

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE ECUMENICAL FORUM FOR PEACE

“OUT OF AN ETHIC FOR PEACE WILL COME A PEACE WITH ETHICS”

Bogotá, May 18-19 2013

On May 18th and 19th of this year, as members of a wide spectrum of Christian churches and movements, we gathered together as the Ecumenical Peace Table (*Mesa EcuMénica por la Paz*) on the campus of the Javierian Pontifical University in Bogotá, in order to contribute to the work of constructing a Colombia in which we can all live in peace with justice.

As disciples of Jesus, committed to his way of non-violence, relying completely on the illumination of His Spirit, we have reflected together on the ethics related to peace and the meaning of an ethical peace. To do this we have used three guiding elements: solidarity, democracy and transparency.

We understand that peace with social justice requires the overcoming of the causes of social and economic inequality. Therefore a just peace is the very ground on which a society based on true equity must be built.

We believe in a peace with a strong ethical foundation, a peace which will be based on respect, participation of the people in decisions, on zero tolerance for corruption. We believe that public administration must be responsible and accountable to the people, to the whole society. An ethical peace promotes relationships grounded in solidarity rather than competition, builds strong communities confident in their own authority, and a society which respects the natural environment.

We believe in a social ethic which liberates the poor and oppressed, which requires just practices in economic, cultural, social and political relationships, an ethic grounded in generosity and the sharing of wealth in the society, on compassion and mercy for those who are suffering, on respect for the other, on our mutual care for the earth, on the rejection of war and on the construction of peace with justice.

THE CITIZEN AND GRASSROOTS MONITORING MECHANISM

We believe that our contribution to this ethical peace can best be achieved through the establishment of a concrete mechanism for citizens and popular groups to monitor the social and political dynamics of the peace. This would be an all-encompassing oversight which would go much further than the monitoring of formal peace agreements. It would be established and conducted together with the popular movements, in which our various ecumenical Christian sectors would make their significant contributions.

We believe that this monitoring process must be accompanied by political action and mobilization to declare and defend this social agenda for peace. We believe that this process will stimulate organizing for justice at the base, in all areas of the country, and that this in turn will encourage respect for the social and political accords which are achieved through this mobilization. It will be built in cooperation with all social and political organizations. It will identify and challenge in the public arena the destructive ethic of the capitalist and anti-democratic structures in our country. And it will unmask and reveal the true purposes of political leaders who seek to monopolize the ethical discourse in our country. By doing these things it will defend the interests of the people and stimulate awareness of these realities among Colombians.

We believe that this monitoring operation must be self-critical and also critical of various processes in our churches and of these churches themselves. We believe this process can mobilize and liberate the religious conscience of the Colombian people, that it can lead to a real social commitment to stand with the impoverished and disempowered in our society, a commitment to stand against all forms of injustice. Hence this commitment will go far beyond the accords achieved at the negotiating tables in Havana. And it will provide a new measure of protection to the popular movements for justice and to their leaders.

We believe that this mechanism, this monitoring process, must be grounded in and inspired by the prophetic tradition of our faith, that it must accompany the people, and the many victims in particular. For us, the inspiration for this undertaking is the God of Life and not the god of the System.

We believe that this monitoring process must be carried out not only during the present period of conflict but also in the post conflict period. It must relate to the various themes on the Havana agenda from the perspective of the defense of human rights which has inspired the social agenda for peace. These concerns include the defense of the right to health care and education and the enforcement of the provision of those services. They include defense of our cherished farmlands and natural resources and proper enforcement to ensure these are respected as well.

The monitoring processes will be carried out primarily through the holding of popular assemblies. These assemblies will be spaces for deliberation and decision-making for organizations and communities in the regions, spaces that will strengthen the democratic and justice-seeking processes and the participation of a broad spectrum of people.

The assemblies will be organized by using the ecumenical networks and dynamics which are already in place in the local areas. They will be organized within the existing framework of a broad community and grassroots alliance, and will thus be able to generate thousands of local groups able to monitor and verify compliance with the accords which result from the popular negotiations as well as those which come about through the formal dialogues between the guerrilla groups and the Colombian government. This monitoring process will be also be linked to international processes, networks and bodies, and this will lead to broad recognition and legitimacy for this new mechanism.

