

PRESS KIT - SEPTEMBER 2010

PBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS

San José de Apartadó Peace Community

Photo: Charlotte Kesl

On 23 March 1997, a group of small farmers in San José de Apartadó established a Peace Community as a response to multiple and continued aggressions perpetrated by all actors involved in Colombia's conflict. Peace Brigades International has accompanied the Community on their journey for peace since 1999.



Walk commemorating five years since the massacre of San José de Apartadó in February 2005.
Photo: Damien Fellos/libre arbitre

The Peace Community began as a process of pacific civilian resistance to armed actors in the conflict; as a temporary political option for a group of displaced individuals who decided to return to their lands and continue resisting in the midst of conflict without involving themselves in it. Community members commit themselves to participating in community work, to struggle against injustice and impunity, to abstain from participating directly or indirectly in the armed conflict, to refrain from giving information to any parties involved in the conflict, and to never bear arms. Additionally, the sale and consumption of alcohol is prohibited within the Community. Several communities located in the municipality declared themselves Humanitarian Zones to provide refuge to civilians during armed confrontations in the zone.

The Peace Community is comprised of villages located in the Abibe Mountains in the Urabá region, which is located between the departments of Antioquia and Córdoba. Economic interests and the geographically strategic position of this region have made it a focus in the armed conflict since the 1970s. Hundreds of persons were assassinated for political reasons in the 1980s and 1990s in this region. In 1996, several families fled San José de Apartadó, establishing a temporary refuge in the Apartadó coliseum in protest against the violence and repression endemic in the region. A government-sponsored commission negotiated the displaced families' return, but once the return was complete, protest leaders were assassinated. With few alternatives left to them, some of the survivors of this

STRUGGLING TO MAINTAIN NEUTRALITY IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT HAS PROVOKED ACTS OF AGGRESSION FROM ALL ARMED ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT

violence joined together with other families to found the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

Struggling to maintain neutrality in the midst of conflict has provoked acts of aggression from all armed actors involved in the conflict. The Peace Community has denounced the assassination of more than 180 members at the hands of State forces, paramilitary groups, and the guerrilla¹. According to the Peace Community, the State is implicated in more than 90% of these cases. Despite all this, the Community continues to be firm in their determination to resist participation in the armed conflict and to ensure that the more than 750 crimes against humanity that they have denounced do not remain in impunity².

International accompaniment and recognition

PBI has accompanied the Peace Community since 1999. The US organisation Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and the Italian organisation Operazione Colomba also accompany the Peace Community. This accompaniment is truly valued by the Community which has stated that «as long as there is international solidarity, the Peace Community will continue».

