Nonviolent Movements for Peace in Columbia and International Solidarity.

Mauricio García-Durán

Unarmed Resistance: the transnational factor 13-17 July 2006



Centre For Peace and Reconciliation Studies

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Introduction

Colombia has had probably the largest peace mobilization in countries with an ongoing armed conflict, which is certainly a reaction to the protracted violence that we, Colombians, are suffering. This mobilization has been mainly non-violent and in general terms it is possible to say that it expresses a form of resistance to violence in the Colombian population affected by the dynamics of the armed conflict. It appears clear that the main reason for acting collectively for peace is the rejection of the armed conflict and its negative consequences for the population. Without neglecting the 'resistance' character of peace mobilization, it is pertinent that the topic of this seminar considers the existence of some proper forms of unarmed resistance within the peace movement in Colombia. Different forms that explicitly resist the dynamic of the armed conflict have appeared in the Colombian context as a way of facing the situation and surviving in the midst of an escalated violence.

In this presentation I will introduce these general and specific ways of resistance in Colombia, considering also the crucial role that international solidarity has played for the existence and sustainability of these expressions of unarmed resistance. The main source of data for this presentation is Cinep's Collective Action for Peace Database (Datapaz) which collects information on peace events over 28 years (1978-2005). Some of the ideas developed here were initially mentioned in my PhD dissertation at University of Bradford (2005) on the topic of the peace movement in Colombia ("To what extent is there a peace movement in Colombia? - An Assessment of the Country's Peace Mobilization, 1978-2003").

I am going to develop this presentation in four parts. I will introduce the discussion with some conceptual remarks clarifying the meaning of non-violence and civil resistance in the Colombian context. Secondly, the main characteristics of peace mobilization will be presented. After this, I will analyse specific experiences of resistance in the Colombian context. Fourthly, some comments on the role of international solidarity and its connection to those expressions of civil resistance will be introduced.

Some conceptual remarks regarding the Colombian context

Before starting the analysis it is necessary to make some remarks about the way two concepts have been used and understood in the Colombian context of searching possibilities for peace. The first one is the concept of *non-violence*. It is necessary to bear in mind that the majority of the peace initiatives and events have been mainly non-violent. Nevertheless, not all these initiatives and events for peace can be considered as truly non-violent actions. The armed conflict has developed a considerable polarization within the Colombian peace movement, which has led to a subsequent division between those that consider the guerrilla's warfare and the use of violent means it implies as a legitimate, as a way of reaching the transformations that Colombian society needs, and those advocating that only through non-violence is it possible to build positive and sustainable peace. In that context of polarization, non-violence has been understood for many as passivity and acceptance of the unjust situation, as a naïve position in relation with the complexities of the conflict and the social situation. So, in Colombia to make a claim for peace does not necessarily mean that someone is defending a non-violent perspective. The non-violent option needs to

be explicit, as women and indigenous people have shown when they reject all types of war and violence.¹

The second one is the concept of *civil resistance*. The term is quite new in the conflict and peace debate in Colombia (practically non existent before 2000). It became popular in the media and people working for peace given the proliferation of actions of civil resistance facing the armed actors in different parts of the country between 2000 and 2004.² In those cases, the concept was understood in the Colombian context as a form of civil and non-violent defence (Hernández, 2004), following M. Randle (1994). But the term started to be used at least with two other different meanings by many activists, politicians and researchers. In first instance, civil resistance is made synonymous with every social initiative which expresses rejection of violent events. This is the reason that many collective actions (marches, demonstrations, meetings, among others) began to be named as "actions of civil resistance". Some of these initiatives have been led by mayors of towns and cities affected by different expressions of violence, with the vision of civil resistance as "a reaction to any act of violence".³

On the other hand, in some analysis of peace initiatives the concept has started to be used as the communal efforts developed to protect life, which implies facing all types of violence (also the structural ones such as poverty and the discrimination of women), and not only those connected with the armed conflict. As in the case of indigenous peoples: "Nowadays, the indigenous peoples are not worried by the development of the war, but [by] what is going to happen in the post-war period... The indigenous peoples are directly or indirectly involved in this war, and what they are doing is to prepare the children with the ancestral diets (food security) to resist the battering of the war, because their aim is to survive and resist these years of war. That is the reason why the indigenous people from Cauca have civil resistance; that is how we, indigenous people, resist the war. It is a survival mechanism of some peoples".⁵

Despite the fact that in a context of armed conflict there is some level of resistance in all action for peace, the wider use of the concept of civil resistance for analysing the many and diverse types of peace initiatives can be misleading, especially when activists try to design a way of acting in different contexts: it is not the same to face an armed actor as to promote a productive project.

