

## BARRANCABERMEJA SOLIDARITY MISSION WITH ECAP/CPT

March 23-27, 2009-04-04

Reporter and editor: Kathryn Poethig

### INTRODUCTION

Our delegation of six arrived Barranca on a cloudy wet day in March (minus Farsijana who was desperately searching for her passport back in Bogota). As a joint delegation of Peace for Life and the Interfaith Institute for Justice Peace and Social Movements we hoped to meet women, youth, and LGBT groups affected by Colombia's intractable conflict. We represented the Philippines, Brazil, Indonesia, Canada and the US, all of us are Christians and both straight and gay .. Sandra Milena, the Coordinator of the Colombia Christian Peacemaker Team was our organizer and host for our four day exposure to Barrancebermeja and the Magdalena Medio region.

CPT's mission is to offer

an organized, nonviolent alternative to war and other forms of lethal inter-group conflict. CPT provides organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy.<sup>1</sup>

We had come from an international conference in Bogota on "Without Fear of Empire: Global People's Resistance," the Second People's Forum of Peace for Life hosted in Colombia by *Proyecto Justicia y Vida*. Peace for Life (PfL) is a global faith-based movement resisting militarized globalization. This conference was intended to set Colombia's armed conflict and struggle within a larger global context.

We were thus eager to get to Barranca in Magdalene Medio region, in one of Colombia's Zona Rojo or 'red zones' to learn more about Colombian situation 'on the ground' and to show solidarity for people who were both affected by the violence and refuse to be defined by it.

In what follows members of our delegation reflect on aspects of our visit that made the greatest impact. Because of this, the reflection does not address every part of our well-organized time in Barrancabermeja

### **Colombia**

Vivian de Lima, consultant with the secretariat of Peace for Life and a member of our delegation, sets the Colombian situation in the PfL concept paper:

The people of Colombia are living the nightmare of over 40 years of civil war, as guerrilla groups have waged an ongoing struggle against Colombian governments, and as the present government seizes upon the conflict in order to serve the interests of elite groups in the country and of

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Peacemaker Teams, "Mission Statement," December 1986, [www.cpt.org/publications/history](http://www.cpt.org/publications/history).

transnational empire and capital. This is an internal and complex conflict, indeed, but it is one that is exacerbated, maintained, and, in many ways, created by, the external interests of U.S. global empire.

Millions of Colombian people are displaced internally by this conflict. Numerous military, paramilitary groups, and "self-defence" units for large landowning elites afflict non-combatant civilians, especially in the rural areas. Guerrilla groups have made their contributions to the agony of present-day Colombia, violating human rights, and causing popular displacement, but independent analysts the world over, such as a recent joint study, *Call To Investigate*, by Amnesty International and Fellowship of Reconciliation, emphasize that the majority of abuses and their systemic occurrence are the result of military, paramilitary and various "self-defence" groups that are supported by the government and the corporate interests it serves.

Colombia is also especially strategic for U.S. imperial interests... the U.S has since 2000 invested almost 5 billion dollars funding right-wing governments that have been directly linked to the killing of trade unionists, human rights workers and *campesinos* (rural workers of the land). The paramilitaries are trained and directed by the Colombian military and their U.S. military advisors. In fact, recent studies by Amnesty International and the Fellowship for Reconciliation document that the highest occurrence of human rights abuses occur in areas where U.S. trained Colombian military are operating.

Only later did we also learn in *Washington Post* that the two former US ambassadors to Colombia --Anne Patterson and William Wood – are now U.S. ambassador to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has indicated that this trend is expected to continue since Colombia's "lessons" are applicable "specifically to Afghanistan."

### **BARRANCA , A red city in a red zone**

Barranca is known as the red city for its long history as a centre for resistance to oppression. Because of the militancy of popular groups in the region and because of the resource rich the Magdalena Medio region has been the site of some of the most vicious repression.

