

Walking towards Peace: FOR Peace Presence in 2018





Dear friends,

We are grateful for completing our sixteenth year of protective presence in Colombia. In 2018, our team continued to provide physical and political accompaniment of human rights defenders, victims of the armed conflict and conscientious objectors. Our partners work in the regions of Urabá (the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó), Valle de Cauca and Cauca on the Pacific Coast (CONPAZ and the Interfaith Justice and Peace Commission), Cesar (Tierra Digna) and Cundinamarca (Nilo communities and ACOOC).

We would first like to thank our allies who dedicate their time and energy to support FORPP by reaching out to a broader audience by arranging speaking tours, publishing articles, or disseminating urgent actions and appeals. Your tireless commitment makes a great difference to our ability to protect the lives of our partners. Equally we cannot emphasize enough the contribution of our generous donors to accomplish our mission of accompanying these courageous social leaders in 2018. We offer you special thanks for your solidarity in the defense of life and land in Colombia.

Despite the signing of the 2016 Peace Accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), threats and assassinations against social leaders continue at alarming rates. Risks of physical attacks are further compounded with legal actions taken by state actors against human rights activists, all of which threaten the nonviolent activists' human rights and limit their space in the new post-accord context. International accompaniment remains as important as ever.

While the security situation in Colombia remains volatile for leaders and rural communities, our Colombian partners remain steadfast in their daily struggles for peace and human rights.

Despite the continued threats against our partners, it has become increasingly difficult to find sufficient funding to maintain our extensive accompaniment in Colombia. We are in the process of evaluating our program and exploring with our partners the most efficient ways to provide safety. We intend to adopt revised strategies to achieve the most effective impact to contribute to sustainable peace and justice.

We hope you enjoy reading about what we have been doing in 2018 and thank you for your continued support that makes all this work possible. Please stay with us throughout this crucial process and throughout 2019.

The Board of Directors



2018

FOR Peace Presence is made up of volunteer accompaniers who demonstrate a commitment to and understanding of non-violent direct action, strong intercultural competence, and knowledge of the human rights context in Colombia.

FOR Peace Presence volunteers and staff members hail from different professional, educational and cultural backgrounds, from Austria, Italy, Mexico, Venezuela, Malaysia, Lebanon, and the United States, united in their pledge to bear honest witness to the challenges of the post-accord context in Colombia.

In 2018, **FOR Peace Presence** provided 271 days of physical accompaniment to all our partners.

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Special thanks to our 2018 Accompaniers:

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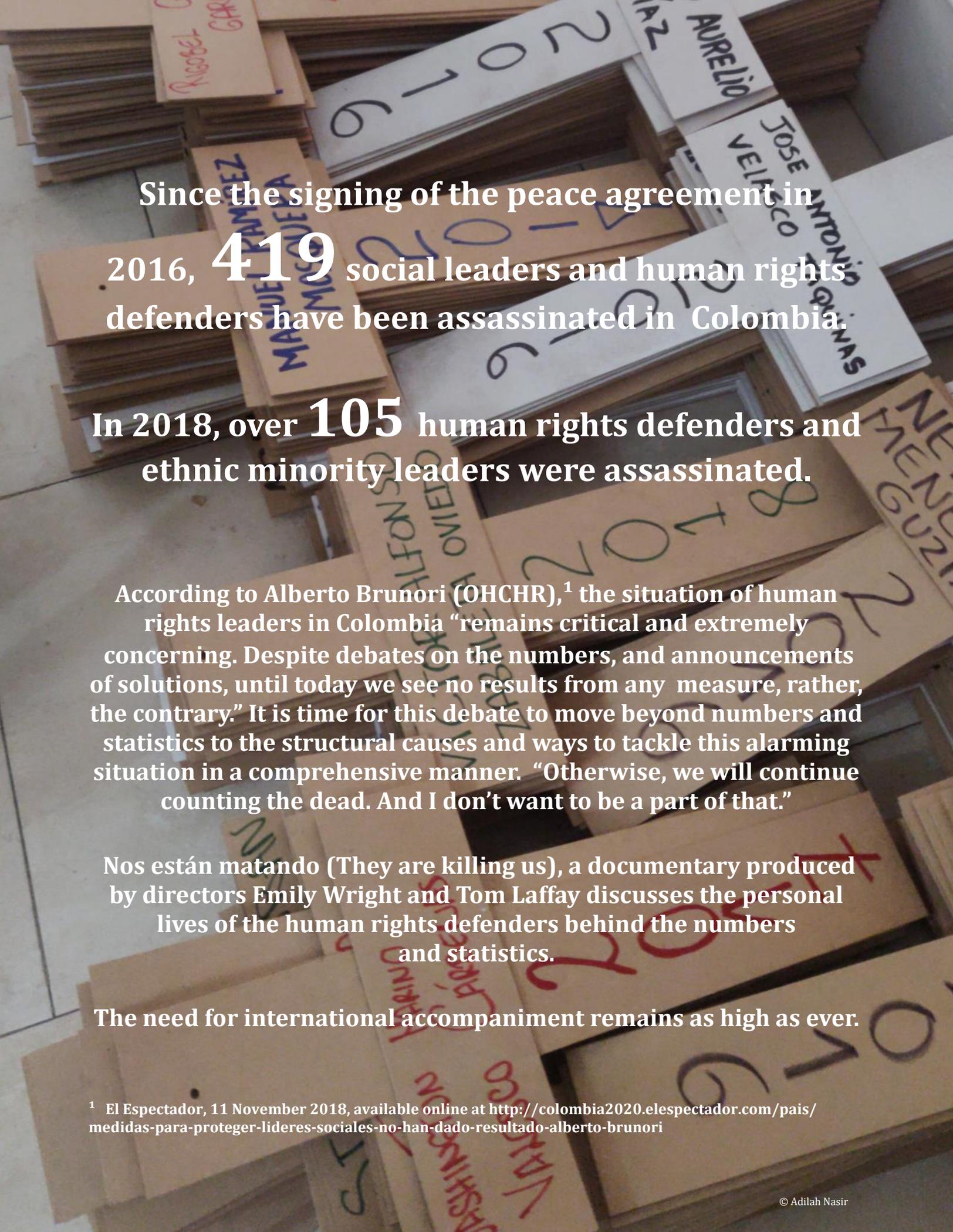
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Since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, **419** social leaders and human rights defenders have been assassinated in Colombia.

