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The General Assembly of 2010 approved item 13-08:

***On Assisting with a Process For Negotiation of a Peace Accord with Colombia***

1. Direct the Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) to write the administration of President Barack Obama and the Congress of the United States of America seeking the permanent suspension of the U.S. military use of seven Colombian bases initiated in 2009, given that this expanded U.S. military presence in Colombia will:

- increase violence and displacement within Colombia, and be perceived by many Colombians as a violation of Colombia's national sovereignty; and
- sow distrust among nearby Andean nations which perceive the expanded U.S. military presence in South America to be a threat to their national security.

2. Direct the Stated Clerk to request President Barack Obama and the Congress to assist with a process for the negotiation of a peace accord in Colombia instead, in order to end Colombia's internal armed conflict which has lasted more than fifty years and which is a threat to the entire Andean region.

3. Call on the church to strengthen initiatives of prayer and action in PC(USA) congregations and by PC(USA) leaders in order to broaden and support the movement of citizens toward peace in Colombia.

4. Encourage Presbyterian churches, as part of these undertakings of prayer and action, to visit Colombia in order to monitor the Colombian bases and their impact—so long as the United States maintains a presence in them.

5. Direct appropriate offices of the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) to work with ecumenical partners to monitor and post periodic updates on the impact of United States military use of seven military bases in Colombia.

**RATIONALE**

*History and Call of the Presbyterian Churches of Colombia and the United States to Work for Peace*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has had a long relationship with Colombia, both in spreading the gospel message of God's peace and in strengthening its democracy. The first Presbyterian missionaries established schools that have educated generations of respected citizens with an open and democratic mindset that strengthens Colombian society.

The PC(USA) continues a 154-year relationship and honors the testimony of education, evangelism, and service of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), by answering the call to



**General Assembly Mission Council**

help them in their ministry of accompaniment to the displaced population and the most impoverished communities, and the search for peace as the fruit of justice.

Given the armed conflict that Colombia has lived for more than fifty years, the IPC has advised us of the damages of Plan Colombia (the common term for U.S. legislation aimed at curbing drug smuggling and insurgency, also used by Columbia's leaders) and the grave consequences of the approval of a free trade agreement for wide sectors of the Colombian populace. We have witnessed that pastors and members of the churches frequently put their lives at risk to the point that some have been martyred for being witnesses and remaining faithful to the requirements of the Gospel to serve those most in need and those who have been victims of the violence.

In the 210th, 213th, 216th, and 218th General Assemblies, the PC(USA) has responded to the call of the IPC, rejecting this circle of violence. Today, several presbyteries in the PC(USA) have partnerships with presbyteries of the IPC that make up a network of mission and solidarity with Colombia. The PC(USA) has also created the Accompaniment Program to provide a physical presence by citizens of the United States giving protection to threatened communities and to the church whose leaders and pastors involved in human rights protection have been victims of surveillance and threats.

While it is appropriate to recognize and remember our past and present contributions to the troubled country of Colombia, it is essential that we focus on the responsibilities and opportunities we have as U.S. citizens who are followers of Christ. We must work in religious and political spheres and with social networks in our own country to contribute to a future of peace with more justice and equality for all of the Colombian people.

We have learned from the IPC that the election of President Barack Obama generated hope in Colombia that the United States would strengthen the search for peace and a greater respect for human rights. This has not been the case. In September 2009, the government of the United States certified the Colombian government in human rights even with the revelation of a high number of extra-judicial killings of youth—everyday citizens—whom the army tried to pass off as guerrilla members killed in combat, murders known as "false positives." It was also made public that the Colombian intelligence agency, which depends directly on President Uribe, was used to keep illegal surveillance on leaders of the opposition, human rights defenders, and church leaders, threatening them because of their work for peace.

In these times, the hopes for peace in Colombia seem far away. Rather than supporting initiatives toward a peace accord, the government of President Obama has instead made an accord with the Colombian government for the U.S. military to use seven military bases within Colombia. The IPC in the 65th General Assembly of the Synod, a biennial assembly (Feb 10–12, 2010), expressed its concern:

... that the democratic security promoted by the [Colombian] government, the increased military costs, and the growth of the army have not shown us the prospect of peace even though they have reduced the actions of illegal armed groups. It is evident that there is a resurgence or strengthening of former armed groups. Furthermore, there are tensions with Columbia's neighbors—Ecuador, Venezuela, and throughout the region because of the announcement of the U.S. Army's use of Colombian military bases (Public Pastoral Declaration from Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia, Bogotá: February 12, 2010, translated by the church).

**General Assembly Mission Council**

For this reason the IPC has called on the PC(USA) to join them in making stronger efforts (initiatives) toward peace in Colombia. As Christians we are obligated to respond to injustices, wherever they may be—healing the sick, feeding the poor, denouncing injustice, and ministering to those in need—with the values that we have in union with the words and actions of Jesus Christ. A great many people in Colombia suffer injustice caused by war, indifference, and the greed of their own government in collaboration with powerful global economic interests. This suffering has been aggravated by the good intentioned but often counter-productive politics of the United States. It is time to develop more visible means to help the work of Presbyterians in the United States and in Colombia who are working to create a more just and peaceful society, as the gospel exhorts us to do.