Set up on the Magdalena River, Barranca began as an oil boomtown for Standard Oil in the early 1900's. Today, three-quarters of Colombia's fuel comes from the area, now run by Colombian oil refinery Ecopetrol. It hosts one of the most formidable labor unions , Unión Sindical Obrera , who initiated the first labor strike in the 1930s in which women were also involved. <sup>2</sup> The Catholic church has had a long history of supporting popular groups. Barranca is also known as the birthplace of the guerilla groups ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* or National Liberation Army) who found support in the region with oil workers who wanted to protect Colombian oil from foreign exploitation. It had in its leadership radical Catholic priest Camilo Torres and later Manuel Perez. In the 1990s, the more powerful FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) ousted the ELN in the region. But in the late 1990's the

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<sup>2</sup> Center for International Policy NEW MASTERS OF BARRANCA <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0401barr.htm>

region was subjected to the bloody brutal onslaught of the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) intent on wresting control of the city and surrounding region from both ELN and FARC, resulting in many massacres, disappearances, assassinations and displacements throughout the region in the period between 1998 and 2002.

The AUC negotiated with the Uribe government to begin demobilizing in July of 2003. When the process supposedly ended in August 2006, approximately 32,000 paramilitaries had handed over their weapons. But many analysts indicate that this has just led to a restructuring of the paramilitary forces. The Bogotá-based Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ) indicates in 2006 that 43 new paramilitary groups totaling almost 4,000 fighters had formed in 23 of the country's 32 departments.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, there is an increase in assassinations in the Magdalena Medio region in the last years.

Luiza Tomita aptly characterizes our first images at the Barranca airport.

The intense security at the airport, made by the military force - with an apparatus of almost a dozen and a half helicopters - only served to reinforce our idea that, though everything seemed calm, their force could be felt not only in the lives of all the citizens of the city but also the cities along the Magdalena Medio.

"What are all those helicopters for?" we ask Sandra on our way to the city. "Fumigation," she says. And intimidation is the thought of many of us as well. US funded aircraft are intended to eradicate the coca in mountains, but at the same time it is used to destroy small peasant landholdings, facilitating displacement of the peasants - see CPT website. The CPT staff house is set in a pleasant working class neighborhood in Barranca. The streets wind like a delta of asphalt, evidence of its early life as a boom town for the oil industry where workers set up homesteads first, and the streets came later. "Don't wander off too far" was a warning we heeded. CPT arrived in Colombia - and in the Magdalena Medio region in 2001 at the invitation of the Mennonite church. CPT staff arrived in Barranca after the town had succumbed to the paramilitary,

At a presentation given by Peace and Development staff (an ngo started by the Jesuits and whose function has been to support alternative economic development as a strategy to undermine the war). We discovered there are cattle farms, African palm oil plantations, oil and gas wells, goldmines, uranium, coal... and coca throughout the region and three-quarters of Colombia's fuel comes from Barrancabermeja.

### **Denise Nadeau**

Vancouver, Canada / Director, Interfaith Institute on Peace, Justice and Social Movements, Vancouver

While our delegation was somewhat different from typical Northern white gringo ones - in that we were three from the South and four gringos from the North- we were still privileged outsiders. So a dynamic of sitting in circles, listening or questioning, with people who had taken time out of their lives to meet with us, to tell their stories, with us carrying the privileges of passport, class, sometimes race, sometimes gender, sometimes sexuality, sometimes regional location - they carrying the oppressions of war violence, loss, displacement, impoverishment,

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<sup>3</sup> "Paramilitary Demobilization," U.S. Office on Colombia, 15 December 2007.

race, location - was ever present. For me it was an awkward dynamic, somewhat transcended in occasional moments of the heart, the hugs at the end of some of our encounters. ( Organización Femina populaire San Pablo and the Families of the 16 mayo Massacre, 1998)

**Luiza E. Tomita**

São Paulo, Brazil / EATWOT – Executive secretary & Treasurer

What I can tell is that the whole of the trip had a very meaningful impact on my way of looking to Latin American peoples who are in struggle for life and peace.

what impressed me in Colombia was the way the claim came from almost the whole society: the labor workers, the rural workers, the people who are losing their homes or their jobs, the people who has lost some relative or close friend and specially the ones who had never heard what happened to them (the so called “disappeared”) etc.. And worst for the women who were probably not only tortured, but also brutally raped and wounded.

