

# HAND IN HAND FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA

## 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia

### FAITH COMMUNITY ACTION PACKET

#### Your Guide for Prayer and Action in Solidarity with Colombia's Millions of Victims of Violence

People of faith and conscience from across North America are answering a call from Colombia to come together to pray and act for justice and peace.

From April 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of congregations throughout North America will join hundreds of congregations and people of faith in Colombia to pray for the peacemakers and justice seekers in that war-torn land. On April 11<sup>th</sup> we will make our voices heard during the international Day of Action for Peace in Colombia.

Every day more than four people are killed and another 1,000 flee their homes as a result of the armed conflict in Colombia. Yet every day thousands more put their lives on the line to heed God's call for peace by working for justice and an end to war.

In this packet you will find the resources you and your faith community need to participate in the Days of Prayer and Action.

We hope that through the Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia you will help bring much-needed attention and hope to the tragedy in Colombia. Will you join us?

For more information and to register your event please contact or Jess at [Jess@WitnessForPeace.org](mailto:Jess@WitnessForPeace.org). You can also go to [Facebook.com/DoPAColombia](https://www.facebook.com/DoPAColombia).



*Colombian families find joy amidst war.*

**Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. *Isaiah 1:17***

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#### **What's at stake?**

- Approximately 1,500 people are killed every year in Colombia's armed conflict. More than five million have had to flee from their homes.
- People of faith in Colombia take huge risks on the front lines of the struggle for peace and justice in their country.
- The U.S. government has provided over \$7 billion dollars to Colombia, the vast majority in military aid.

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### Background on Colombia



Colombia, with a population of 42 million, is located in northwestern South America.

*Clergy and lay church leaders are especially at risk in Colombia's conflict due to their work for peace and justice amidst war.*

*According to a report by Justapaz, the Christian Center for Justice, Peace, and Non-violent Action and the Peace Commission of the Evangelical Council of Colombia, 533 protestant church members were victims of political violence in 2009.*

Colombia, located in northwestern South America, is home to a diverse population of indigenous, Afro-Colombians and people who have mixed European, native and African ancestries. The country includes a diverse topography, from the snow-capped Andean peaks to the Amazon rainforest and both Pacific and Caribbean coastlines.

But Colombia has been mired in armed conflict for nearly fifty years. In the last twenty years, over 5 million people have been internally displaced. The violence has particularly affected women, indigenous groups and Afro-Colombians. Those who work for peace risk their lives in the process.

Clergy and lay church leaders are especially at risk in the conflict. Hundreds of churches have been forcibly closed by the armed groups, while many church leaders are threatened, kidnapped, or killed each year. However, churches remain at the forefront of the grassroots movement for peace in Colombia. They promote sustainable development for the impoverished, provide sanctuary for families driven from their homes due to violence and call for armed groups and the government to negotiate true peace. Now, they are calling for churches in the U.S. and across the world to accompany them in their important work through prayer and action.

Standing in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Colombia requires that we recognize the role of our own government in the Colombian conflict. Colombia is currently the fifth-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. Since 2000, the United States has provided Colombia over \$7 billion dollars in assistance, three quarters of which is military assistance. Ostensibly intended to help Colombia eradicate drugs and address the armed conflict, the aid package was expanded to include counter-terrorism initiatives as well. Church leaders in Colombia argue that U.S. aid has not brought Colombia closer to peace. Nor has it reduced the flow of drugs to the U.S. Furthermore, people of faith believe a proposed U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement will only further impoverish Colombia's poor majority.

Colombia can find peace, but people of faith must come together to make it happen.

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### Letter to U.S. Congress from Colombian Church Leaders in 2008

*And the work of righteousness shall be peace;  
and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.  
Isaiah 32.17*

Honorable Members of the United States Congress  
Washington, D. C.

May 2008

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, are U.S. and Colombian people of faith, convinced that God calls us to be on the side of the weak, the victims and the poor. For this reason, as representatives of numerous faith communities and churches, we come to you because we understand that soon you will consider two pieces of legislation that would have a significant impact on Colombia—U.S. military and social assistance through Plan Colombia and the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. We write in the hope that your decisions may build the foundation for dignified life for all and promote the justice and peace that we so desire.

For more than 50 years Colombia has suffered through armed conflict, violence, inequalities and injustices. The civilian population is most affected by the armed conflict. More than four million people have been displaced from their lands. This conflict kills more than 3,000 people annually and tens of thousands of paramilitary and guerrilla victims today call for truth, justice and reparations. Meanwhile, the United Nations indicates that more than 45 percent of the Colombian population lives in poverty.

