

The Right Honourable President **Iván Duque Marquéz**
Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la Republica
Despacho del Presidente de la República
Casa de Nariño: Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

To the Right Honourable President
Via email: secretaria.privada@presidencia.gov.co / ivandunque@presidencia.gov.co

Re: Current Social Protests and Conflict in Colombia

Geneva, 18 May 2021

Excellency,

As international church-based organisations which have been providing long-standing support to efforts for peace in Colombia, we add our voices to the multitude of urgent calls from the international community for the Colombian authorities to stop the spiral of violence that is doing terrible harm to the civilian population.

While we acknowledge that the government is dealing with a very complex situation, we believe the focus now must not be on repressing popular protests, but rather to listen to the people's voices with empathy and without resorting to violence, and to begin to seriously address the root causes of the mass mobilisation of the Colombian people.

Colombia has now entered a third week of national protests. More than 40 people have been killed, hundreds have gone missing and thousands injured as a result of the security response.

We echo local faith voices who have been raising the alert about the violations to human life, rights and dignity that are taking place, contrary to Jesus' commandment for us to love one another. DiPaz, Colombia's main ecumenical peace-building platform, released a statement on 3 May demanding the demilitarisation of the government's response to the protests. We make their words our words:

“We reject the announcement of the government [...] to take the Army to the streets to reinforce the containment of social protest”. “We express our solidarity with the families of the fatal victims and those who have been victims of human rights violations in the midst of police repression; and we invite everyone to join the voices that demand [the government to] stop armed violence and comply with the norms of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights”.

We insist on:

- An immediate end to the disproportionate use of force exercised by security forces, and the need to reform them to ensure the state's and security forces' role as guarantors of constitutional rights.
- The creation of safe and transparent dialogue and negotiation spaces with diverse sectors of society, giving priority to local voices, and preferentially with the presence of observers such as faith actors who can provide an element of impartiality.
- The urgent need to stop stigmatization and accusations against peaceful protestors, in particular the Indigenous Minga and youth.
- The obligation of the competent authorities to investigate and prosecute the instigators and perpetrators responsible for illegal actions that have resulted in the injury, disappearance, and killing of citizens during the current demonstrations.
- A comprehensive implementation of the obligations assumed in the Final Peace Agreement, including those addressing the rampant social inequality which underlies the current protests.

We trust, Mr President, that you will rise to the occasion and will fulfil your obligations as set out in International Human Rights and Humanitarian law, as well as your moral duty as a Christian. We believe that as head of government you will call the Colombian authorities to remember and fulfil their primary responsibility which is the protection of the Colombian people. We pray that you will resist and reject the calls for more violence and greater use of force against activists.

We continue to monitor the situation in Colombia closely and with great concern, praying for a just and peaceful resolution to the current crisis, and remain committed to supporting dialogue between the different stakeholders as the only path to such a resolution.

We look forward to your response, and wish you grace and peace in the fulfilment of your responsibilities.

Yours respectfully,



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Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca
Acting general secretary
World Council of Churches

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria
General secretary (CEO)
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Rev. Chris Ferguson
General secretary
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The Most Revd. Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon
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