And among them are a lot of people being persecuted, who have to “disappear” for a while as they are considered “dangerous” for the order imposed by the paramilitary forces.

We met a lot of groups that emerged from this situation of conflict, some protesting against unjust practices as murders and arrests, some as resistance groups, some as educational organizations for conscience rising or just offering an alternative education through arts (theater, music, arts crafts etc.).

Some of the people we met were in more than one movement as they see how the struggles are interconnected and how their activities are not just a punctual action (with practical and close results) but also a commitment with a deep change in the mentality of a whole community.

**Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta**

Jogyakarta, Indonesia/ Professor of Anthropology, Duta Wacana Christian University (DWCU)

I name my trip to Barrancabermeja as a trip of call. I still remember the morning reflection after being there several days that allowed us to repeat a poem which titled “If you want”:

If you want,  
the virgin will come walking  
down the road  
pregnant with the holy...

Yes, because I wanted, I could end my trip in Colombia by being there in Barrancabermeja. Despite going through a fear that I had lost my passport in Bogota (I found it), I decided to join the group late to experience Barrancabermeja’s challenges, an example of the complex conflict mentioned repeatedly during the Second People’s Forum of Peace for Life in Bogota. The struggles of people’s movements show their unique method and strategy. Again, in Barrancabermeja I felt like I revisited Colombia where I could share my solidarity for those women, youth and civil society who have transformed their anger with a living strategy to overcome the possibility to be trapped by anger and retaliation at the loss of family members.

## WOMEN ADDRESSING THE CONFLICT

'Neither a Peace that Oppresses us, nor a war that destroys us.' OFP

OFP (La Organizacion Feminina Popular) in Barranca.

The dominant theme of our visit was the effect of conflict on women and youth and how these groups were organizing for justice and peace. We had three encounters with OFP, one in their regional headquarters in Barranca, with a meeting with a OFP leader, Anita (Anna); another an hour's ride by pumpboat up the Rio Magdalena to San Pablo, meeting with the local OFP chapter; and a third was the Clothesline Art Show – La Memoria al Viento, keeping memory of their 35 years history alive with the wind. Our connection with OFP proved to be one of the most enduring experiences of our brief visit.

### **Pamela Brubaker**

Los Angeles, United States

Professor of Religion and Ethics at California Lutheran University.

Of the many experiences that linger in my memory, the visits with the OFP (La Organization Feminina Popular) stand out. I was intrigued to learn that there were Casas de las Mujeres (Women's Houses) in neighborhoods in Barranca and other towns. The house in Barranca is filled with colorful posters and murals expressing their resistance to violence and injustice against women and their communities. The organization began in 1972 as part of the Christian base community movement in Latin America. The women ran a community kitchen, providing low cost, nutritious meals for people in the neighborhood. Their work expanded to include programs addressing violence against women; training in non-violence and developing economic alternatives and providing reproductive and other health services for women. Taking up these issues led to the organization becoming autonomous from the Roman Catholic Church in 1988. OFP began speaking out against armed violence and war in Colombia, which led to some of their leaders being assassinated or forced into exile. One of their slogans asserts that women do not give birth to or raise sons and daughters for war (la Guerra)! Meeting the women of OFP in San Pablo whose entire community had been displaced by violence brought home the human cost of the armed conflict in Colombia.

### **Luiza Tomita**

The women's organization (OFP – Organización Femenina Popular) is the thing that most impressed me, during the visit to Barranca Bermeja, as my experience with poor women (in the periphery of the capital city of Sao Paulo for over 20 years) has shown me that all of these organizations (with very rare exceptions) disappear after some years of existence or are transformed into another type of organization by lack of people/coordinators with administrator's skills. OFP is in its 35 year.

