

Meet Colombian communities resisting repression

as they struggle to save the rainforest and family farms.

Witness for Peace Southwest Delegation to Colombia July 5 to 15, 2010

Many of the civilians murdered by Colombia's armed forces and paramilitaries are family farmers. While claiming to fight narcotics and guerrillas, the Colombian army and its paramilitary allies have driven subsistence farmers off their land to make way for agribusiness. The proposed "free trade" agreement (FTA) between Colombia and the United States is the next step. If approved by the U.S. Congress, the FTA will give wealthy investors increased power to take over those lands.



In the region near Panama, paramilitary death squads and the Colombian army's 17th Brigade violently displaced 15,000 people in 1997, killing more than 100. Sustainable farms and forests were replaced by large cattle ranches and monocrop plantations, especially oil palm. Despite death threats, some displaced people have returned in a nonviolent effort to regain their stolen lands. While the courts delay in restoring the land, the returning communities are establishing a toe-hold in the region by forming humanitarian zones. A humanitarian zone is a living area of a few acres surrounded by a barbed wire fence. The community puts signs on the fence proclaiming that this is a civilian zone, and nobody with a weapon is allowed inside. Because threats continue, these communities rely on international attention for their survival.

WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DELEGATION:

Half the time, we will be in Bogotá, where the climate is cool and comfortable. We will meet political analysts, human rights defenders and government officials. The rest of the time we will visit humanitarian zones in Urabá (the region near Panama) in the states of Antioquia and Chocó. This trip can be physically challenging: Participants must be capable of hiking with their gear (food, water, sleeping equipment, etc.) on a muddy trail and sometimes sitting in a cramped canoe. The climate is hot, humid, and mosquito infested. Lodgings are simple. But it's worth it in order to meet with community members and learn about their lives and how they have created such courageous communities. (Witness for Peace is careful about security. Therefore, the possibility always exists that our exact destination will change.)

Cost: \$1450. This delegation fee covers all set-up, preparation, meals, lodging, interpreters, and transportation within Colombia. The fee also covers extensive reading and activist tools both before and after the delegation. Airfare to and from Colombia is not included. Applications are due by May 5, 2010 along with a nonrefundable deposit of \$150. The total is due June 5, 2010.

For more information about this delegation, please contact delegation coordinator:
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Witness for Peace is a politically independent, grassroots organization. We are people committed to nonviolence and led by faith and conscience. Our mission is to support peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing US policies and corporate practices which contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean. We stand with people who seek justice. www.witnessforpeace.org