*Plan Colombia and the Use of Military Bases in Colombia by the United States Military*

Colombia has been identified by the government of the United States as a key strategic ally in the Western Hemisphere. The external politics of the United States have had an important, yet adverse, impact in the evolution of the armed conflict that exists in Colombia. In 2000, a policy called “Plan Colombia” was developed by the governments of the United States and Colombia with the purpose of eradicating coca crops to reduce exports of cocaine to the United States as well as the unstated desire to undermine the guerrilla forces that controlled around 40 percent of the country. The plan has been financed by the United States, which has given more than \$7 billion—80 percent destined for military aid and the eradication of coca, 20 percent for alternative development, human rights, help to displaced persons, and judicial reform.

This well-intentioned goal has failed either to diminish the cultivation of coca or the export of cocaine to the United States. It has had grave unforeseen consequences for the situation in Colombia. The aerial fumigations directed at the eradication of the coca crop have caused an ecological crisis and medical harm to the civilian population. It has caused massive displacement. The fifty-year-old Colombian conflict has become even more deeply entrenched with the military aid offered by the United States. Paramilitary groups directly linked to the Colombian military, developed with the help of large landowners, are responsible for 70 percent of the violations of human rights. The guerrillas, far from beaten, have continued their actions of war. The FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas have kidnapped and hold close to thirty military personnel, some for more than ten years. They seek prisoner swaps with their members held in jails in both Colombia and the United States. All of these efforts have effectively had the opposite result of U.S. goals. (See: “Bases, Bullets, and Ballots: The Effect of U.S. Military Aid on Political Conflict in Colombia,” Working Paper 197, by Oeindrila Dube and Suresh Naidu, Center for Global Development, January 2010, available at: <<http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1423498/>>, pp. 26–27.)

During the span of Plan Colombia there have been more than two million people displaced from their land. Added to those that already existed, more than four million people have been displaced, making Colombia the country with the second-highest rate of internal displacement rate in the world. These uprooted people look for refuge in neighboring countries and in poor neighborhoods that encircle the large cities of Colombia. The most recent available annual report for the Colombia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights identifies “continuous growth” in the numbers of internally displaced persons, with more than a quarter of a million new displaced persons recorded in the first half of 2008 alone, and a “disproportionate

**General Assembly Mission Council**

effect on communities located in regions where the armed conflict is fiercest.” (See: Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia, March 2009, p.22, available at <[http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc\\_id=15200](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=15200)>.)

In this context, the announcement that the United States military will use seven Colombian bases makes aspirations for peace in Colombia become ever more distant. The guerilla groups have announced their intent to fight together against the presence of the U.S. Army in Colombia. In addition, there have been tensions with border countries and in the region because of this base agreement. The most significant tension is with Venezuela and the government of Hugo Chavez, who sees the presence of the U.S. military in Colombia as a threat and the preparation for military aggression against his country.

**ACSWP Comments**

The origin of this overture is a pastoral letter from the Presbyterian Church in Colombia. The General Assembly of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia has sought to discern a path toward a peaceful future through prayer, Bible study, and corporate worship. Their process of discernment produced a letter addressed to all the Presbyterian congregations in Colombia and their sister churches throughout the world, urging a united response to the violence that continues to plague Colombia. This letter calls for the suspension of an agreement that permits U.S. troops to operate in Latin America from seven bases established in Colombia.

The United States and Colombia, however, have already renewed the agreement authorizing the use of these military bases for ten more years. The Washington Office of the PC(USA) comments, “This appears to be an agreement without borders, potentially allowing the U.S. military to conduct virtually any mission against virtually any perceived threat.” The Presbyterian Washington Office further notes that, despite the declared intention not to operate beyond Colombia’s borders, intentions often change over the life of an agreement. Other nations in the Latin America have expressed concerns about the purportedly limited scope of military activity in light of the history of U.S. military intervention in the region (Washington Office Legislative Action: November 25, 2009, Washington, D.C.).

The opportunity to suspend the joint use agreement may have passed, but the potential for damage to the environment, U.S. relationships in Latin America, and the PC(USA)’s relationship to the Presbyterian Church in Colombia remains as long as this pact stands. Therefore, ACSWP recommends that Presbyterian World Mission and the Compassion, Peace and Justice programs of the PC(USA) monitor the use and impact of these bases in cooperation with the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and publish periodic reports on the PC(USA) website. ACSWP further recommends that the General Assembly instruct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the President of the United States stating the concerns of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia and the PC(USA) about the use and impact of these bases.

***ACWC Advice and Counsel:***

*The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) advises that the 219th General Assembly (2010) approve this overture.*