### **Kathryn Poethig**

After I returned from Barranca, I read up on OFP and was gratified to learn that one of our few progressive senators Paul Wellstone visited OFP in 2001 at the height of the paramilitary violent takeover....OFP had been harassed by the powerful paramilitary group United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia many times and their choice to to continue to speak out is a sure sign of courage. Right before Senator Wellstone arrived, an armed man made his way to the OFP kitchen, ripped open the cook's blouse with his knife and demanded the addresses of workers. She refused to give him the information. Her courage was evident – she remained to serve lunch and tell her story, her ripped blouse held together with safety-pins.

Of course, this woman had a name, a family, a story, but in the short incident, she was nameless. After meeting the women of OFP, I was struck by how often we who are the 'visitors' or those privileged to *choose* to be 'in solidarity' do this to 'the people' or 'victims'. A kind of semiotic erasure.

### **Pam Brubaker**

We ended our time in Barranca at the OFP exhibition, "La Memoria al Viento," at a local school. Articles of clothing printed with slogans and posters were hung from clotheslines, a chronicle of OFP's 37 years and vivid testimony to the powerful force of women united to reclaim their people's freedom.

### **Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta**

I was touched by the simplicity of their message... all their memories are written in the hanging clothes including a shirt or skirt or a trouser of the victims left after he or she was killed. Collective memories are celebrated to overcome the violence. By holding this exhibition around students, they share openly the suffering, transforming it to become life for everybody. Violence is faced, not feared.

### **Denise Nadeau**

I have come away most inspired by OFP (La Organization Feminina Popular ). I remember Anita saying they rejected Western feminism in that their priority is the daily survival needs of women in the midst of war. . . Their work is that of creating non-violent spaces, spaces of peace whose goal is the rebuilding of a shattered social web. For OFP this has been through housing support, much skill training, and promoting an ethic of non-violence and acceptance of difference.

### San Pablo's Displaced Women

The OFP staff had asked CPT to send our small delegation to its office in San Pablo. Thirty of the 80+ killings since January had occurred in that river town, and an international delegation would send a message that this had not gone unnoticed. Since we have returned another murder has taken place, a leader of the Union of Small Mners and Farmers from the South Bolivar area of the region.

This time, we put on the blue CPT vest that signaled an official accompaniment visit. CPT visits and accompanies groups and individuals who are at risk of being kidnapped, or killed. We boarded a 30-passenger pump boat that deftly skirted debris on our way up the gray Magdalena River. Along the shore, we noted oil and gas fields and an extensive African palm plantation. Once in San Pablo, we walked to a small community of displaced women from Lechazo, a small peasant community about 60 k from San Pablo. We were greeted by 15 of the women in a circle under a large shady tree, with some of their children playing at their feet.

Colombia has the second largest IDP population in the world, second only to Sudan. In 96 per cent of cases, this internal displacement has been triggered by direct threats, violence and fighting. <sup>4</sup> It is estimated that more than half of registered IDPs are children and youth below the age of 20. Children in areas of displacement face serious protection threats such as family separation, forced recruitment, and land mines as well as can experience or witness violence, including sexual violence.

Two to six million hectares of land are estimated to be controlled by paramilitary groups. Though formally demobilized in 2006, new paramilitary formations such as the Black Eagles have continued the practice of land grabbing.

The guerrilla, the military and the paramilitary have targeted some rural communities even more than Barrancabermeja, in their dispute for control of those areas. Rather than engage the guerrilla directly, a common tactic of the two latter groups is to try to eliminate the support-base of the guerrilla by depopulating the area of civilians - to drain the pool so the fish have nowhere to swim.<sup>5</sup>