In 2018, over **105** human rights defenders and ethnic minority leaders were assassinated.

According to Alberto Brunori (OHCHR),¹ the situation of human rights leaders in Colombia “remains critical and extremely concerning. Despite debates on the numbers, and announcements of solutions, until today we see no results from any measure, rather, the contrary.” It is time for this debate to move beyond numbers and statistics to the structural causes and ways to tackle this alarming situation in a comprehensive manner. “Otherwise, we will continue counting the dead. And I don’t want to be a part of that.”

Nos están matando (They are killing us), a documentary produced by directors Emily Wright and Tom Laffay discusses the personal lives of the human rights defenders behind the numbers and statistics.

The need for international accompaniment remains as high as ever.

¹ El Espectador, 11 November 2018, available online at <http://colombia2020.elespectador.com/pais/medidas-para-proteger-lideres-sociales-no-han-dado-resultado-alberto-brunori>

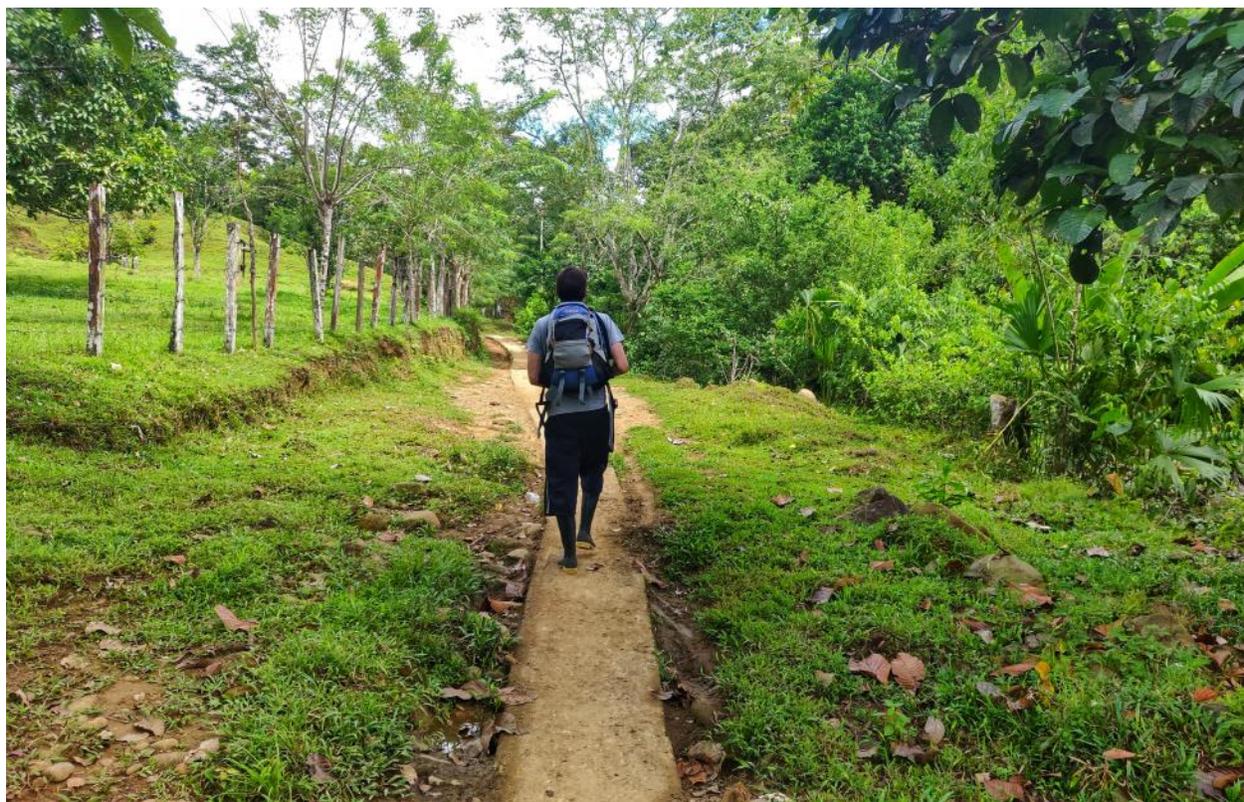
Where FOR Peace Presence Accompanies...