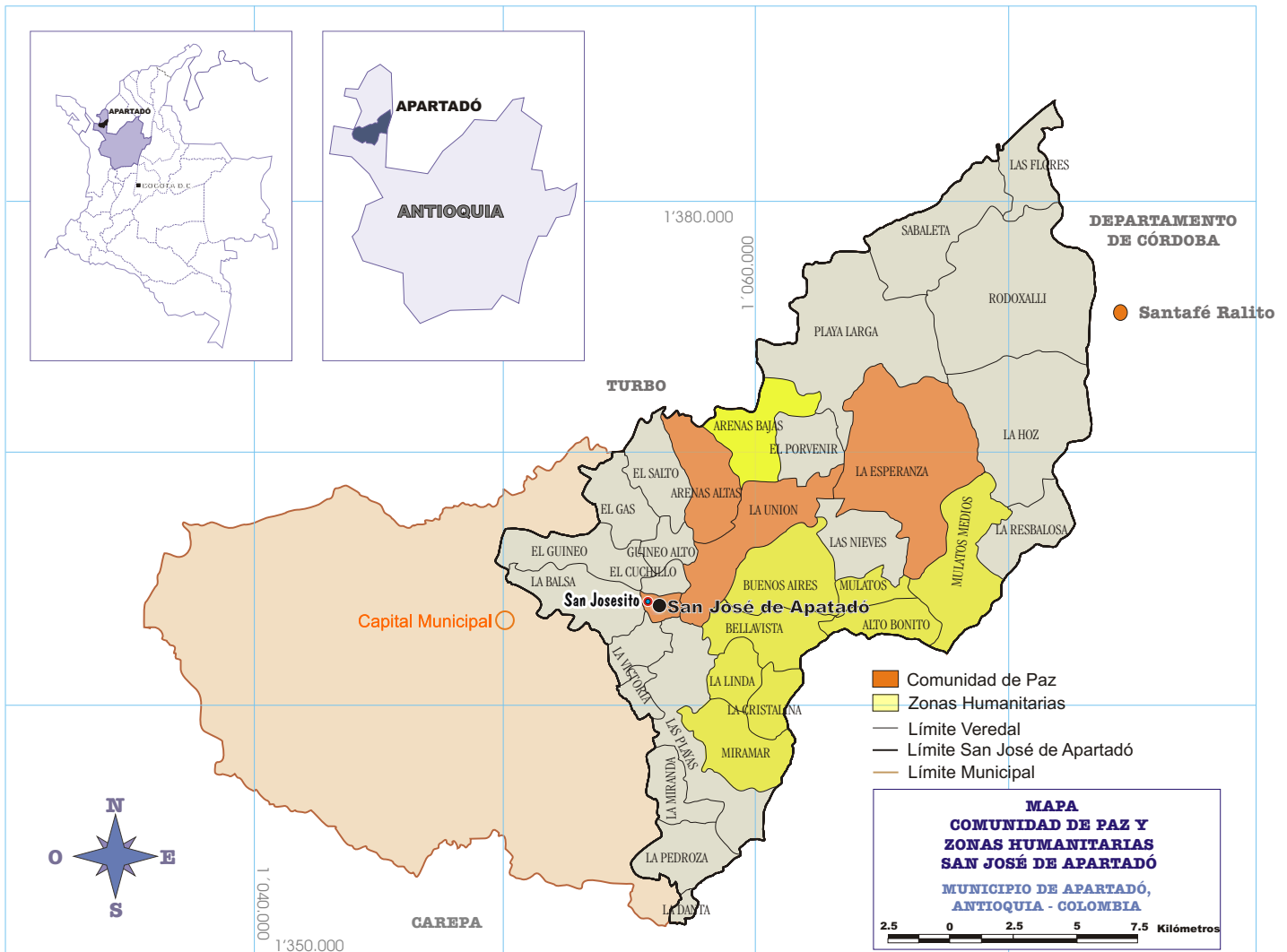
Both the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights have recommended that the Colombian State take measures to ensure adequate protection for the Peace Community . Provisional measures granted by the Inter-American Court were ratified by the Colombian Constitutional Court in sentence T1025, which established that the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and the State should arrange the means by which the Community will be protected.

Impunity and the Community's Relationship with the State

To date, there has been little progress made in the investigation and sanction of persons accused of committing crimes against the Peace Community. In 2005, following a long history of massacres, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, sexual



Members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.
Photo: Jorge Mata / Surimages-IPA



Dibujo: William Roza, dominio público

crimes, and forced displacement, the Peace Community suspended dialogue with the Colombian government until several conditions are met .

The Community continued to communicate with the 17th Brigade of Colombia's National Army until the massacre of 8 July 2000, in which six members of the Peace Community were assassinated. At this moment a Special Investigation Commission was created, coordinated by the Vice Presidency of the Republic and composed of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Inspector General's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations as observers of the process. This commission was active for two years, but never initiated any judicial processes, despite 130 separate testimonies from the Peace Community. For several of the witnesses who participated in the process, the mere act of providing their testimony put them at great risk of persecution

and death. As a result of these subsequent attacks and the lack of results from the Commission, the Peace Community withdrew from the process in 2002.