## Denise Nadeau

As we journeyed through a very small section of the Magdalena Medio region, an hour and a half boat ride to San Pablo and back, and as we met with the Development and Peace men, Ubencil and Santiago, who gave names and corporate faces to the dynamics of displacement, murder, massacre and conflict in the region, it became very apparent that the fight for control of resources is a central core to this war and that is how we in the North are implicated. Gold, coal, uranium, natural gas, oil, as well as palm oil plantations and cattle ranching that displace peasants are the range of economic resources coveted by multinationals in the region. The FTA deal between Canada and Colombia will only increase the displacement of these people, disposable so that our

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<sup>4</sup> The estimates of the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Colombia differ, depending on the source. National NGO Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES) has recorded 4,247,882 IDPs from 1985 to the end of 2007 with 305,966 newly displaced in 2007; the government's registry of displaced population (RUPD) gives the number of 2,452,152, with 288,406 displaced and registered in 2007 (data as of 31 March 2008). *Submission from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism established by the Human Rights Council in Resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007*

<sup>5</sup> Center for International Policy NEW MASTERS OF BARRANCA..  
<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/0401barr.htm>

corporations can benefit. We have two directions to follow- to continue to expose Canadian complicity in this war and to support and make known the popular groups who are resisting the terror non-violently, so that they will be protected.

### Luiza Tomita

Colombia is a very rich country in resources: petroleum, minerals, precious stones, and gold. And what should be a reason for people's welfare has become a reason for people's misfortune. Because the elite fight to take possession of these rich resources, the ordinary people are killed and persecuted, being entrenched between the main political groups. However, I feel that there is a strong movement from the basis as the people is not only resisting but also organizing to protest and act collectively against this conservative government headed by President Uribe and the paramilitary forces.

Colombia's legislation to protect IDPs, conscientious objectors, and others is the most advanced in the region. But it is not effective. This discrepancy was pointed out over and over again.

### Denise Nadeau

#### Reflecting on San Pablo

Green blue slender beak hibiscus hot sun impervious hummingbird  
Circle of chairs white plastic solidarity seekers with different community leaders  
Darts around bush lush with yellow stamens scarlet petals  
Community in the shadow of fear  
Paramilitary threats of social cleansing, woman lawyer her voice lowers veil of pain over  
face Phone call that morning, a death threat, someone risks dying or leaving.  
Elders have no food on the weekends,  
hummingbird swoops in flash of emerald disappearing.  
Palm oil extraction plant, lake fish polluted, ground water at risk,  
Plantations for bio fuel displace  
cleansing bare feet in muddy puddle young man carrying bucket slowly crosses the field  
we sit under the moving shade of a cebu tree  
the women of OFP San Pablo standing in the circle  
two lime green parrots with clipped wings watch from the tree perch above  
three young boys barefoot soon to be recruited sit in the dirt  
Delphelia tells their story young thin lanky in pale blue jeans and long earrings

We shift our chairs with the sun. The women do not move

We adjust sun hats, bug dope, water bottles, write notes

"We are women ignored by the state, the municipality, abused physically, emotionally, yet we are strong women and hope we will not be forgotten by you"

Shifting in the burning sun,

We listen, witness, accompany for a few hours

Take a rusty ancient red Datsun taxi back to the boat

Buy a sweet bread and we are off down the river

A moment to wash one's feet in muddy water.

## YOUTH RESISTING VIOLENCE

“Where love is the key war can not happen”

Donde el Amor es la clave la Guerra no cabe

Quinto Mandemento, Fifth Commandment, a war resisters group, had grown out of a youth group of OFP.<sup>6</sup> As a small group of conscientious objectors, Quinto Mandemento joined the National Assembly of Conscientious Objectors of Colombia to register their non violent position and protest illegal conscription of youth by the military. They noted that Article 18 of Colombia’s 1991 Constitution refers to freedom of conscience and guarantees the right that “No one will be obligated to act against his conscience”.<sup>7</sup> However, in various cases, soldiers would pick up young men and force them to sign papers for their enlistment.

Quinto Mandemento, members are involved with Legion del Afecto , a youth group that organizes disaffected youth through art , creativity and ritual, what they call alternative languagesOne of their slogans is “afecion es affective!”