We believe that this monitoring process must actively seek protection for those who involve themselves in the political process, and insist on safeguards to insure that proper conditions for the free exercise of political rights will be put in place, in particular for those who involve themselves in the political process as a result of the peace accords. Thus the monitoring process must ally itself with the demands and requirements of the victims' movement in Colombia, which advocates so strongly for truth, justice, reparations and guarantees that violations of human rights will not be repeated.

As members of the Ecumenical Peace Table, we believe that the proposal spearheaded by the national victims' movement and other human rights organizations for a Truth Commission could well be supported by the ecumenical movement. To this end, we will seek to organize consultations in the regions and at the national level which will address the implications and commitments which this initiative for a Truth Commission will require. These consultations will also look at ways to link our monitoring process with the work of the Commission.

We believe that this monitoring process will result in political control over the macroeconomic neoliberal processes of the current savage and unrestrained capitalism in our country, processes which are the structural cause of the social conflict, both political and military, in our country. We believe that it will also be able to effectively monitor the activities of our legislators and those who govern, so that they will carry out their responsibilities according to the agreed principles of equity, justice and social responsibility.

We believe that the monitoring process must be collective, ecumenical, macro-ecumenical and transparent. Its fundamental premise and criterion is truth.

THE ECUMENICAL PEACE TABLE

We believe in a Christian unity which listens to, addresses and respects the different social processes, creeds and churches which follow the way of Jesus in obedience to the God of Life, a unity which is the expression of a broad ecumenism which respects and celebrates the full gamut of these diverse visions of reality.

We believe that the Ecumenical Peace Table must work to provide significant opportunities for children and youth to express themselves and for their proposals opinions and visions for their lives to be heard. This is all the more important because they have been subjected to multiple forms of violence and persecution throughout their lives.

We believe that the Ecumenical Peace Table will promote processes for dissemination of information, awareness-raising and training in regard to these principal proposals, and will draw us together to mobilize around these principles. We believe that the Table will be able to work to affect change in the communications media which continue to over-represent and legitimize violence. The Table will also strengthen its own communications processes and mechanisms such as the webpage and the social networks.

The Ecumenical Peace Table will create working groups in the major cities and in the local areas, where we will seek to weave a new social fabric, linking with other processes and movements, both national and international. In this way, we will work to overcome the isolation and factionalism which are so common in the ecumenical movement in Colombia.

The Ecumenical Peace Table will promote its ecumenical perspective through reliance on input from the various local areas. This will involve meetings, dialogues and other forms of communications between leaders and representatives of Christian groups in local areas, major cities, and at the Departmental level. The Table will create mechanisms for connecting groups and enabling them to function effectively, and these groups will thus be able to reach parishes, individuals and families. Thus they in turn will be able to bring the ethical principles of coexistence and peace down to the local level. Moreover this will equip them to be able to receive and process reports and grievances in regard to violations of human rights in their communities.

We will also propose an oversight system for the Ecumenical Peace Table itself, using local, national and international participants. A protocol will be established for the identification of tasks, skills, talents and areas of responsibility in each of the organizations and movements which are part of the Table. It will also deal with the concerns and themes which have to be monitored by all the participants in the Table.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR 2013 AND 2014

1. Organize a national concert which will bring to the public at large the efforts being proposed by the Ecumenical Table for Peace. This would involve the broad participation of youth.
2. Organize a National Vigil and Day of Mobilization for Reconciliation and National Reconstruction. This collective action will publicize and gain public support for the monitoring effort. It will encourage people to take over parks and plazas in a nation-wide action involving artists, social networks and the internet. This would be planned to take place in October or November 2013 as the dialogues in Habana are coming to a close.
3. Organize a gathering for women and men and a gathering for youth which would both be linked to these ethical proposals and the peace monitoring process. These would be held in preparation for a second national Forum of the Ecumenical Table for Peace.
4. Promote and participate in the Annual Day for Victims.
5. Promote a dynamic and exciting biblical theological initiative at the national level which would implement a whole re-reading of the Bible. This very broad initiative would enable us to gain a new perspective on peace and ethics.

IN CONCLUSION

Lord Jesus, we believe that peace is possible, that all of us together can bring it about, that in this work we will be witnesses, prophets and tireless monitors of these processes, proclaiming the Good News of God's plan for abundant life.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19)