

PUBLIC STATEMENT ON COLOMBIA

Due to the escalation of violence, the worsening of the living conditions of a large part of the population, the current health situation and the risk of slowing down the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the Colombia Working Group composed of members of the undersigned Caritas organizations, invites the international community to pay particular attention to the following situations:

1. The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which in Colombia has not yet reached its peak, has negatively affected the whole population, leading to a deterioration in the living conditions of those groups that are historically and structurally most vulnerable: migrants, indigenous, poor people, homeless and those deprived of liberty. We ask for special attention to the health and humanitarian situation that the Amazonian and Pacific regions are experiencing, where there are high rates of both COVID-19 cases and fatalities.

Faced with this situation, the Catholic Church in Colombia together with the Caritas Internationalis Network, has mobilised national and international cooperation and solidarity to improve the situation of those populations most affected by the humanitarian crisis. We have adapted our projects to provide humanitarian aids such as food, drinking water, hygiene kits, multipurpose cash transfers, temporary accommodation and psychosocial and spiritual aid through the different ecclesiastical jurisdictions across Colombia. Through projects directly run by the National Secretariat of Social Pastoral (Caritas Colombia), more than 6,140 families are being helped, and with national government support more than 21,826 food and hygiene kits, have been delivered or are scheduled to be delivered in the coming weeks.

We request the continued accompaniment and support of the international community so that we can jointly develop and coordinate humanitarian actions, in response to the health and social emergency caused by COVID 19.

2. Regarding situations of violence, we would like to express our concern at the increasing action of both new and old armed groups, who, taking advantage of the lockdown situation, seek to take control of some regions, affecting the communities that inhabit them. As a result of this, and other factors, the increase in violence and murders against social leaders and the forced recruitment of minors is alarming. According to the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (IDEPAZ in Spanish) in the last two months, during the COVID-19 lockdown period, 51 social leaders have been killed. Additionally, the Coalition Against the Recruitment of Children and Young People into the Colombian Armed

Conflict (COALICO in Spanish) warns that at least 128 children and adolescents have been recruited in the first five months of the year, representing an increase of 113% compared to 2019 figures. This context is further worsened by the slowdown in the implementation of the Peace Accords, and the announcement of the end of the ELN cease-fire.

We therefore request that the International Community monitor and develop effective actions that ensure the protection of the life and integrity of the hundreds of social leaders and human rights defenders, who are currently threatened and at risk. We also ask for support to raise an international alert regarding the increase in forced recruitment of children by illegal armed groups, and to support joint actions focused on eliminating this practice, particularly given the current escalation of conflict and the reconfiguration of the armed groups in the territories. Finally, we thank you, in the various roles that you have, for continuing to accompany the Peace Agreements implementation and monitoring the transparent use of the resources allocated for this purpose; as well as building toward future dialogues with the ELN that contribute to Colombian peacebuilding and the strengthening of community social fabric.

June 1, 2020