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¹ As a women leader clearly stated: "We have been against the war. But is there a just war? No, for us, no war is just: not religious war, nor ethnic or nationalist wars, nor any war on behalf of anything. We say it from the perspective of what happens to us, women, during the war. For example, when women became a war booty in Pueblo Nuevo (Turbo – Urabá); they are a booty for everyone, a means of retaliation against the other parties. And when that happens, we think that there is not a just war in our country." (Piedad Morales, personal interview, 30.04.2003).

² Datapaz has registered 48 actions of this type between 1999 and 2005, 18 of them in 2002. This type of actions not only implies a rejection of military activities of one of the armed actors, but normally a type of non-violent confrontation between civilians and combatants.

³ Luis Eduardo Garzón (mayor of the capital, Bogotá, D.C.), in: El Tiempo, 28.08.04, pages 1-14 and 1-17.

⁴ "La resistencia debe entenderse ligada a la vida [...] Se dirige a la potencialización de la vida, basándose en la experiencia y las tradiciones de la vida misma de las comunidades que son las fuerzas activas y creativas que la protegen y salvaguardan" (Villarreal & Ríos, 2006: 162).

⁵ Armando Valbuena Goauriyú, interview published in Sandoval, 2004: Vol. 2: 64.

Two key characteristics of the non-violent peace mobilization

Now it is time to present two key characteristics of peace mobilization in Colombia, highlighting the connection they have with the expressions of unarmed resistance developed by the peace activists.

A mobilization with a varied repertoire of action forms

The efforts of various social sectors led them to use an increasingly diverse repertoire of collective action as the theme of peace gained momentum during the 90s. Fifteen distinct action forms are registered in Datapaz, some are very clear and consolidated, whilst others are only just visible in amongst the complexities of the mobilization and resistance against the negative effects of the armed conflict. These different action forms can be classified in five general strategies for peace (see Figure 1), as has been done in other parts of the world. These 'strategies' allow us to organize the varied initiatives in five 'areas of intervention' in accordance with the way they orient and prioritize their activity in the social arena and/or political arena:

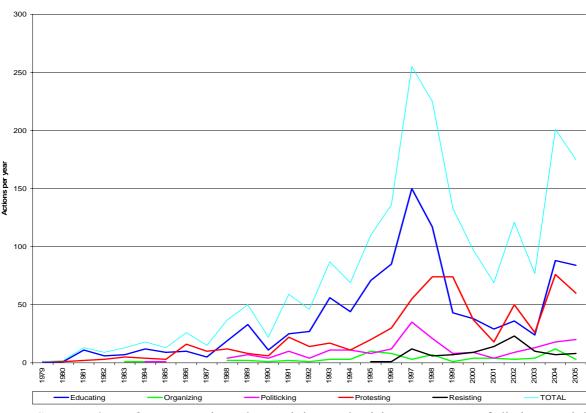


Figure 1: Collective action for peace in Colombia by strategies (1978-2005)

Strategy 1 – Educating: oriented to training and raising awareness of distinct social sectors to promote peace and a negotiated solution to the conflict, therein promoting

⁶ Despite the differences of context and objectives of peace activism, the analysis of the peace movements in USA (Lofland, 1993: 23-36) and in Germany (Mushaben, 1986: 141-154) contributes towards the clarification of these strategies. These strategies are 'educating', 'politicking', 'protesting' and 'organizing'. In the Colombian case one more emerges given the importance of the 'resisting' dynamic of the population in relation to the armed actors.

the development of an agenda for peace and its cultural support. The specific initiatives which contribute to this strategy include: 'forums, congresses, and seminars', 'educational programmes and campaigns', 'cultural and sporting events', 'religious celebrations', and 'peace awards and honours'. Together, these types of initiatives represent 50.1% of all collective action for peace which took place between 1978 and 2005.

Strategy 2 - [Self-] Organizing: oriented towards the creation of organizations and networks that promote peace work for the articulation and coordination of their efforts to foster peace. Although this only corresponds to 3.6% of all collective activity in the 28 years studied, they have been crucial in lending weight and identity to peace mobilization.

Strategy 3 – Politicking: through the creation and coordination of social and political consensus these acts look to influence the political environment in the search for peaceful alternatives. The types of collective action that contribute to this strategy are: participation in elections and referendums (particularly at the local level), processes of building social consensus, and dialogues/negotiations to find alternative solutions to the problems faced by organizations and local communities. Together, these three types of initiatives represent 10.1% of all collective action developed.

