

London, 15 August 2018

IVÁN DUQUE MÁRQUEZ  
Presidente de la República

Dear President Duque,

As organisations with a long history of working on human rights, inclusive, sustainable and just development and promoting programmes that address poverty and inequality in Colombia, we would like to welcome you as the new President of the Republic of Colombia.

ABColumbia members welcome the commitment in your inauguration speech to sustainable development and the promotion of equity. Your appointment of a gender-balanced cabinet is a very welcome symbol, and we hope that it will be developed to provide a cultural change in Colombia that will reach the rural areas.

We recognised that many challenges lie ahead for your government and therefore write to you today to ask you to take bold steps to advance inclusive, just and sustainable peace and development. Key for sustainable peace and development is the incorporation and respect for diverse views of development across different sectors of society.

Colombia is a unique country in terms of its rich diversity of cultures and ethnicities. These communities have their own Cosmovision in relation to development of their land and territories. As the main local partners of ABColumbia we are aware of their concerns regarding some public policies. These are policies related to the expansion of the extractive and agribusinesses industries into their territory. In this respect the emphasise in your speeches on inclusion is encouraging. Two important constitutional mechanisms to ensure inclusion in decision making regarding development are: free, informed and prior consultation (consulta previa) and the Consulta Popular.

ABColumbia members have concentrated a good part of their support to organisations working in the rural areas of Colombia addressing issues of human rights violations, poverty and inequality. We therefore consider that your commitment in your speech in Catatumbo to “social justice” to be immensely important. In this respect there are key challenges for your government across Colombia in areas where the conflict has been at its most acute. The implementation of the PDETs together with the participation of the local communities will be important in this respect. We would recommend that your government ensures that the PDETs are developed and implemented together with grassroots communities, and include their planes de etnodesarrollo, planes de vida and planes de salvaguardia.

The situation on the Pacific Coast of Colombia, where ABColumbia supports many local partners, is particularly acute and they are suffering a humanitarian crisis. We would therefore encourage your government to engage in dialogue with the Church and local organisations in Chocó and to respond to their call for improved basic services and local infrastructure, to tackle corruption and to strengthen local state institutions. As well as, ensuring the full and rapid implementation of the Constitutional

Court Decision T-622, which provides a framework for addressing many of these issues, including that of illegal gold mining.

In your inauguration speech you also refer to the challenge of the illicit drug economy due to coca cultivation being at an all-time high. ABColombia has seen how the competition to control the cultivation of these crops by neo-paramilitary and the ELN guerrilla groups along with the Mexican cartels has further exacerbated the violence experienced by local rural populations. Some of ABColombia member organisations work on policies around drug-trafficking and they have found that forced eradication is not sustainable. In their experience, what has been more effective and sustainable is concerted, gradual and voluntary crop substitution together with rural development programmes, including the provision of local infrastructure and support for local markets.

ABColombia welcome the acknowledgement by you of the extremely concerning situation of HRDs and the importance of preventing violence against human rights defenders and prosecuting those responsible, both the material and intellectual authors. Many of these HRDs that have been killed were leading rural processes in relation to the environment, development and land restitution. Security and protection for defenders, especially ethnic and campesino/a leaders is a key challenge. We would therefore recommend that you invite the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of HRDs to Colombia.

A further major challenge is that of land concentration, which has been exacerbated by internal forced displacement and dispossession of land during the conflict. Land restitution has been extremely slow; it is essential that this process has further resources committed to it, and effective oversight to ensure that it is accelerated. An accurate and complete land registry is essential before developing large scale projects, if victims' rights and the rights of communities previously excluded are to be upheld. In this respect we draw your attention to the new draft Land Law as this could further exacerbate land concentration and further provisions within the law, including legalising land appropriated through irregular means and allocating public land to mining and energy projects; this would further deepen inequality and exclusion, which is a root cause of violence. We would therefore recommend that further consultation is taken with ethnic communities before proceeding with this law.

Transitional Justice and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) is important to the victims of the conflict in terms of truth, justice and non-repetition. It will therefore be essential for all armed actors, both legal and illegal, to take part in this system and to tell the truth, in order to provide a firm foundation for building sustainable peace in Colombia. Given the commitments made to victims in your inauguration speech we look forward to seeing the policies involving the JEP fully implemented and ask that your government ensures a victims-centred approach is adopted.

We encourage you to promote an environment in which peace dialogues with the ELN can continue and to establish as soon as is possible a bi-lateral cease fire.

Local and regional actors, churches and other civil society actors are fundamental in any peacebuilding process, so we urge you to ensure that they fully participate in decision making bodies related to peace and development. We hope that under your government, Colombia can achieve a just and lasting peace and inclusive and sustainable development.

We appreciate you taking the time to consider our suggestions.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Winstanley  
**Gerente de Programas e Incidencia, ABColombia**

**En nombre de**

Clare Dixon	Head of Region for Latin America Caribbean Section, CAFOD
Thomas Mortensen	Country Representative Colombia, CHRISTIAN AID (UK/ Ireland)
Aida Pesquera	Country Director Colombia, OXFAM GB
Lorraine Currie	Head of International Programmes Department, SCIAF
Tom Crawley	Head of Region Latin America, Trócaire