After the massacre of 21 February 2005 in which eight persons were assassinated (among them, one of the founders of the Peace Community, Luis Eduardo Guerra, and three small children), the reaction against the Peace Community was extreme, and many accusations were made against the its members, including by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. These accusations against the Peace Community varied, from obstruction of justice for failure to report the crime, to collaboration with the FARC. As a result, the Community decided to end all interaction with the Colombian State, with the exception of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office and the Inspector General's Office.



During the massacre of 21 February 2005, eight persons were assassinated, among them, one of the founders of the Peace Community, Luis Eduardo Guerra, and three small children. Photo: Damien Fellous/libre arbitre

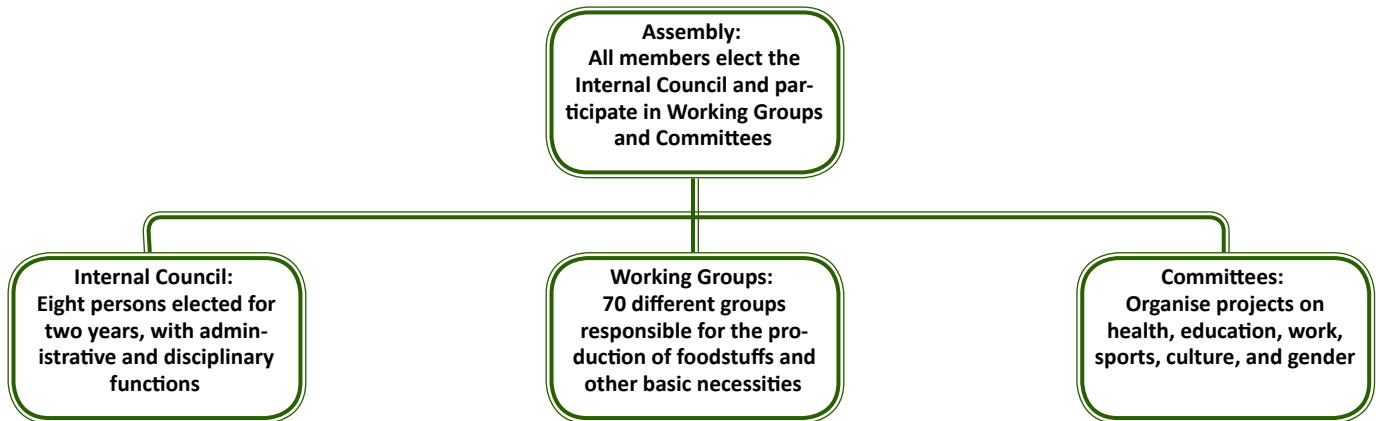
«These twelve years have been about hope built upon a solid foundation, about real life plans and alternatives that have been blinded by the terror of assassins. And despite all of this, the 185 assassinated members of our community are today more alive than ever in those of us who believe in justice (...) we are a clear example of the annihilation that has and continues to be carried out against communities engaged in pacific resistance to the conflict in our country. But in spite of all the acts of terror, lies, baseless prosecutions, deaths, violations, crop destruction, and threats, we are full of hope because these are not twelve years of solitude; they are twelve years warmed by the lives of many people who believe in our new humanity, and with them we have never been alone. Quite the contrary: they walk with us each and every day».

PEACE COMMUNITY OF SAN JOSÉ DE APARTADÓ

«Peace communities have the right to exist in Colombia thanks to the rights accorded by our political system. But they cannot, as is practiced in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, obstruct justice, reject the armed forces, prohibit the sale of licit items, or restrict the freedom of the citizens that reside there. In this community of San José de Apartadó there are good people, but some of their leaders, sponsors, and defenders are seriously accused by people who have lived there, of being auxiliaries of the FARC and of utilising the community to protect this terrorist organisation».

