

## Columbia

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### AVP Columbia Introduction and Country Profile

Colombia is a country that has been affected by social armed conflict for many years. We have a general crisis in reference to Human Rights and a particular crisis regarding to Humanitarian International Rights. On the other side, there is also a growing economic crisis, and the continuity of the processes of forced displacement in different regions of the country. The "Period of violence" 1947-1957 has as a consequences forced migration of thousands of rural families to capital important cities like Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla. The current political violence has had such an impact that this has increased the forced migration to more than three million people.

Civil population has suffered not only displacement but massacres and Human Rights defenders have also been killed and persecuted. The living conditions of displaced people are so poor that violence has become a common way to interact among families and communities. And this also happens among poor families living in very marginalized neighborhoods, who suffer from structural violence.

At a governmental level, armed conflicts are not solved by peace dialogues but with the strength of military force. The process of demobilization of paramilitary forces has become a social problem because there is not a clear statement about peace and restoration laws to indemnify those who were affected by their violent actions and there are not policies to recover the lives of those who have decided (guerrilla groups or paramilitary groups) to be part of civil society again.

We think it is necessary to support peace work because it helps to generate new spaces of interaction, alternatives for a peaceful living and shows a new model or style of living that can impact our families and communities. The personal changes in our own lives (vocabulary, attitudes, handling of conflicts, way of exercising power and taking decisions, and so on) is a proof that peace should be built from us, human beings, and it is like a seed that can give many fruits. Our task is to implement new ways of human interactions through AVP workshops in every space where we can impact families, entities and communities.

The Colombian Team was established in 2001. We are a team of 6 people certified by the US Quaker Team to replicate AVP workshops for the three levels. There are now also more than 60 trained Facilitators able to run the Basic AVP workshop. The Colombian AVP Team Board comprises of Alejandro Parra, Wilfredo Benítez, Edith Guasca and Alba Luz Arrieta.

### Workshops

We set up workshops by contacting people who are interested in working on Non-violence subjects in their communities and also school teachers who have implemented non-violence and peace subjects within their educational programs. We are also invited by organizations and individuals working in poor communities where domestic abuse and family violence to facilitate workshops on Non-violence among their communities.

Current programmes we are running include;

- AVP Programme in Sincelejo, Sucre (North Coast of Colombia) with church people and displaced families.
- AVP Programme in Montería, Córdoba (North Coast of Colombia) with community leaders and church people.
- AVP Programme in Barranquilla, Atlántico (Caribbean Coast of Colombia) with church people.
- AVP Programme in Bogotá, D. C. (Capital city of Colombia) with church people who are in contact with poor and displaced communities.

We hope in the future to work with school teachers in Catholic Schools in Medellín, Antioquia and in Bogotá and with women leaders who are members of NGOs that have a work with displaced people and paysans in the Pacific Coast of Colombia.

## Facilitators and Training opportunities

We have meetings to plan the agendas and share experiences. We also contacted AVP facilitators from the US who have visited us and accompany us to facilitate workshops. They have taught us through these experiences new activities and given us valuable feedback about the workshops. This has been of great help to improve our work.

We are also using books to strengthen our knowledge on Non-violence subjects and experiences.

## Funding

In some cases, participants pay a small amount of money to cover materials, food and transportation for them and for the facilitators who do this work as volunteers. In some other cases we have raised financial support from the World Council of Churches to fulfil a project with displaced families, church people and poor community leaders. This project was presented through the Ecumenical National Network of Women for Peace, from which I am the Board President.

## New Programmes

We have begun work with faith communities in developing new activities and actions exploring Non-violence from their perspective of faith. We use AVP methodology and combine it with biblical reflections on Jesus as the Prince of Peace and also with knowledge about Non-violent Direct Action. These workshops are held by Justapaz, an educational ministry of the Mennonite Church in Colombia and by the Commission of Restoration, Life and Peace of the Evangelical Churches in Colombia.

## Evaluation

In reference to the programme we are holding with the Ecumenical Network of Women for Peace, we evaluate this project on an ongoing basis through feedback sessions after the workshops. We also do an additional midway and end of the year evaluation with the participants.

As facilitators we share experiences that show the changes or transformations people have in their families and in their interactions with others in their communities. There is a real and personal impact and this help us to confirm that this program really works. The impact has influence in families and communities. We hope to develop our evaluation in the future.

The Columbian team is still small, but we are planning to constitute an AVP Colombian Office in the near future and there is also the idea of forming a Latin American Network of AVPers.

Report compiled by Alba Luz Arrieta Cabrales, Board Member AVP Columbia