Strategy 4 – Protesting: this strategy seeks to mobilize people against violence and applies pressure for conditions which favour peace. The forms of collective action which support this strategy are: 'marches and demonstrations', 'strikes and shutdowns', and 'occupations and blockades'. They are closely associated with the traditional behavioural patterns of social movements and they can be found in a much more clear and abundant form in the social struggles of workers, peasants and indigenous peoples, students and the urban population. Together these types of initiatives from the fourth strategy represent 31.5% of all collective action for peace between 1978 and 2005.

Strategy 5 – Resisting: This strategy is oriented towards expressing a more proactive position of the population in relation to the armed actors. The action forms are basically two: 'actions of civil resistance' and 'declarations of peace zones', representing 4.7% of all collective action for peace developed. In addition to the massive mobilizations, namely the Mandate for Peace and the 'No More' Marches, there has been an extended social dynamic of resisting violence, defending life, and building more democratic and peaceful alternatives.

It is necessary one additional comment in relation with the non-violent character of this repertoire of action forms. There is a tendency of Colombian peace mobilization of not being confrontational, which means it makes low use of tactics which imply the use of force and confrontation with the adversary. In concrete terms, there is a propensity towards low levels of contentiousness in collective action for peace in Colombia: 60% of activities developed show a low level of confrontation with

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⁷ A 'peace zone' can be defined as "an attempt to establish rules or norms which limit the destructive effects of violent conflict within a particular area or during a particular time period or with regard to a particular category of people" (Allen-Nan & Mitchell, c2004: 5).

authorities and other social actors; 37% an intermediate level, and only 3% reach a high level of confrontation. But even in these with high level, only four peace events registered in Datapaz (of 2,079 in 28 years) has reached the use of violence.

A wide mobilizing infrastructure for resistance and peace

One of the consequences of the growing peace mobilization in Colombia has been the emergence of a large and diverse organizational structure. Table 1 shows us part of this complexity, but it is far of covering the whole infrastructure for peace. One indicator of this is the case of the National Peace Prize, which in seven years has received 1,180 nominations for the annual award. Among the different types of peace initiatives or experiences, it is important to focus our attention in those organizations and networks oriented to addressing the consequences of the degradation of the armed conflict, so looking for protection and defence of the population, even using forms of civil resistance.

At this level, the prominent organizations are those engaged in what has been called "peacebuilding from below" (McDonald, 1997). It is mainly the dynamic of local communities, threaten by the armed actors, which have organized themselves and developed collective strategies of action for surviving and resisting the devastating impact of the armed conflict, namely the declarations of peace communities, territories or zones; the civil resistance actions to face attacks of armed actors on villages and towns; and the development of communitarian projects to address some of the social consequences of the protracted violence.

Table 5-3: Civic Peace Initiatives: Thematic and Geographical Approach⁸

TYPES	NATIONAL INITIATIVES	REGIONAL INITIATIVES	LOCAL INITIATIVES
Protection, Defence and Resistance to Violence	Citizen's Mandate for Peace; The 'No More' Mo- vement; Peaceful Route of Women; Conscientious Objector's Group	Bajo Atrato Peace Communities (S. Francisco de Asís, Nuestra Señora del Carmen and Natividad de María); Indigenous Communities projects in Cauca; Integral peasant associa-tion of the Atrato – ACIA; 53 women initiatives in Nariño, Cauca & Chocó	Carare & Opón Peasants Association; S. José de Apartadó Peace Commu- nity; Self-Determination, Life and Dignity Commu- nities (Cacarica, Dabeiba and Balsita); Women in Black; Murindo Commi- ttee of All United for Life and Peace
Peace and Conflict Resolution	Children's Movement for Peace; Youth Network for Peace; Peace Week (REDEPAZ); National Pilgrimage for Life, Justice	School of Peace and Co- existence (Peace Program-me); Montes de María Co-mmunication Collective; Network for	100 Territories of Peace (or Municipalities of Peace); 100 Experiences of Participation (Redepaz)

⁸ A initial version of this table was published by the author of this thesis, with the collaboration of Fernando Sarmiento and Carlos Fernandez, in Accord 14, Alternatives to War: Colombia's peace processes (2004) using information gathered by CINEP and the Peace Programme. Now the table has been slightly updated using additional data from Datapaz and from two recent books on the Colombian peace movement (Sandoval, 2004: Vol. 1) and on women initiatives of pacific resistance (Villarreal & Ríos, 2006).