PRESIDENT ÁLVARO URIBE VÉLEZ, 20 MARCH 2005, STATEMENT MADE FOLLOWING A SECURITY COUNCIL HELD IN THE 17TH BRIGADE OF THE ARMY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CAREPA

Internal Structure



Community Principles

1. Activism
2. Liberty
3. Transparency
4. Resistance and justice

Rebuilding Community: current projects

FAIR TRADE CROPS

Currently, the Community distributes bananas to Germany, which are then sold through Fair Trade networks. They are also currently organising the distribution of organic cacao by way of Fair Trade networks. Additionally, the Community is working on a project of Agricultural Research and Production Centers focused on community production and preservation of native flora and fauna found in several villages.

THE CAMPESINO UNIVERSITY

In September 2003, communities from the Cimitarra River Valley, San José de Apartadó, and Southern Bolívar, U'wa indigenous peoples, the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca, Black Communities Process, Arauca Peasant Farmer Association, and communities from Dabeiba, La Nupa, Alto and Bajo Naya formed a Network of Communities in Resistance at a meeting held in San José de Apartadó. Of the thirty communities that comprise this network, twenty of these decided to found the Campesino University, which works to develop community

autonomy and self-sufficiency through the study of traditional agricultural methods, nutrition, politics, and human rights.

WORKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE: THE LUIS EDUARDO GUERRA PEACE VILLAGE

Currently, the Community is building a «Peace Village» at the site where community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra was killed in the massacre of 2005. The intention is to «create a space that is a product of the work of the community, of memory, of pacific civilian resistance in the midst of intense conflict; where we commit to an alternative education that advocates for living in harmony with nature in an agriculturally sufficient manner, as an alternative to destruction and



inequality, on collectively held lands» .

For more information

www.cdpsanjose.org
www.javiergiraldo.org

1. Right to Petition No.17 to President Álvaro Uribe about the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, Javier Giraldo, 17 February 2009

2. «Masacres, desapariciones, extorsiones, desplazamientos forzados masivos, abusos sexuales, destrucción de viviendas y cultivos, bombardeos a población civil, creación de estructuras paramilitares, montajes judiciales y otros crímenes» letter to the editor of The Wall Street Journal in response to Anastasia O’Grady, 17 December 2009; «An irresponsible column», Adam Isaacson, Center for International Policy, 15 December 2009, <http://www.cipcol.org/?p=1250>

3. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) solicited precautionary measures for the inhabitants of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó on 17 December 1997 following the assassination of 43 community members following the establishment of the Peace Community in March 1997. On 9 October 2000, the President of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights requested provisional measures for 189 Community members. On 24 November 2000, the Inter-American Court ratified the President’s request and asked «the Colombian State to immediately take necessary measures to protect the lives and personal integrity of all members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó». On 18 June 2002, the same Court broadened measures and ordered that «the (Colombian) State guarantee safe passage between San José de Apartadó and Apartadó (...) to assure that Peace Community members can receive and transport food, provisions, and other products». These measures were established to confront economic blockades suffered by the Community in their trips between San José and Apartadó. In 2008 these provisional measures were reconfirmed.

4. Today, the Peace Community is still waiting for four essential conditions to be met before reestablishing dialogue with the State: removal of the police station in the city of San José de Apartadó; formation of a Commission to evaluate the findings of a 2000 Investigation Commission; a public apology from President Uribe regarding past comments made about the Peace Community; and respect for Humanitarian Zones.

5. The paramilitaries known as Commander 21, Pirulo, and Kiko (who accepted their responsibility for the crimes of homicide of a protected person, acts of barbarity and conspiracy to commit a crime), are presently in jail for these acts. Army captain Guillermo Armando Gordillo Sánchez has also accepted these charges. Additionally, trials are currently being carried out against Colonel Espinosa, Major Castaño, two lieutenants, six non-commissioned officers, and four paramilitaries, including Diego Fernando Murillo Bejarano, aka Don Berna, former commander of the Cacique Nutibara Bloc and extradited to United States in May 2008.

6. «Trece años de convicción, construyendo esperanza», Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, <http://cdpsanjose.org/?q=node/161>



María Brígida González, member of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, on the Walk Commemorating Five Years since the Massacre of San José de Apartadó in February 2005. Photo: Damien Fellous/libre arbitre