

WCC calls for more ecumenical peace-building in Colombia

News

February 24, 2011

Geneva, February 24 (ENInews)--Colombia urgently needs an increase in ecumenical approaches to peace-building to counter the effects of a half-century of civil conflict fuelled by drug money and corporate influence, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) said.

The conflicts have resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the second-largest population of displaced people, about four million, said the committee, which met from 16 to 22 February here.

"Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, farmers, human rights defenders, journalists and church and community leaders seeking land restitution and justice" become victims of killings, threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions by public officials and "non-state actors," said the committee.

Central Committee moderator the Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann, who is from Brazil, said the document is an important step in preparations for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation scheduled for Kingston, Jamaica in May.

The committee expressed "solidarity and prayers for the Colombian people, especially the families of those who were killed, disappeared or displaced and expresses deep appreciation to all who have already made Colombian peace initiatives a priority." Statements from the Central Committee provide a formal way for the WCC to express itself with a common voice.

"Churches are not some kind of a lobby group advocating for one or another issue," said the Rev. Aaro Rytönen, the director of advocacy for Finn Church Aid and a Central Committee member. "Churches are the body of Christ speaking together for a common concern."

He added, "When there is an issue which is being felt by one or another church on the grassroots level, there is a need for churches together to raise that issue up also on the global platform."

The committee also urged the Colombian government "to ensure the investigation, prosecution and punishment" of those responsible "for human rights violations against civilians."

The statement also asked the United States to end immediately "Plan Colombia," an initiative that has funnelled millions of dollars into Colombia during the past decade, most going to the military and police and drug eradication.

The Central Committee encouraged the organization of an International Consultation on Colombia together with the Latin American Council of Churches "in order to explore the possibility for an accompaniment programme and/or an Ecumenical Forum to support the churches and people in Colombia in their peace work."

The committee also referred to the 2010 report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which defenders of human rights in Colombia expressed deep concern over "the increased threats and stigmatization of several categories of human rights defenders."

The statement also appealed to governments "to assess the impact of trade provisions on human rights before they enter into a free trade agreement with Colombia and to adopt sustainable policies that give particular attention to the protection of farmers, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and trade-unionists, as their rights are being highly impacted by the presence of transnational corporations in the country."