TYPES	NATIONAL INITIATIVES	REGIONAL INITIATIVES	LOCAL INITIATIVES
Education	and Peace (Bishops Conference); Mo-vement for Non-Violence in Colombia	Community Justice and Treatment of Conflicts (Justapaz)	
Deepening Democracy	Strengthening of Marginali-zed Sectors (Peace planet); Monitoring of Plan Colom-bia (Peace Colombia); Citi-zen's Working Groups for an Agenda for Peace (Indepaz); School for the Development of Democratic Lea-dership (Long Live Citizenship); Initiative of Colombian Women for Peace	Departmental Constituent Assemblies of Antioquia, Tolima, and Nariño; Constituent Assembly and Peace Laboratory of Eastern Antioquia; Governors of the South's Consensus for Peace	Public Consultation in Aguachica; Constituent Assemblies of Mogotes, Tarso, S. Luis, Micoahumado, Samaniego, Florida-blanca, Sonsón, Guatapé, & Granada; Community Peace Assemblies of Argelia, El Olival, El Hato, & Tibu; Pensilvania Vivid Community
Dialogue and Negotiation	National Peace Council; National Conciliation Com- mission; National Network of Mayors for Peace; Civilian Facilitation Com- mission with ELN; Ideas for Peace Foundation; Peace Observatory	14 Departmental Councils for Peace; Association of Municipalities of Alto Ariari	Municipal Peace Councils
Peace and Development	Network of Peace and Development Programmes	19 Peace and Development Programmes (4 of them as peace 'laboratories')	
Networks and Coordinating Bodies	REDEPAZ; Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace; National Network (& Alliance) of Women for Peace; University Network for Peace; Businessmen for Peace; Media for Peace	24 Departmental Working Groups for Peace; Soli- darity Network (Twin Towns, Visible Links)	Municipal Working Groups for Peace (around 150 in the whole country)

Some of the cases of communities undertaking resistance are: indigenous communities struggling for their identity and autonomy, supported by projects like NASA and "Proyecto Global"; the peace communities and experiences of returning displaced people, like San José de Apartadó, San Francisco de Asís, Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Natividad de María, and others; the communities that demanded and negotiated respect from the armed actors, like the Carare-Opón Peasants Association and the Murindó Committee All United for Life and Peace. But it is also the case of the different groups of women, flagging their opposition to all forms of violence, like 'Women in Black' and the 'Peaceful Route of Women', and the growing number of projects and organizations in Nariño, Cauca and Chocó. Finally, the 'Conscientious Objector's Group' also features, which gathers young men in order to resist the draft to the Armed Forces.

Maybe the most important result of these initiatives in such a context of protracted conflict has been the possibility to empower people/communities, making them able

to resist violence and to develop their own initiatives for peace, showing an "increased capacity to interact constructively across the lines of conflict" (Lederach, 2005: 97). In other words, all these experiences, projects, and organizations have been concrete ways in which the different social sectors have addressed the damage that degraded forms of violence have inflicted on the social fabric and have showed the possibilities for life in those contexts.

Evolution of resisting as strategy in the peace mobilization

Let us see now the evolution of the two types of action forms which more characterize the dynamic of resistance in the peace mobilization in Colombia between 1995 and 2005 (see Figure 2). It is interesting to find that these initiatives of resistance appeared a bit late in the process of peace mobilization in Colombia. They express paradoxical feelings: people's 'fatigue' with the armed conflict and the gradual surpassing of the 'fear threshold' (Cf. Albo, 1993) in relation to the violence of the armed actors. In other words, there was a moment in which people needed to demand respect and not to be involved in the armed conflict, and they found the strength to do so. As we mentioned before, there are three types of actions and initiatives in this perspective: a) the declarations of neutrality and peace zones; b) the actions of civil resistance; and c) the processes of organization and communitarian resistance. Let us briefly describe each of them.