We have closely followed the congressional debates regarding human rights in Colombia and the balance between U.S. military and social aid for Colombia. We applauded Congress' achievement last year when you cut \$142 million in military aid and added \$97 million in social aid to the aid package. We know that this year President George Bush has once again called on Congress to pass an aid package with approximately 75 percent in military aid. We, who work with the victims of the conflict or accompany them from the United States, hope that Congress prioritizes work for peace and socio-economic assistance rather than military aid.

At the same time, we know that Congress may soon consider the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement negotiated between Colombia and the United States. Being faithful to our principles, we must view any public policy from the point of view of the poor and the victims. Therefore, in Colombia we must consider how the trade agreement would affect what the United Nations estimates are the close to nine million Colombians living in rural areas—the family farmer, the indigenous and the Afro-Colombians—80 percent of whom live in poverty, according to USAID.

According to the United Nations, 21 percent of employed Colombians work in agriculture, the vast majority in rural areas. Research on the impact of free trade agreements between underdeveloped countries, such as Colombia, and countries with large economies, such as the United States, show that underdeveloped countries lose a significant number of agricultural jobs. For example, independent studies indicate that in Mexico at least 1.3 million family farmers have been displaced from their agricultural production due to subsidized imports from the United States.



*A mother comforts her children after their father was killed in a massacre. Many Colombian families have lost loved ones to Colombia's conflict.*

*"For more than 50 years Colombia has suffered through armed conflict, violence, inequalities and injustices."*

*continued*

## Letter to U.S. Congress from Colombian Church Leaders, page 2

While in Mexico many of these family farmers have attempted to survive by migrating into the United States, in Colombia there would be a risk of increasing the number of internally displaced persons, a population that is already the second largest in the world. We are deeply concerned that the livelihood of the rural population—individuals who have already suffered greatly from the consequences of the armed conflict—would be further put at risk by this trade agreement. This population could then face decisions that have historically reproduced violence and poverty in Colombia: migration to urban settings, forced internal displacement, illicit crop production, recruitment by illegal armed groups, among other ill-fated consequences.

We are also concerned that the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement would put Colombians' food security at risk, as the country would, in large part, be dependent on U.S. imports for basic grains and other key foods for daily consumption. Furthermore, this trade agreement does not have sufficient protection for workers nor the environment. Such labor protections are particularly important in Colombia, the country with the highest number of murdered trade unionists. And without necessary environmental protections in the agreement, we would be jeopardizing Colombia's environment, considered the second most bio-diverse in the world.

For that reason, we ask you, honorable members of Congress, to take into account the following requests before considering the proposed aid to Colombia or the ratification of the free trade agreement.

- **Further cut U.S. military aid and aerial fumigation, which does not bring us closer to peace in Colombia, while significantly increasing aid for the poor, the displaced, refugees and the victims of the armed conflict.**
- **Insist that the State Department strongly enforce the human rights conditions in law, which is especially important as we are seeing a concerning increase in killings of civilians as well as other human rights violations attributed to the Colombian Armed Forces.**
- **Do not ratify a U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, which would increase the already concerning poverty rate among rural Colombians, would put Colombia's food security at risk and lacks sufficient protections for workers and Colombia's bio-diverse environment.**

Esteemed members of Congress, we ask that you consider our concerns in order to find the authentic paths for justice and peace for Colombia, the United States and the world.

*This letter was signed by over four hundred church leaders—representing over 4.3 million Protestant, Catholic and Evangelical churchgoers and 20,000 congregations in the United States and Colombia. Signatories to the letter include the heads of the U.S. and Colombian Presbyterian Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Colombian Methodist Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, the U.S. and Colombian Mennonite Churches, the Colombian Conference of Men and Women Religious, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and a Catholic Bishop. The signatories represent nearly twenty denominations.*

*“We ask that you consider our concerns in order to find the authentic paths for justice and peace for Colombia.”*



A Colombian mayor looks over the ruins of his offices after a rebel bombing.

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### Sample Sermon Excerpts

These complete sermons and others can be found at [WitnessForpeace.org/DOPA2011](http://WitnessForpeace.org/DOPA2011).

