

April 20, 2021

OPEN LETTER TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

It is with anguish that I write this message, having heard the laments and suffering yet again, in response to the deaths of our social leaders. Yesterday in the city of Bogota, Francisco Giacometto Gomez was assassinated. Today, our communities in the department of Cauca also experienced a tragic start to their day, with the news of the assassination of the companera and Governor of the Laguna Siberia, Sandra Liliana Pena. As president of the National Peace Committee of the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Co-existence, as a leader and human rights defender, and as protector of nature, I am compelled to manifest my complete condemnation and repudiation of these terrible events.

I am sending a cordial greeting to the Security Council of the United Nations, from within Colombian ancestral territoriality. Considering the functions and powers that the Security Council exercises in relation to the primordial responsibility of the maintenance of peace and international security, it is my responsibility to request your attention and urgent action in the face of the grave situation that had put at risk the realization of a stable and lasting peace in our country.

This is why I am adding my voice to the many messages of national and international concern and denunciation that have circulated in relation to the instability of the process for the implementation of the Peace Accords. Not only is there is an evident and dramatic failure to develop effective guarantees for the lives of social leaders, human rights defenders and ex-combatants, but there is also a lack of political will on the part of the Colombian government to fully comply with the Peace Accords.

This is alarming, in a context in which violence intensifies and armed actors multiply, deepening the already acute humanitarian crisis in various regions of the country. At present, the lives of hundreds of communities continue to develop in the midst of the pandemic and bloodshed, generating collective devastation, with the dismemberment and torture of bodies, forced displacement and the horror of death on a large scale, as part of their anguished daily lives.

Those of us who support peace feel a helplessness, frustrated that historically racialized, impoverished Colombians, most of whom put their hopes in a negotiated solution to the armed conflict, now do not even know from which direction the bullets are being shot. They have minimal possibilities for just and equitable economic development, given that they are living through conditions similar to those endured in the times of slavery while at the same time, they have to deal with the presence of armed groups who impose their will and attack the basic principles of life with dignity.

In the face of this difficult situation, the Colombian government has not only shown itself to be indifferent, but that it continues to be part of the problem, avoiding the provision of any real solution. Rather, the government defends the spraying of illicit crops with glyphosate, despite all the consequences this has for public health, food sovereignty and the integrity of the territories. The Colombian state has chosen this high-impact measure over other anti-drug policies, such as regularization and legalization, which are currently more timely, necessary and effective. In doing so, it is demonstrating its ignorance and backwardness in relation to international practices that promote more convincing changes in the fight against drugs, which seek to generate effective material and productive conditions, instead of campaigns of the stigmatization of populations involved in drug

trafficking networks. I utterly disagree with the current anti-drug policies of Colombia, and manifest my complete support for affected communities. I urge the government to explore the most appropriate routes to deal directly with this problem, in order to foster economies for life that contribute to closing the gaps of inequity and inequality that the communities victimized by war and the narco-industry are living.

The clear lack of political will and absence of effective response evidenced by the national government in dealing with this ominous scenario is similarly expressed in each of the spaces and institutions created for the functioning of the peace process. An important example has to do with the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence, an advising and consultative organism of the Colombian government, created by Law 885 of 26 May 2017. Its mission is to strive to achieve and maintain peace; to promote a culture of reconciliation, tolerance, co-existence and non-stigmatization, and to facilitate the coordination among various state organs and entities relating to the peace agreement. I myself have witnessed the present government's constant assault on the various social and political sectors who are working for real peace, and the way it intentionally creates financial and institutional obstacles that prevent us from developing timely programs on the scale needed to implement peace in more remote regions of the country.

The lack of transparency in the management of resources, the economic dependence of the National Peace Council, the weight of the bureaucratic responsibilities for the execution of actions, the weak guarantees for the sustainability of the Technical Secretary of the Council, and the unsuccessful attempts at articulation and communication with the national government, fundamentally affect the role that we, as peace councillors, are able to play in this important space. This is why I insist that those of us who are members of the National Peace Council persevere in the efforts that are required based on the daily lived realities of Colombians. We must demand that the national government take up its national and international responsibilities related to peace. We must demand that our voices and recommendations are heard, and that there is real progress in the implementation of the historic Peace Accords reached with the FARC, including the necessary goal for all the remaining armed groups to participate so that peace in Colombia is complete.

At the same time, I would like to call the United Nations Security Council to attention, to request your participation in processes of observation, international accompaniment and urgent support in the realization of measures and meaningful alternatives that go beyond the traditional expressions and reports that end up forgotten and ignored by the government of Colombia. Without a concrete commitment in relation to this situation, there is a risk of diminishing the suffering of a ravaged people. We request you demand the protection of human rights, the strengthening of the National Peace Council, seeking to ensure that its pluralist and vital spirit, a spirit oriented to the concern for life and the guarantee of security in the territories, does not falter in the face of the rattle of guns and the pain of the continuation of war.

Mindfully,

Francia Elena Márquez Mina

President of the National Peace Committee