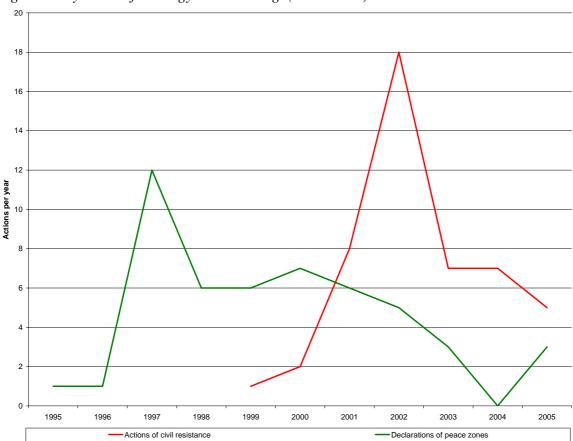


Figure 2: Dynamic of Strategy 5 – Resisting (1995-2005)

Declarations of peace [or neutral] zones. Here we can find three different kind of experiences which developed between 1995 and 1998. Firstly, there were populations which declared themselves 'neutral' in the armed conflict such as Punta de Piedra in Urabá, Murindó, Zaragoza, and above all the indigenous organization in Antioquia, for whom being neutral is "that we do not accept being recruited by any armed force. Not the army, nor the guerrilla, nor the paramilitaries will find any information on us... We will keep protecting our rights, working to strengthen our organizations without being involved in the armed conflict. We support a civic, democratic, pluralistic and participative society" (Gobernadores Indígenas de Urabá, 9 1997: 24). Secondly, there were groups of forcibly displaced people in the regions of Urabá that declared themselves peace communities, as a strategy for disengaging their communities from the armed conflict and making a return to their place of origin possible. These communities (San José de Apartadó, San Francisco de Asís, Natividad de María and Nuestra Señora del Carmen), with the support of the Diocese of Apartadó, CINEP, Justicia y Paz, and with international cooperation, started up the process of returning to their areas of origin and developing diverse types of projects. Thirdly, there are the municipalities, which declared themselves as 'peace territories', demanding respect for the civilian population within their territory; ¹⁰ amongst them Puerto Wilches, Villavicencio, Corinto, Aguachica, Tulúa, Ungía, Medellín and Samaniego. The majority of them occurred as part of the campaign 'One Hundred Peace Municipalities' promoted by Redepaz.

Actions of civil resistance. Between 2000 and 2005 the actions of civil resistance emerged with considerable force. Of the 48 registered in the database, 34 correspond to this period. One can identify two different scenarios of civil resistance actions: a) those that involve a face-to-face confrontation between an armed actor (the guerrilla or paramilitaries) and the population, normally when the former attempts to attack a town or to kidnap someone; b) those that are developed with the explicit idea of opposing the violence perpetrated by the armed actor, but which do not imply direct interaction between the population and armed actor, as is the case of the voluntary blackouts, 'cacerolazos' (the banging of pots and pans together by the population in the street) or similar protest events. In different ways, all are explicit expressions of resistance to armed actors, predominantly against guerrilla groups, although there are also three cases directed against paramilitary groups. Normally it is a form of nonviolent resistance, although in four cases there were violent confrontations with fatalities, three with paramilitaries and one with the guerrillas. 11 The indigenous people have played a leading role in these initiatives. But, there have been also acts of civil resistance promoted by governmental officials, particularly in the case of the mayor in Bogotá. But in terms of public opinion, cases where the unarmed civilian population has gone out to face armed groups – particularly the guerrilla - have had more impact and publicity in the media.

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⁹ Indigenous Governors of Urabá.

¹⁰ This is part of the program 'One Hundred Municipalities for Peace' nationally promoted by Redepaz. ¹¹ A detailed account of this case and four other cases of civil resistance can be found in the book by Juanita León (2004).

Resisting as a communitarian process. Behind some of these events of civil resistance in many cases it is found long processes of community work and organization. In the context of a worsening conflict, the defence of life is undertaken through civil resistance against the war. It is an effort made by different social sectors, especially the indigenous people and African-Colombians, to survive the battering of the conflict while it lasts. "The war is not going to finish in the next few years, [...] it is necessary to strengthen the capacity for resistance of all social sectors [...] to create the right conditions to survive, and in some cases, under very difficult conditions, take the communities away from the impact of war." This has been done through a discourse that demands the autonomy of the communities from the armed groups and that proclaims their neutrality in relation to the conflict; that is to say, they do not want to get involved in the dynamics of war. "In this recent time where the conflict has escalated, and got worse, there are indigenous communities that clearly say: we cut ourselves off from the armed actors, we are not aligned with anyone; they do not go through our territory, etc. It is like a strong position of autonomy and active neutrality."13

Initiatives of civil resistance and international solidarity

International solidarity has been crucial for the development of initiatives of unarmed resistance in Colombia. It is possible to say that without this help those experiences would have problems of sustainability. I am going to share part of the accumulated experience in Cinep in relation to this point, ¹⁴ given our experience of accompaniment of the peace communities in the Atrato river since 1996. But we can generalize using this case and refer to other experiences, which present a quite similar pattern regarding of international solidarity.