#### **A Mennonite Sermon** by Pastor Chet Miller-Eshleman

[WitnessForPeace.org/Mennonite](http://WitnessForPeace.org/Mennonite)

Colombia is a beautiful country with much to offer. From the majestic Andes Mountains and exotic rain forests, perhaps the wettest on the earth, to its striking flora and fauna—the beauty and diversity are captivating. Whether in small town or city, most people still take time to enjoy one another, often passing time in the tranquil palm-treed plazas where they laugh together as energetic children weave in and out among them chasing and playing...Yet, while these things are a reality in Colombia, Colombia has a dark side as well. Colombia's beauty is too often contrasted by its violence. This violence is multi-layered, manifesting itself in so many forms. Even as we work beside our Colombian brothers and sisters for peace with justice, we witness violence and injustice as “*el pan de cada día*” (the daily bread) for so many...

#### **The Courage that Faith Calls Forth**, a sermon by Tom F. Driver (Presbyterian)

[WitnessForPeace.org/Presbyterian](http://WitnessForPeace.org/Presbyterian)

"... we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts." -- I Thessalonians 2:4b. In this text Paul writes as if God were a cardiologist -- because he says that God tests our hearts. But we get his meaning, and it presents us with a question: If we are Christians, have our hearts been tested?...Colombia, in South America, is a land that has become famous for its violence. There I met a man named Jesus. A 40-year-old Presbyterian pastor, he has lived his entire life in danger.

#### **A Sense of Belonging**, a sermon by Rev. Barbara Gerlach (UCC)

[WitnessForPeace.org/UCC](http://WitnessForPeace.org/UCC)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."...As many of you know, I went to Colombia three weeks ago for a "Summit of Evangelical Churches for Peace in Colombia." I returned with a meditation by Peter Stucky still echoing in my ears. Peter talked about how important it was for them who felt so small, so powerless, so beaten down by the violence around them to listen for God's dream, God's vision for their lives.

*"Colombia is a beautiful country with much to offer. Yet, Colombia's beauty is too often contrasted by its violence."*

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### Sample Prayers

These prayers and other resources can be found at [WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011](http://WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011).

#### **Prayer for Peace and Justice in Colombia**

Source: Education for Justice, a Catholic social justice organization

(The response is: *Spirit, bring peace and justice.*)

For a country which has been ravaged by war, death and violence for many decades . . . . *Spirit . . .*

For poor farmers and their families who produce both legal and illegal crops, trying to survive . . . *Spirit . . .*

For the Colombian government, that it may seek just solutions, respectful of the dignity of the poor and vulnerable. . . *Spirit . . .*

For the U.S. government, that its policies would focus on social and economic renewal, instead of military-focused solutions. . . *Spirit . . .*

For ourselves and all citizens of the world, that we might advocate fair and sustainable solutions . . . *Spirit, bring peace and justice.*

#### **Prayer for Colombia**

Source: Lutheran World Relief

"We pray for the peacemakers in Colombia, the churches, and all people who in countless ways seek to right the wrongs, heal the wounded and sick, speak the truth, and protect the vulnerable. We give thanks for those who are empowered by their faith to be peacemakers. We ask that you would protect them from all harm and danger. God, give us strength as we seek to be voices for peace in Colombia, strengthen our efforts to bring forth the words of truth, compassion and peace that we receive from our Colombian brothers and sisters. Bring us all to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly in your ways, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

#### **Prayer for the San José de Apartadó Peace Community**

Source: Fellowship of Reconciliation

GOD OF LOVE, as we emerge from Holy Week rejuvenated spiritually, may we seek out the wisdom and courage demonstrated by certain groups and individuals that evoke from us that Spirit of Goodness that allows us to act with love and compassion.

MAY WE TURN our attention in particular to the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and its members, for they are living witnesses to the radical commitments of truth, peace, and justice.

SINCE COMING TOGETHER in 1997, the Peace Community has suffered tremendous atrocities due to severe repression carried out by the armed groups in Colombia. This group of united *campesinos* tragically has become a persecuted and crucified people that share in the burden of carrying a heavy cross.

EVEN THOUGH FEAR, violence, and suffering are a part of their daily reality, the members of the peace community display great resilience, fortitude and perseverance. Their anguish and desolation have transcended into hope, joy, and togetherness.

MAY THEIR INVINCIBLE SPIRIT permeate our beings, so that we join together in their struggle for human liberation. As we observe their miraculous effort to resurrect so much life and hope, may we come to know our own capacity to love our fellow brothers and sisters.