### **Rev. Darren Liepold**

Toronto, Canada / Mission and Service Fund, United Church of Canada

Barrio Arenal is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Barrancabermeja. Situated on the banks of Magdalena River, residents of the barrio face a daily life of poverty and violence. The paramilitaries and government armies are constantly looking for recruits. They also see the young residents of the barrio as easy targets- and too often use threats of harm to calm any opposition to their rule of terror. Murders and disappearances are a far too frequent occurrence. Unable to pay for school uniforms and supplies, young residents aren’t able to go to school, are unlikely to escape the impoverished neighborhood.

In such an environment it would be easy to give up hope. One could try to participate in the illegal drug trade or escape through military service and continue being part of a 50 year old civil war. One way of fighting the daily violence that these people face is through more violence. Or one might just struggle to remain under the radar, and hope that they will be able to eek out a living.

But young residents here have been given another option. The Legion del Afecto is a group that seeks to resist the inequities of life in Arenal. Using not the tools of war, the young people here use the weapons of music, art and dance to prove that there can be life outside of the cycle of

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<sup>6</sup> See English language statement on WRI website: The power of the gun perpetuates a war that destroys and oppresses us <http://www.wri-irg.org/news/2008/quintomandamiento-en.htm> .

<sup>7</sup>The state of militarization and conscientious objection in Colombia <http://www.wri-irg.org/co/colombia2007-en.htm>.

violence. Through their art, they express hope- hope that life can be changed- hope that they and their families can escape violence- hope that life can be different.

### **Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta**

Only those who are critical and faithful to their vision of struggles, can get out from the cycle of violence.

I remember enjoying the dance of fish and biting on drum from a member of Legion of Affection....I told the gathering after seeing their Samba and Mestizo energy of the cultural performance that without going to Barrancabermeja and meeting them I will believe that only with violence, this armed conflict can be solved... I told this youth that I will go home to Indonesia with a light heart because I know there are faithful communities empowering their cultural and religious roots to stop the cycle of violence. I feel like the words of the poem have lived in the society because they allow the holiness to be alive in their society as what it has affected my life...

...and say / I need shelter for night,  
please take me inside your heart/ My time is so close.  
Then under the roof of your soul /you will witness  
the sublime/ the intimacy / the divine,  
the Christ / taking birth / forever.

### **DISPOSABLE / LOCO / CLEANSED**

#### Diversidad Humana

Homophobia is a useful prejudice in choosing which groups to eliminate. This is particularly the case for gay men involved with the church. The men who represent Diversidad Humana were affiliated with both the Protestant and Catholic churches and all had stories about religious denigration of LGBT communities. Since January 19 gays and lesbians had been murdered in Colombia.

In both Barranca and San Pablo, activists spoke about the leaflets of "Operación Limpieza" , , operation clean-up, a threat of social cleansing, presumably distributed by the Black Eagle and other notorious paramilitary groups. These leaflets declared hunting season on individuals considered 'undesirable' and a danger to society. Those targeted include sex workers, youths, delinquents, those with long hair and earrings, drug users and dealers and the homeless. This pamphlet has been circulated in Bogotá, Cali, Barranquilla, Cúcuta, Sincelejo, Barrancabermeja, Villavicencio, San José del Guaviare, Neiva and La Dorada. While OFP, Legion del Afecto and Diversidad Humana, the local gay group, have been threatened, we could see that none would compromise on their principles.

## **Rev. Darren Liepold**

I was quite excited to learn about Diversidad Humana, an organization which struggles to push the Colombian government to live up to its own human rights declarations already passed into law regarding the protection of the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered citizens in Colombian society.

My interest in this was deeply personal. I am a Canadian gay man and pastor who has been partnered for the past 16 years. My country now has some of the most liberal laws regarding human sexuality in the world and Toronto, where I call home, is home to one of the most vibrant LGBT communities in the world. However this has not always been the case. In the past, I have been shunned, spat on, and taunted by others because of my orientation. It is with that background, that I wanted to see how gays and lesbians were treated in Colombia.

