



Rodeemos el Diálogo

# STATEMENT

May 24th - 2021

## The ground must be prepared for a national dialogue

After 28 days of demonstrations, the conditions for a national dialogue are yet to appear. Violence continues to be used by state forces against protesters in several cities across Colombia. At many of the assembly points, protesters have been attacked by armed actors, and the allegations against the police of sexual violence are alarming.

The different groups exercising their right to protest, including organisations behind the initial calls and many, predominantly young people, that have since joined, remain in the streets as they have not found a government willing to listen. Instead, they express greater distrust of the government because they feel that President Duque wants to instrumentalise dialogue in order to dismantle the protest. It is worrying that the president has not acknowledged the excessive use of force against the legitimate right to protest, despite repeated calls from the public.

Drawing on voices and proposals that we have heard from different sectors, we as Embrace Dialogue consider:

First, **it is necessary to immediately stop the military suppression of the social protest and allow an international commission to investigate the violent acts that have taken place during this national demonstration.** The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, for example, has requested the president authorises a visit to the country to that end. Oversight by such a commission would help to rebuild confidence between protesters and the State.

Second, **we stand behind the proposal by several universities who have offered to advance dialogues on historic structural issues.** We invite this initiative to be widened to include institutions of basic education. According to the 'Numbers and Concepts' survey of the Rosario University, young people believe more in their teachers than in any other group. This presents a unique opportunity to grow the spaces for dialogue and include a greater spectrum of youth.

Third, **it is necessary to prepare the ground for a national dialogue with the next government.** Dialogue demands preparation by all participants, as it is full of challenges. It is important to train facilitators and strengthen capacity for dialogue to avoid it becoming transactional. Dialogue is a process that prepares the ground for deliberation, from which a negotiation conducive to reaching agreement is possible, and one which ultimately allows inclusive participation by all of society in the realisation of those agreements.

Fourth, **dialogue must be framed by a comprehensive vision that includes the historic dimension to current events and a projection into the short, intermediate and long-term future.** It requires patience and humility among those that want to support the process, locally, nationally and internationally.

We therefore invite Colombian society to recognise the current situation as a key opportunity to place the culture of dialogue at the centre of peacebuilding.