

Mass Pilgrimage in Support of Life and Peace

The Demonstration

On 21 October 2020, around two thousand FARC ex-combatants from across the country joined a mass demonstration to meet with the national government and demand both the implementation of security measures to safeguard life and the fulfilment of the peace agreement. The starting point of the demonstration, named Peregrinación por la Vida y por la Paz (Pilgrimage for Life and Peace), was the municipality of Mesetas in the department of Meta – the resting place of former FARC combatant Jesús Monroy Ayala, who was killed on 16 October 2020.

Waving white flags, the ex-combatants embarked upon a journey towards the capital Bogotá in demand of tougher measures to protect their lives and those of social leaders in Colombia. The participants conducted symbolic acts of forgiveness and reconciliation along the way – such as those of Pipiral and El Doradal – which involved candle-lighting ceremonies, cultural and reconciliation events and mingas (an indigenous word that means communal work but also collective act of protest).

The Motivation

The main reason for the pilgrimage was the lack of security guarantees for those who had laid down arms and were committed to peace. The increase in threats and homicides against this population is alarming, and the majority is happening outside of urban centres. Between December 2019 and March 2020, for example, 73% of such crimes occurred in rural areas.

Due to the lack of security guarantees, several reincorporation areas (ETCRs) need to be relocated. That is the case in Monterredondo (Miranda-Cauca), La Pradera (Puerto Asís-Putumayo), Yarí (La Macarena-Meta) and El Ceral (Buenos Aires-Cauca). Last June, people moved en masse 352 kilometers away (218 miles) from their home in Santa Lucía (Ituango-Antioquia) to the municipality of Mutatá.



The security situation is no better in the New Reincorporation Areas (NARs), where the majority of ex-combatants currently live. In these cases though, relocation is not a viable solution. Forcing people to abandon their homes and progress on economic projects uproots them and their families from their territories, widening fissures in the social fabric.

Adding to the serious security and humanitarian crisis, there remain unresolved structural issues related to the peace agreement and the National Reincorporation Policy. For example, slow progress in the Comprehensive Rural Reform has stymied access to land for housing and agricultural projects. Also, the absence of a functioning National Reincorporation System has impeded the management and oversight of policies and resources, institutional coordination and the efficient channelling of aid funds towards the protection of people's rights in conflict areas.

The Capital

After walking for several days, the protesters arrived at Bolívar Square in Bogotá, the site of national government buildings in the capital. They had a busy few days attending meetings with different key actors, including government delegates to the National Reincorporation Council, United Nations officials, international peace guarantors and the Senate's peace commissioners.

The Festival for Life and Peace – also held in Bolívar Square – included various cultural events in recognition of women and indigenous peoples. It also showcased various goods produced by ex-combatants. As ex-combatants marched peacefully through the streets of Bogotá, they were warmly supported with applause and white flags flown from the capital's windows and balconies.

The Results

In their meeting with the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilisation, Emilio Archila, they succeeded in obtaining an audience with President Iván Duque. Other significant outcomes of the meeting were the extension of the National Reincorporation Council's outreach to rural territories; a draft timeline for land and housing projects and the design of a land strategy; and, an analysis and review of security inside and outside the ETCR that takes account of the local context. In addition, the parties agreed to maintain the departmental and municipal Peace Councils and to closely monitor the process.

Page 2



Rodeemos el Diálogo



@RodeemosDialogo



@RodeemoselDialogo



Rodeemos el Diálogo

One of the greatest achievements of the mobilisation was the meeting with President Duque on 6 November. At the Casa de Nariño – the presidential residence – spokespeople representing ex-combatants from all over the country presented 15 proposals related to security, land and housing, the setting-up of the National Reincorporation System and the comprehensive implementation of the peace agreement.

Following these meetings, ex-combatants headed back to their territories with renewed hope. The spirit of the mobilisation was marked by a renewed sense of togetherness and camaraderie. Ex-combatants no longer march quietly through Colombia's jungles; instead, they now march peacefully along the country's roads clamouring for life and for peace.

Sadly, despite the agreements reached with the President, there have been more killings since the death of Jesús Monroy. At time of publication, the number stands at 244 ex-combatants killed since the signing of the agreement.

Embrace Dialogue commends the peaceful mobilisation and acts of reconciliation carried out by FARC ex-combatants and we urge President Duque to fulfil the agreements reached in the context of the Peregrinación por la Vida y por la Paz (Pilgrimage for Life and Peace).