Among the forms of non-violent intervention (cf. Moser-Puangsuwan & Weber, 2000) it is possible to identify the following in the case of the peace communities of the Bajo Atrato:

Local actions, campaigns and lobbying: in different countries, particularly France, Spain, and the Netherlands, intense campaigns in favour of the peace communities were developed. Solidarity committees were convened, which displayed a wide range of activities. Examples of this are the French committee, configured between 1996 and 1998, integrated by a platform of NGOs (CCFD, ACAT, AI, Escuela de la Paz, Fundación Charles Leopold Mayer, among others) and a network of local committees in several cities in France. Their purpose is to raise awareness about the situation of the communities and to generate different types of social and political support:

- Activities for raising awareness of the situation: conferences, festivals, etc.
- o Publishing leaflets and books on the peace communities.
- Every year a delegation of the committee has come to visit the communities.

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¹² Carlos Rosero, interview published in Sandoval, 2004: Vol. 2: 56.

¹³ Armando Valbuena Goauriyú, interview published in Sandoval, 2004: Vol. 2: 63.

¹⁴ I am thankful with Eduardo Vega and Claire Lunay, who helped me refresh my memory on the work with the peace communities and how the international community has played a role there.

- Lobbying to put pressure on their on government and the European
 Union, but also in the Colombian government.
- Organizing a tour of representatives of the communities and NGOs working with them in order to visit the local committees.
- Denouncing human rights violations and other abuses against the communities.
- Defusing the information about the peace communities in other parts of the world, particularly in similar situations of armed conflict.

This social and political support has been important for helping in sustainability of the communities. The armed actors and those with economic interests in the region feel they are observed at international level and this restrains them of abusing. One consequence of all this international solidarity with the peace communities in the Bajo Atrato was the fact that they were awarded with the Human Rights Prize of the French government in 1998.

- Witness and accompaniment: the presence of international volunteers alongside the communities has been an important contribution, bringing some protection and security; both the armed forces and the illegal armed actors have normally refrained from doing anything against the communities in presence of these witnesses. On the other hand, this presence encouraged the members of the communities to develop inner strength for facing pressure and surpassing the vulnerability they experience at the hands of the armed actors. In the Bajo Atrato, in addition to the presence of PBI, there have been volunteers from France and Spain, some of them working as part of Cinep's team in the region.
- Humanitarian assistance: Given the situation of displacement and the return to their land after their declaration as peace communities, members of the communities needed lots of humanitarian support, particularly in the critical situation in the camps in Pavarando and at the time of returning. In those moments, they received important humanitarian aid more from international governments, agencies, and NGOs, than from the Colombian government. One important challenge for this humanitarian aid was to coordinate the different institutions, agencies and NGOs for the delivery of the aid, in order to have wider coverage and better and timely distribution.
- Funding: It is clear that the international community has funded the effort of the peace communities, and this has been crucial for their sustainability. They and the organizations working with them have received money from governments (i.e. France, Spain, the Nederland, and the EU), international organizations (such as the Red Cross), international NGOs and agencies (i.e. Secours Catholique, Oxfam, Swiss Aid, etc.). But in addition, there is some help coming from the grass-roots level in Europe. For example, in France the local committees of solidarity have developed different types of activities in each locality for raising some funds to be sent to the peace

communities. Nevertheless, in the last period there is an interesting change in the way of bringing this help. Previously, the international actors supported the communities funding the institutions and organizations working with them. Now they are funding the communities and the social and ethnic-territorial organizations more directly, as in the case of ASCOBA (Association of Communitarian Councils and Organizations of Bajo Atrato).

Conclusions

The dynamics of peace mobilization in Colombia have shown the way in which people living in a context of protracted armed conflict can develop different ways of resistance to violence. As a whole, we can consider the large peace mobilization in Colombia in the last 15 years as an expression of non-violent resistance. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that in this context there are some experiences which in more explicit ways show that it is possible to resist violence and provocations to commit violence, as is the case of the actions of civil resistance, peace zones or territories, and projects orientated towards structural ways of resistance. For these experiences, international solidarity and support is crucial. Their fragility can only be surpassed when they are backed by others, in a dynamic of globalising solidarity and non-violent resistance towards a just, lasting, and sustainable peace.

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