WE OFFER this prayer in your name. AMEN

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### Sample Scripture

#### Old/First Testament Readings

Come children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who among you loves life, takes delight in prosperous days? Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The Lord has eyes for the just and ears for their cry. When the just cry out, the Lord hears and rescues them from all distress. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed. Many are the troubles of the just, but the Lord delivers from them all. The Lord redeems loyal servants, no one is condemned whose refuge is God. **-Psalm 34:12-16, 18-20, 23**

Many people shall come and say "Come let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! **-Isaiah 2:3-5**

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am! If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; The Lord will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; "Repairer of the breach," they shall call you, "Restorer of ruined homesteads." **-Isaiah 58:9-12**

#### New/Second Testament Readings

And raising his eyes to his disciples, Jesus said: Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. **-Luke 6:20-23a**

Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.

**-Romans 12:9-14, 15, 17-18**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. **James 2: 14-17**

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### Sample Letter to Your Religious Leader

Please consider reaching out to the leader of your faith community to ask her or him to involve your congregation.

What follows is a sample letter you can adapt to ask your religious leader to set aside April 10<sup>th</sup> for the Day of Prayer and Action for Colombia.

Dear Reverend/Pastor:

For the past six years, people of faith from all over the Americas have been coming together in prayer and solidarity with the people of Colombia. The Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia are an opportunity for the people of God to pray for an end to the violence and suffering in Colombia, and to act in order to end unjust U.S. policies toward Colombia. These days will provide our faith community a unique opportunity to proclaim God's justice throughout our world.

We ask you to set aside Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup> as a special day of worship, a unique day of prayer for the people of Colombia, and for the conversion of our national leadership to a just cause. In doing so, our local community will be standing together with hundreds of other congregations in the United States, Colombia, and all over the world, crying out to God for justice and peace for our sisters and brothers living in and suffering in Colombia.

We have access to liturgies, prayers and sample sermons that may be helpful in preparing this special service. We would be happy to work with you and others to develop a service suitable to our congregation for this special opportunity.

We propose that we work together with other congregations in prayer and faithful action to bring an end to violence and injustice in that is ravaging our neighbors in Colombia. Your support, as always, is greatly appreciated. And, as always, we will pray for you in your ministry.

Faithfully Yours,  
(Your Name Here)

***Pray for Peace, Act for Peace***

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### Community Action Resources

Colombian communities and human rights organizations risk their lives to protect human rights and promote peace in their country. Join us in lending them support by creating *Hands for Peace*. These symbols of solidarity will be distributed to Colombian communities, churches and organizations under threat. Here's how to get started:



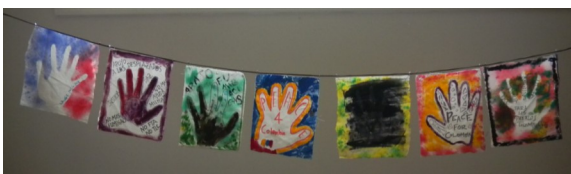
- **Create *Hands for Peace* artwork to be sent to Colombian communities under threat.**

Throughout the month, church, student, and community groups will host educational events to create *Hands for Peace* to be sent to Colombian communities under threat. Please ask your church's social justice committee or Sunday school class to consider hosting a *Hand in Hand for Peace in Colombia* event. Go to [WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011](http://WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011) for a packet with instructions, factsheets, and other helpful materials.

- **Organize a *Hand in Hand for Peace in Colombia* public demonstration in April.** Thousands of *Hands for Peace* will be displayed in moving public demonstrations across the country throughout April. Please ask your congregation, student group, or community organization to consider setting up a public demonstration. Go to [WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011](http://WitnessForPeace.org/DOPA2011) for instructions, factsheets, and other helpful materials.

- **Send your *Hands for Peace* to Witness for Peace, 3628 12th Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20017.**

If interested in hosting a *Hand in Hand for Peace in Colombia* event or public demonstration, **please contact** [Jess@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:Jess@witnessforpeace.org)



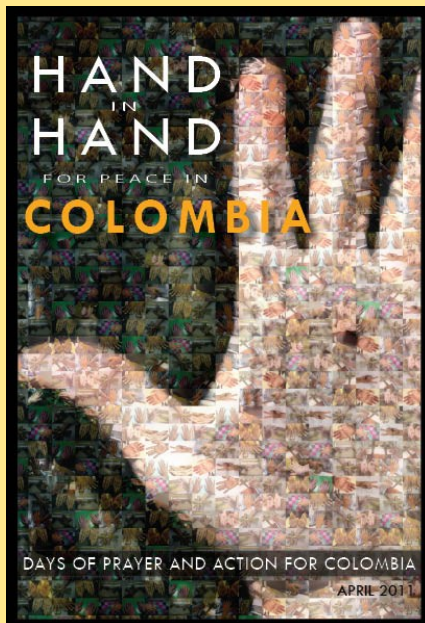
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### Ask Congress for New U.S. Policies toward Colombia

Help us flood Congress with our message of peace and justice for Colombia! During the National Days of Action for Colombia we will call on our government to pursue policies that protect communities at risk of displacement, small-scale farmers, and Colombian human rights advocates. In particular, the U.S. must stop funding the Colombian military and pushing the unfair proposed free trade agreement with Colombia.

