

**RETHINKING PLAN COLOMBIA:
THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS GROWS AND THE U.S. IS CALLED UPON TO RESPOND**

Plan Colombia was passed into law in 2000 with the stated objectives of strengthening democracy, promoting human rights and the rule of law, fostering socio-economic development, and reducing coca cultivation in Colombia. Lutheran World Relief, a relief and development agency, has observed in work with Colombian partner organizations that not only has Plan Colombia failed to meet expected marks of achievement, but the situation for the most vulnerable Colombians has grown considerably worse.

The depth of the crisis of internal displacement in Colombia is the foremost indicator of the persistence of the internal Colombian conflict.

Internal displacement in Colombia continues to worsen despite almost \$4 billion invested through Plan Colombia aimed at resolving this torn nation's crises. U.S. policy toward Colombia has failed to make a dent in the humanitarian crisis that the United Nations calls the worst in the Western hemisphere.

Current U.S. policy must be altered to meet the needs of more than 3 million internally displaced persons who do not have adequate assistance, recognition, or opportunity to design their own destinies after being violently pushed from their homes and lands by Colombia's raging conflict.

Lutheran World Relief works with churches, humanitarian organizations and community groups to serve the immediate and long term needs of those affected by the Colombian conflict, particularly the most vulnerable, and especially internally displaced persons. However, the scale of the crisis requires a concerted effort from the international community to both rebuild sustainable community life and to support a negotiated end to the conflict.

Lutheran World Relief asks the U.S. Congress to **recognize and respond to the gravest humanitarian crisis in our hemisphere**. Current funding levels within Plan Colombia provide 80% of aid to the military and police, while leaving a paltry amount for social and economic assistance.

We urge you to name social and economic assistance for Colombia as a top U.S. priority. To do so the U.S. must balance the package for Colombia with significantly increased funding for social and economic assistance and decreased military assistance.

Addressing the massive humanitarian and security crisis and its particular impact on vulnerable populations requires the U.S. Congress to:

- **Acknowledge the ongoing conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis**
- **Increase funding for internally displaced persons**
- **Address the protection crisis for rural communities and internally displaced persons**
- **Provide recognition of and programming specifically for women**

Acknowledge the ongoing conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis

The depths of Colombia's armed conflict are most clearly manifested in the humanitarian crisis facing the nation, particularly the 3 million internally displaced persons. The Colombian state and the international community must address the human suffering resulting from more than forty years of ongoing armed conflict.

The U.S. government should publicly name the heightened crisis of internal displacement in Colombia while providing direct assistance to affected Colombian populations. The U.S. should also encourage the government of Colombia to comply with its own laws requiring the state to provide assistance for internally displaced persons, implement strategies for prevention, strengthen structures within local governments, and create durable solutions for internally displaced populations.

Increase funding to address the humanitarian crisis and mounting internal displacement

U.S. funding for internally displaced persons has diminished as the number of internally displaced persons has grown. In fiscal year 2001 \$36 million was allocated to internally displaced persons. That number has fallen with each budget year, with the GAO reporting \$21 million for internally displaced persons in fiscal year 2004.

Current levels of funding do not come close to meeting the vast needs of affected communities. LWR partners note that aid typically lasts for only a few months, and does not meet basic needs nor does it create any stability for the many who are unable to return home for the next months or even years. The resulting crisis is seen in housing, education, and health care, and a fundamental lack of any structure to assist this growing group of the victims of war.

We urge the U.S. Congress to increase levels of assistance allocated to internally displaced persons.

Address the protection crisis for rural communities and internally displaced persons

The Early Warning System, supported by the U.S. government as an instrument for the prevention of systematic and massive human rights violations and the defense of international humanitarian law, has not been effective. When activated to prompt a response to emergencies or developing threats that face vulnerable (often rural) communities, it has garnered only a 50% response rate. Urgent improvements are necessary to integrate the Early Warning System into comprehensive state strategies to protect civil society from the effects of armed conflict. The U.S. government should monitor and evaluate the use and effectiveness of the Early Warning System and ensure that necessary improvements are included.

Returns of internally displaced persons must be voluntary with guarantees for security, sustainability and dignity. The Colombian government affirms that it has returned 70,000 Colombians to their place of origin. Nevertheless, based on information from LWR partners, the returns have not complied with the principles of security and dignity, with a few cases of involuntary, forced return. Internally displaced persons who do return to their lands often do so only because the conditions they face in displacement are so inhumane and debilitating that they prefer the insecurity of return. Special attention must be given to the protection of collective land rights held by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities during the return process, particularly recognizing that both groups have been disproportionately affected by violence and internal displacement due to conflict. The United States should pressure the Colombian government to be vigilant in the process of returning internally displaced persons, ensuring that all returns are voluntary, and meet the principles of security, sustainability and dignity.

The establishment of a strong and lasting peace must ensure the alleviation of the vast human suffering in Colombia along with the establishment of a negotiation framework that ensures peace, justice and reparations to victimized groups. Land and goods stolen from internally displaced persons and other groups must be repatriated as part of any recognized peace negotiation. Effective mechanisms must be established for the restitution of individually and collectively held lands and goods that were destroyed by the conflict or by the perpetrators of displacement. Specifically within the current negotiations with paramilitary groups, the U.S. should advocate for a guarantee of the dismantling of illegal structures and the inclusion of truth, justice, and reparations that include the return of stolen lands and other illegally obtained goods, with special attention to women heads of households and the collectively held land of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.

Provide recognition of and programming specifically for women

Violence against women, particularly sexual violence and exploitation, is perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, and continues to be widespread. Women also are disproportionately affected by internal displacement. Seventy-five percent of internally displaced persons are women and their children, according to the 2003 World Bank publication Colombia, the Economic Foundation of Peace.

But women are not simply victims. They play pivotal roles in the sustainability and reconstruction of family and community life and the promotion of democracy and improvement of living conditions throughout the country. LWR understands the leadership of women to be essential, particularly within sectors that have been affected by conflict and subsequent conditions of poverty in Colombia.

Women in Colombia should be recognized for their unique roles, both as victims and as leaders. All U.S. assistance programs should include mechanisms for the participation of women in program design and implementation. Specifically, the U.S. should support programs to strengthen local governments to respond to challenges of women's participation, gender inclusion, protection and social assistance while encouraging meaningful dialogue between women's organizations and Colombian governmental institutions.

WHO IS LWR? Headquartered in Baltimore Maryland, Lutheran World Relief (LWR) has been responding to emergencies and disasters since its founding in 1945. Working through partners and global relief and development networks, LWR works in 50 countries to provide not only relief but to combat the causes of poverty and restore the dignity it robs from people's lives. We advocate for fair trade that helps farming families earn a better income. We teach people to better care for themselves, their communities and the environment. We teach people how to be less vulnerable to natural disasters. We advocate with them for policy change that more fairly represents them. We counsel them after human and natural disasters, and help them recover with material aid and long-term programs. We do all of this exclusively with partners from the communities we serve.

LWR works on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, individuals and parish groups.