

STATEMENT OF THE 82nd PLENARY ASSEMBLY

THE CHURCH'S COMMITMENT IN THE FACE OF THE CHALLENGES FACING OUR NATION

The Bishops of the Catholic Church in Colombia, meeting in the 82nd Plenary Assembly to address the issue of "The Church's Missionary Action," announce to all Colombians that because we have received the Word of God through Jesus Christ as the Father's Missionary, He sends us out to the world to proclaim with our life his message of salvation.

Our vocation as disciples of Jesus is the mission of shepherding the flock entrusted to us, with the commitment to respond to the challenges facing our nation.

Reflecting on Colombia, which has taken positive steps toward progress and has reason for hope, but which yearns for peace, we Bishops unite our voices in a call for reconciliation with God, with ourselves, with others and with creation.

With reconciliation as a purpose and a principle, we accompany the Colombian people on their journey, so that victims, perpetrators and society as a whole understand the depth of forgiveness, so as to establish a peace that denotes not merely the absence of war, but "fullness of life," life with dignity and abundant life for all (John 10:10).

Lies are one of the causes of any conflict and the main obstacle to any effort at political negotiation. We must immerse ourselves in the way of truth to restore the dignity of the victims, who play the leading role in reconciliation and are privileged to possess the grace of forgiveness, which can and should only arise within them if we seek to break the cycle of animosity, resentment and vengeance that sometimes becomes a burden too heavy to bear.

Truth is necessary to heal the wounds caused by the violence, as a necessary step toward peace, so that those who have caused harm sincerely recognize the sin committed by attacks on the life and liberty of other brothers and sisters.

In these times, when people accuse one another of "para-politics" and a violent past, we Bishops urge all sides to remain calm, and without flagging in our seeking and speaking of the truth, we call on them to also address other problems affecting Colombia. Putting special interests ahead of the country's interests confuses people and leads to chaos.

The country cries for endless acts of truth in the national, departmental and local political spheres, ahead of partisan interests, so as to put a stop to corruption and purify democratic institutions, so that they can respond effectively to citizens' demands for inclusion, participation and social justice.

We hear the lament in our communities: government agencies, the legislature, the executive branch, the judiciary, the Constitutional Court, the armed forces and oversight bodies are in serious crisis. Because we support solid government institutions, this pains us and concerns us. We encourage efforts to uncover acts that have undermined the legitimacy of state institutions and to design and implement the necessary corrective measures.

We also demand truth and clarification of the signs of systematic persecution by various sectors, groups and individuals against the values that the Church defends, which are born of the Gospel and grounded in respect for life, human dignity and the family.

We call on the media to support the building of a society that values truth. This means working with honesty and equality. We will hold firm to our commitment to value communicators as bearers of news that contribute to the building of a new homeland, and we will accompany them so that they use the media with humanity as the core value. We invite them to contribute to calm debate, without fanning flames.

We recognize the government's efforts to broaden access to education. Nevertheless, the dynamics of globalization impose higher levels of quality. We encourage education for conscience and peace in the family, in school, in the Church and in society.

The call to reconciliation also involves a national effort to establish conditions for justice, knowing that the goal is charity.

Figures show economic growth, but we are pained as we see poverty increasing. We call on banks, industry and business associations not to forget that the economy must be at the service of men and women, and must aim to solve the problems of unemployment, hunger and people's basic needs.

We call on everyone in the country not to forget small farmers, who cannot find the incentive to remain in the countryside, and the displaced, who find neither the reasons nor the conditions necessary for returning to their land.

Ethnic minorities ask that their dignity as persons and their opportunities for self-determination be respected, and that they be provided with the assistance needed to participate appropriately in public life and develop their own vision of and plans for the future.

The armed conflict, whose causes are not completely addressed, continues to afflict large sectors of the population; those involved in it threaten the country's institutions and commit extortion against our society.

For us as Bishops of Colombia, the destruction of our brothers and sisters who remain deprived of their liberty, subjected to abduction, weighs on our conscience. We will not be silenced, nor will we flag in our efforts until both the national government and the FARC-EP make their freedom possible through a humanitarian agreement.

We support other humanitarian agreements that lead to the eradication of kidnap-for-ransom, anti-personnel mines, aggression against civil society and displacement in Colombia.

We are willing to accompany any process that leads to reconciliation and peace in Colombia. We call on the FARC to facilitate opportunities for negotiation and dialogue. We express our encouragement of the process involving the national government and the ELN, and we invite the demobilized members of the self-defense groups to continue with courage and transparency the process that has begun, faithful to the commitment to

contribute to truth, justice and reparation. We denounce and oppose the formation of new armed groups.

We maintain a commitment to unlimited assistance for the victims, and we will accompany them in the defense of their rights to reparation and memory, encouraging the greatness of forgiveness.

Those who make a living from illicit crops are the target of government prosecution; nevertheless, drug trafficking continues to be the driving force behind corruption and the armed conflict and the cause of many ills in the country.

We in the Church, lay people, religious, priests and bishops, recognize our limitations and failings, and commit ourselves to raising our prophetic voice to denounce lies and corruption and proclaim the truth — which is simply the defense of life from conception until natural death, human dignity, equal opportunity and honesty — so that together we build a country in which everyone has a place and no one is marginalized.

The Church will continue to proclaim a message of hope and call for a national accord for peace and reconciliation, to which everyone can contribute, so as to build a nation in which we all have a place with dignity and with possibilities for self-fulfillment as citizens and children of God.

We raise our prayer to God to send his spirit and live in the hearts of all Colombians, granting us the strength and wisdom to discern the signs of life and death and to make decisions for building a just society.

May the Blessed Mary, Queen and Mother of Colombia, intercede for us before her Son, who is rich in mercy and Lord of Peace.

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