**You can request a packet of postcards to send to Congress demanding changes in U.S. policies toward Colombia. We've got 20,000 postcards at the ready!**



### Support a new Colombia policy in the new Congress

To the Honorable \_\_\_\_\_,

With an ongoing conflict that has internally displaced over 5 million people and forced another half a million to flee to neighboring countries, Colombia now endures the largest displacement crisis in the world. After a decade of spending billions of dollars on failed and harmful military strategies, we need to send aid to Colombia that will help alleviate the crisis and promote human rights, not more unfair trade agreements that will only push more people off their land. The new Colombian government has made positive changes in tone about land return and prospects for peace, but community leaders and human rights defenders continue to be threatened and killed.

**I ask that you:**

Prioritize funding to support displaced people, refugees, and victims of violence  
Stop sending military aid to Colombia that fuels the war  
Promote a negotiated end to the conflict and a just peace  
End fumigation programs and support alternative development aid  
Do not move forward with any U.S.-Colombia trade agreement that could cause further mass displacement and cement drastic inequalities

Please make these changes to promote human rights, support small-scale farmers and indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and restore displaced people to their lands.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Congress Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip



**Can you help us get the message of peace for Colombia onto Capitol Hill?**

**Email Jess at [jess@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:jess@witnessforpeace.org) to request your packet of postcards.**

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### Stay Involved Beyond April

Prayer and action in solidarity with Colombia shouldn't be limited to a weekend in April. The Days of Prayer and Action will jump-start renewed focus on a just peace in Colombia. The good news is that you don't have to do it alone. Here are a few suggestions of how to get involved with groups and coalitions diligently striving to transform Colombia's crisis by transforming U.S. policy. To be more effective, they need you, your congregation and community to add to your voices.

Witness for Peace ([WitnessForPeace.org](http://WitnessForPeace.org)): Witness for Peace organizes educational delegations To Colombia. Delegates return to the United States with the knowledge and skills they need to change U.S. military and economic policies

#### **Cutting Military Assistance to Colombia**

- Latin America Working Group ([LAWG.org](http://LAWG.org)): Sign up to receive alerts at key moments to pressure Congress to shift U.S. aid away from military assistance.
- U.S. Office on Colombia ([USOfficeOnColombia.com](http://USOfficeOnColombia.com)): Read clear summaries and articles on Colombia issues.

#### **End Forced Eradication of Drugs in Colombia**

- Washington Office on Latin America ([WOLA.org](http://WOLA.org)): Information about fumigations, forced manual eradication, military funding, and military abuses.

#### **Reject the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia**

- Citizens Trade Campaign ([CitizensTrade.org/cfta.php](http://CitizensTrade.org/cfta.php)): Get the most recent fact sheets, articles, and other resources on the trade agreement. Contact an organizer to join local actions.
- American Friends Service Committee ([TradeAndWar.org](http://TradeAndWar.org)): View educational slide shows that link the proposed free trade agreement and the war. Find resources to spread the word.

#### **Protect Human Rights**

- Amnesty International ([Amnesty.org](http://Amnesty.org)): Documentation of human rights abuses and opportunities to take action.
- Human Rights Watch ([HRW.org](http://HRW.org)): Updates on human rights throughout the Americas and the world.
- Peace Brigades International ([PBI-Colombia.org](http://PBI-Colombia.org)): Receive updates and read articles on the status of human rights in Colombia, written by on the ground accompaniers.
- Justa Paz ([JustaPaz.org](http://JustaPaz.org)): Documentation of human rights abuses and support to churches.
- Christian Peacemaker Teams ([CPT.org](http://CPT.org)): Expose and transform structures of domination and oppression through active nonviolence and accompaniment work.
- Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office ([Washington.MCC.org](http://Washington.MCC.org)): Advocacy for a U.S. policy that promotes justice, prioritizes human rights and lessens the military footprint.
- Presbyterian Accompaniment Program ([PresbyPeaceFellowship.org/Colombia](http://PresbyPeaceFellowship.org/Colombia)): Opportunities for accompaniment work and reports by on the ground accompaniers.