

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF COLOMBIA IVAN DUQUE MARQUEZ

Mr. President,

The undersigned organizations and individuals—members of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace in Colombia (MEP), composed of grassroots ecclesial communities, churches, congregations, and Christian organizations who are faithful to our religious and spiritual beliefs, to the ethical principles that ground them, and to our mission as the Church of the Poor—met recently on November 15 and 16 for our eighth annual National Gathering, where we dedicated a great deal of our time to **SEE** the global and national reality; to **ASSESS** said reality through the light of the gospel and through the liberating praxis of Jesus of Nazareth and the social doctrine of the Church; and to identify the **ACTION** that is asked of us, which includes the duty to hold accountable those who have the responsibility to guide the destinies of the world and our country. Our Mission and work, as the Church of the Poor of Colombia, focuses on the **prophetic denunciation** of everything that threatens the life and dignity of creation and on the **proclamation** of the transformations that are required to make the Kingdom of God on Earth, which is the kingdom of life and not the kingdom of death.

Mr. President: Seventy-two years ago today, on December 10, the nations of the world, which make up the United Nations, signed and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has been seventy-two long years of struggle for humanity: for the rights and dignity of peoples and to try to eradicate poverty, inequality, violence, exclusion, and discrimination. These are rights that today we see seriously threatened in Colombia by the same state that boasts of being a signatory of this historic Declaration.

SEE

1. We are experiencing a world-system undergoing a situation of crisis caused by savage capitalism and extractivist neoliberalism, which in devouring nature's main gifts generate an environmental imbalance and risk the survival of humanity itself. In Colombia, this is takes shape in the development model that you set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2022, which prioritizes the extractivist and agro-industrial economy that accentuates the accumulation of capital and the greater concentration of large national and transnational companies' corporate power to the detriment of peasant economies, solidarity economic initiatives, and food

sovereignty.

2. We see the contempt and hatred of your government and your party—Centro Democrático (the Democratic Center)—for the poor who live on the periphery of big cities and in our rural areas, especially those who are Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, peasant, women, and victims of the conflict. Several members of your party who serve as senators have enacted racism and discrimination against these populations. This deliberate disregard of the poor, referred to by Adela Cortina as “aporophobia,” consists of marginalizing those who are considered a hindrance or a “social enemy” by sectors of right-wing ideologies and those who exert some kind of power in the state or in society.
3. We see an advancement of a trend that denies reality, truth, conflict and, at the same time, stories are promoted that spread lies and partial information and distort arguments in order to make them appear as truths that must be accepted by all Colombians. This denial, typical of authoritarian regimes, has been seen in some ministers of your government and by the director of the National Center for Historical Memory, to name just a few.
4. We note with sadness and horror that the extermination of social leaders, human rights defenders, does not stop. During your first two years of government, President Duque, 473 leaders have been assassinated (250 in 2019 and 223 to October 2020). Between January and October 2020, 68 massacres were committed in which 270 people died. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement, 232 of its signatories have been assassinated. Contrary to this tragic reality, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of the Interior, and the High Councillor for Human Rights consider that the murders of leaders have decreased; you yourself said publicly that “in Colombia there are no massacres but collective homicides” and that the murders are motivated by drug trafficking. Again, reality is denied and reduced, thus distorting the truth.
5. We see little progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement. The KROC Institute in its latest report indicates how in the two years of your government the agreement’s implementation has only progressed by 6%, which is compounded by

the obstacles that your government has placed on the Agreement. Your attitudes as president simulate a commitment to the implementation of peace, while the head of your party (former president Uribe) proposes a referendum to end the mandate of the Special Jurisdiction of Peace.

6. We identify with amazement how the executive branch is deinstitutionalizing the social and democratic state of law, concentrating power, and distorting democracy. To do this, you have used the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic to issue a series of decrees, several of which do not correspond specifically to addressing the health crisis, to limit citizen freedoms and guarantees that regresses peoples' rights and access to them. The control of power in the hands of the executive branch has been achieved through the recent appointments of the heads of the offices of the Attorney General, Ombudsperson, Prosecutor. The political agenda proposed by your political chief, former President Uribe, in the referendum document would result, for Colombia, in the adoption of state model based on opinion and not on the social and democratic state of law and the absolute limits to liberal democracy. With this agenda an authoritarian state would be consolidated, which would be quite close to taking the form of a fascist model. You, Mr. President, are weakening Colombian democracy by eliminating the mechanism of checks and balances and the structures that play the role of "arbitrators" in the rule of law in any democracy.

7. We see the political use of religious beliefs and sentiments with the majority of the Colombian people that favours the rise of an evangelical caucus with neo-conservative tendencies that defend what they call the common good, authority, and legitimacy; at the same time, debates and the inclusion of subjects of diverse ethnic, gender, sexual diversity, and affective preferences are opposed while racism, patriarchalism, theism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and discrimination are reinforced.