Representatives from Diversidad Humana began their discussions with us by saying that Colombia has on paper some of the most liberal laws protecting LGBT peoples. They are supposed to have equal protection under the law and should face no discrimination in housing or employment. It sounded so progressive, especially for a country with such a strong Catholic influence.

Humana felt that Gay men were considered undesirable because they were thought to be spreaders of diseases such as AIDS (even though statistics show that it is straight women in Colombia who have the highest HIV rates). Lesbians are targets because they do not submit themselves to the norms of a macho society. The paramilitaries do not make idle threats against these groups of undesireables. In the first three months of 2009, 17 men and women have been killed in LGBT 'witch hunts' in the city of Barrancabermeja.

Diversidad Humana, calls on Colombian government to honour human rights legislation that it has already passed. They do so by working with contacts in the International Community who attempt to apply pressure on the Uribe government. Also they act as a support network for the LGBT community in the area. They provide safe houses for members facing threats of violence and also provide a check in service to make sure members of the community are safe. As a gay man, I admire their strength under such duress and pray that their rights may be respected.

## WHAT IS DECOLONIZED SOLIDARITY?

At the risk of misrepresenting their self-study, we learned from Colombia CPT members that they were currently reevaluating their mission's purpose and relevance. Indeed, Colombia CPT has been the subject of a recent study that evaluates its adherence to nonviolent principles.<sup>8</sup> Hart argues that

there is a need to explore the appropriate role of nonviolent practitioners from an outside nation, such as North American CPTers working in Colombia, in training and organizing local groups (Principle 3). Is significant involvement in this arena a modern form of colonialism and racism, or is it appropriate?

US activists earlier involved in Central American solidarity began to focus on Colombia in 2000. Younger activists joined this group noting,

"It was natural, given my political orientation, from the solidarity movement, the notion of 'we're responsible for all the shit that our government does,' it was natural coming off of the Central American solidarity movement."<sup>9</sup>

The Colombian CPT team is now offering a training for Colombians, which means that eventually there will be more Colombians than Northerners on their team and they may be able to expand their efforts to other regions in Colombia. There were two Colombians and one Mexican American on the team, which changes the power dynamics of race and passport though not necessarily of class with the locals the Cpters work with.

For us as outsiders, all Christian but at least three of us from the Global South, this delegation was a beginning in questioning how we can recreate our forms of international solidarity. How do we continue and maintain relationships with some of the people we have met? How do we continue the solidarity work at home? .....How do we become conscious of our privilege and at the same time open our hearts?

### Denise Nadeau

The reflection times we spent with CPT were important in moving our solidarity work to another level. The reading of "If you Want", the Saint John of the Cross poem, spoke to me at the level of what it means to take these encounters into our hearts and what can we give birth to if we keep allowing the spirit to be part of them. The Spirit was constantly hovering over and with us in this trip, a testimony to resistance and non-violence as a space for Spirit to flourish. As Vivian, one of our group members who is from the Philippines said, suffering is universal, and in seeing

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<sup>8</sup> Julie P. Hart, "The Work of Christian Peacemaker Teams in Colombia. A Case Study of Nonviolence Principles in Practice," *Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace*, Fall 2008  
[http://www.plowsharesproject.org/journal/php/material.php?issu\\_list\\_id=11&material\\_list\\_id=1](http://www.plowsharesproject.org/journal/php/material.php?issu_list_id=11&material_list_id=1) Retrieved April 6, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Activism Against Plan Colombia, unpublished paper, W Tate

and feeling that we can begin to move beyond the othering that makes Northern neo-colonialism so easy to maintain.

### **Luiza Tomita**

...To see their faces, to witness their tears, to feel their helplessness and at the same time their hope is not just like seeing a movie scene, but is to get into their lives, is to taste the bitter salty taste of their tears, to feel their pain, to feel the anger against those who are exploring the labor of these peoples who are the real owners of their land, who have always worked this same land and struggled to produce the best for them and their families.

