



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520
-transmitted via email-

July 24, 2023

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, I write to you in solidarity and support for my brother bishops in Colombia regarding the current hopeful, though complex, political and security situation in their country.

The Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference (*Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia*) has been a critical partner in the Colombian Government's efforts to implement the 2016 Peace Accord between the Colombian state and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). The Colombian bishops' peace implementation projects have received generous funding from the U.S. Department of State and USAID, and their leadership is in regular collaboration and dialogue with U.S. Government policymakers, the United States Institute for Peace, as well as many religious and non-religious peacebuilding organizations in the United States, Europe, and throughout the western hemisphere.

Today, the Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference, as the most trusted national civil society organization in Colombia, is actively supporting and accompanying the peace process between the Colombian Government and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) and taking part in negotiation efforts in Havana, Cuba, as well as in Colombia.

As you continue to develop and implement our country's policies in support of achieving a lasting peace in Colombia, I offer the following points for your consideration:

- As the Colombian Government starts the process of expanding civil society participation in the peace negotiation process with the ELN—after having signed a provisional ceasefire agreement this July—it is vital for the people of Colombia to know that the United States, their country's most trusted security ally, robustly supports this process towards achieving a lasting peace with the ELN. Strong United States support will incentivize Colombian civil society participation and strengthen the negotiation process.
- The United States should also support Colombia in developing and assuring durable international support for the peace negotiation process between the Colombian Government and the ELN.

- The Colombian bishops urge the United States to remain open to the possibility of sending a special envoy to the Colombian Government's negotiation efforts with the ELN, as our country did when it designated Bernard Aronson as the U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombia Peace Process with the FARC in 2016. The bishops believe that this step will fortify the Colombian Government's negotiating position.

Simply stated, Mr. Secretary, the support of the United States for Colombia's peace process with the ELN remains critical. As General Laura Richards, head of U.S. Southern Command, said last year, "the Western Hemisphere is largely free and secure because of Colombia's stabilizing efforts, and Colombia is the United States' closest security partner."

My committee regularly supports the Colombian bishops' peace negotiating team in conducting their advocacy here in Washington; we would be most pleased to facilitate a private meeting with you if you would consider it helpful.

Be assured of my prayers as you continue to lead our nation's diplomatic efforts around the world.

+ *David J. Malloy*

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

CC: The Honorable Juan Gonzalez
Special Assistant to the President and
Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere
The National Security Council