ASSESS

1. From our Christian and faith-based worldview and readings, capitalism and the economic model adopted by your government in the National Development Plan are not a plan for life. As the social scientist and theologian Frank Hinkelammert

points out, we have been left to choose between life and capital. We choose a life of dignity.

2. Our mandate as grassroots Christian organizations and our ecumenical focus is to serve life. With this, we express our conviction to go beyond a merely legal vision of rights and to put at the center threatened life and the right of the poor to life—those who capital hates and rejects.
3. We believe in life as an integral concept that also incorporates the life of nature. The possibilities of a full and dignified life depend on our harmonization with nature and on its comprehensive protection. The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, like the Pan-Amazon Synod and Forum, mark a horizon of possibility of what an integral life could be and of the need to rethink a world-system that introduces environmental justice as a fundamental right of nature and of human beings.
4. We are concerned that, in line with transnational companies, Colombian businesses will oppose the signing of the Escazú Agreement and the signing at the UN of a Binding Treaty on the issue of Business and Human Rights and that you will declare yourself on the side of such positions, without aligning yourself to the truth and instead contributing to distorted interpretations of the very essence of said Agreement.
5. The tendency towards the concentration of power and towards authoritarian ideologies, in addition to curtailing the founding principles of liberal democracy, understand power as a totality. In the name of power, these interests are deified and held up or presented as absolute values that are imposed on society, at the same time that they annihilate any activity (or subject) that opposes the system. Colombia is already experiencing a long period of polarization, McCarthyism, stigmatization, and criminalization of sectors and opinions critical of the current model and system of power. Leaders of those who see themselves above the state have been deified and decide the destinies of an entire people.
6. We have to remember that a reference point of our Christian faith is that the God Yahweh hears the cries of the enslaved, oppressed, and poor, and frees them from

the hands of the enslavers, oppressors, and rich; Yahweh God, God of life, unmask the legitimating gods of power and wealth, revealing them as idols thirsty for human sacrifices, and challenges them. This is the essential perspective on which all biblical traditions have been sustained since the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt (see Exodus 3).

7. The state is there for some but too little for others. The rights of victims of the armed conflict, for which the state is also responsible, are not being recognized. But efforts are made to defend the military, political actors, and state agents who are also implicated in serious acts of political violence. The rights of Afro-descendant and Indigenous ethnic communities and peasant communities to free, prior, and informed consent and consultations are not respected when extractive, fracking, and agro-industrial projects are to be implemented in their territories, and licenses and titles are issued to large extractive companies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, resources have not been allocated to correspond to the historical and structural deficit of public health infrastructure, as in the cases of territories of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, or to the impacts and differentiated needs of women, who are the historical caretakers of life.

8. We are experiencing a complex humanitarian emergency in the country. The escalation of the armed conflict and the expansion of violence in addition to the health crisis are putting some human groups and communities at serious risk of extinction—their survival is in peril. All this is aggravated by the systematic murder of ethnic and social leaders, human rights and environmental defenders, and signatories of the Peace Agreement. As President of Colombia and in compliance with the constitutional mandate to preserve the life and honor of citizens, you cannot continue to let this happen. You have all the constitutional tools to ensure the protection of all lives.

ACT

1. We all have to act. Doing our part as a people of faith in Colombia, we demand that you, Mr. President, fulfill your oath and duty to guarantee the social and democratic state of law and defend democracy in Colombia.

2. We demand that you fully comply with the implementation of the Peace Agreement, within the framework of the commitments assumed on behalf of the state, both with the FARC and with Colombian society who participated in said Agreement with innumerable proposals and has participated in the preparation of initiatives and projects, such as the PDET (Territorially Focused Development Plan) and PNIS (National Illicit Crop Substitution Program) and with the international community, guarantor of the Agreement, and are politically and financially committed to its implementation. Resuming the talks with the ELN is imperative to move towards complete peace as is responding to the call of the UN Security Council for a global humanitarian ceasefire, in this context of a pandemic caused by COVID-19.
3. We demand that you guarantee the protection and defense of the rights of social leaders, of the signatories of the Peace Agreement, and of the opposition leaders, streamlining and making effective the existing mechanisms for such purposes.
4. We demand that you stop the deinstitutionalizing and dismantling trend of the social and democratic state of law; and the undermining of democracy that sets back the guarantees and freedoms of citizens and their access to fundamental rights and enthrones in Colombia an authoritarian regime of a “civil” nature.

Sincerely,
Ecumenical Forum for Peace

The [original letter in Spanish with organizational sign-ons is available via the Ecumenical Forum for Peace's website](#). The [letter was also posted on Change.org](#) to collect individual signatures.