's Olympic stadium, sporting camouflage jackets and scarves as symbols of native struggle. Pellkey carried her young toddler in a shoulder sling, protecting his little body against the bitter cold weather.

Dustin Johnson described the tour as "... a collective resistance to 2010, representing a diversity of social struggles. The corporate media cheer-leads the Olympics without knowing the real story behind 2010."

The Olympics are scheduled to be held on sovereign indigenous nations and territories, un-ceded to the BC government. 2010 development is contributing to loss of territory and resources, a marked increase in homelessness, poverty and debt, further ecological destruction, corporate invasion, and the imposition of a 2010 police state.

The RCMP is warning that 175 million dollars will not be adequate to cover security costs at the Olympics. Over 10,000 police, military and security personnel are expected to occupy Vancouver and Whistler during the Games.

"The games are pushing people to a certain limit of survivability," Johnson said of his people. "2010 is giving them a death sentence, so of course they're resisting by any means necessary." Pellkey appealed to natives and non-natives for a unilateral boycott of 2010 supporters, including Visa, Royal Bank, General Motors, General Electric, Coca-Cola and others.

Despite Native resistance, the Olympics are nonetheless being welcomed to Native territories by the four host nations that are working with the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic Games (VANOC).

"VANOC and the BC government have bought off chiefs and governors," Johnson said. "Only a small indigenous elite will benefit from the games and from the corporate interests. It's not just a racial issue, it's a class war, and within that we have a common enemy."

In the 2004 Athens Games, 40,000 prostitutes were brought in from Asian countries and elsewhere. Johnson mentioned prostitution as a major concern.