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### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

"America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia," Doug Stokes, Zed Books, 2005. He includes lots of information from declassified US government documents, which is particularly useful for documenting what is too often hidden from public view. It's quite good, I think, in terms of US policy.

The other is "Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization," Mario A. Murillo, Seven Stories Press, 2004. Murillo was born in Colombia although he now teaches in the US. However, he travels back often as he still has family there. His book includes interviews and an insightful analysis of distorted media coverage of Colombia. Although now five years old, he presents a narrative and framework which still seem relevant. It also tells more about Colombia than Stokes, including a brief historical account.

A regional peace experience: the Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/colombia/regional-peace-experience.php>

### **BIOGRAPHY**

Farsijana Adeney-Risakotta, Ph.D. is a scholar and activist who is an anthropologist and a theologian. Lecturing at Duta Wacana Christian University (DWCU) and Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS Yogya), She is also serving as the head of the Office for Research and Community Development at DWCU. She has worked in facilitating a peace process in Maluku during the civil war and applying the use of culture of women and children to maintain harmony and peace in Yogyakarta.

Pamela K. Brubaker, Ph.D. focuses on feminist perspectives on economic globalization and just peacemaking. She authored and co-edited many books, including *Women Don't Count: The Challenge of Women's Poverty to Christian Ethics*, and *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*. She is a member of the World Council of Churches Advisory Group on Economic Matters. Dr. Brubaker has traveled to Mexico, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Guatemala, Thailand, Hong Kong, Brazil, India and Colombia as part of ecumenical delegations or for consultations or academic conferences. She is

a former member of the Society of Christian Ethics Board of Directors and co-chair of the Ethics Section of the American Academy of Religion.

Vivian de Lima, secretariat, Peace for Life, Manila PLEASE ADD

Rev. Darren Liepold was born and raised in Saskatchewan, Canada. He received his Bachelor of Arts in World Religions from the university of Regina and his Master of Divinity Degree from the Vancouver School of Theology. He was ordained by the United Church in 1990 and has served congregations in British Columbia and in Ontario. In September of 2008 he left congregational ministry, and has served the United Church in the role of Mission and Service fund officer for Toronto Conference and then at the national level. A trained tenor soloist, Darren and his partner Brian live in Toronto with their son Anthony who is 18.

Denise Nadeau, D.Min. is of mixed French and Irish heritage; her ancestors intermarried with and colonized the territory of the Mi'kmaq people of Gespe'gewa'gi (Gaspé) in Quebec. She is a theologian, movement therapist and popular educator whose work combines expressive art therapies and spiritual practices in the repair of violence. She has worked in interfaith contexts for many years, and, in particular, in the area of Native—non-Native relationships. She is Acting Director of the Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver Canada.

Kathryn Poethig, M.Div, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Global Studies at California State University, Monterey Bay. Her work focuses on progressive religious activism in Southeast Asia, particularly relating to gender, complex conflict and peacemaking. She is a advisor and faculty in the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies MA program in Cambodia. She is on the Working Group of People's Forum on Peace for Life and on the Advisory Committee of Interfaith Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movement in Vancouver, Canada. She has taught in graduate programs in Thailand, Indonesia , Cambodia and the Philippines. As a member of the PCUSA, she is an 'out' lesbian in the ordination process.

Luiza E. Tomita has a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology and is a professor of theology in Catholic Institutes in São Paulo, Brazil. She is also a feminist activist and has been active in issues of Violence against Women and Reproductive Rights. She was one of the founders of Catholics for a Free Choice in Brazil, in the early nineties. She participates in a Nucleus of Feminist Theology - Mandrágora-Netmal - in the Methodist University of São Paulo. From 2001 to 2006 she was the Theological Commission's Coordinator in Latin America of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians - EATWOT and edited 3 books on Religious Pluralism and Theology of Pluralism in Portuguese and Spanish. At present she is the Executive Secretary and Treasurer of this Association and responsible for its Home Page.