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colombia_relief_location_map.jpg
Edited by FORPP

In 2018, FOR Peace Presence maintained our team in San José de Apartadó, increasing support for protective physical accompaniment beyond La Unión to San Josecito (La Holandita) after petitions from the Peace Community following the assassination attempt made by neo-paramilitaries against the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó's Legal Representative Germán Graciano in December 2017.

- Our team accompanied the Peace Community as they carried out internal organizing meetings in villages across their territory, weekly communal work events, and in emergencies, which included incursions of neo-paramilitary groups in territories in hamlets of San José de Apartadó.
- Aside from physical accompaniments, FOR Peace Presence also focused on political accompaniment for the Peace Community, in light of increasing concerns that human rights defenders in Colombia face not just physical risks but also risks of legal actions against them. FOR Peace Presence conducted meetings with Colombian regional and national authorities, diplomatic corps, multilateral institutions and strategic international allies. In particular, to increase international visibility about the Peace Communities continued non-violent resistance to the various physical and political threats against them, FOR Peace Presence co-organized a speaking tour in the United States in October, where Community leader Jesús Emilio Tuberquia met with members of the US Congress and social movements.
- Despite persistent threats from military and paramilitary forces, no members of the Community were killed in 2018.

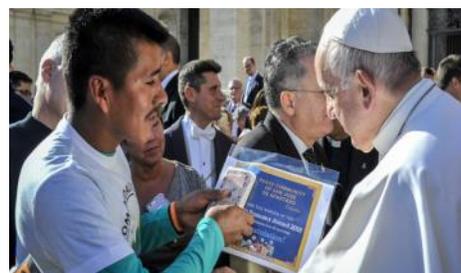


FOR Peace Presence remains concerned about the plight of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in 2019 and beyond. Despite multiple human rights accompaniment organizations witnessing the presence of neo-paramilitaries in the zone and the public denunciations by the Peace Community themselves, FOR Peace Presence witnessed the 17th Brigade of the Colombian National Army open a legal case to charge the Peace Community with defamation for their documentation of human rights violations in San José de Apartadó, despite the Community's constitutionally-guaranteed right to do so. We denounce this action taken by the National Army, done instead of creating protective measures with the Peace Community, as the Colombian State has been charged to do by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.



Photo courtesy of El Espectador (on [Twitter](#))

These physical and legal threats against the Peace Community stand in extreme contrast to the support the community has for their human rights work, on both a national and international level. This year alone, the Peace Community received two prestigious awards: legal representative Germán Graciano Posso was named Diakonia's Human Rights Defender of the Year, and the Peace Community was awarded the Prophetic Economy Award for 2018.



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In the words of a member of the Peace Community reflecting on the award:

“Being human, and remaining so, is connected to recognizing the other as different from oneself. I grow as a person when that different person complements me and we walk alongside one another. Building together permits us to transform ourselves into a ‘we.’ This means going beyond just one person. It requires doing it communally. In the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, we declared ourselves neutral in the middle of the war in 1997 and have continued as such since. This led us to create an economic vision that permits us to walk collectively: community lands; food self-sufficiency; respect for nature through organic crops, especially cocoa/chocolate; communal work; solidarity economy funds; mutual care, even with those outside the Peace Community; and establishing solidarity networks, particularly at the international level. Being with others, building together, and caring for the planet – our house, our Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) – is a goal that many desire. Meanwhile, the economic system imposed at the global level fiercely attacks the construction of such different proposals. However, fortunately, many remain committed to achieving such alternatives, even if we remain few in numbers, and many attempts are small and localized, as in the Peace Community. Our economy is prophetic, because we have resisted with autonomy during almost twenty-two years, thus showing the world that farmers exist who trust in humanity and are willing to provide light to the construction of alternative economies.”



In the Pacific region where assassinations of community leaders are pervasive, FOR Peace Presence provided protective accompaniment to the organizations Communities Constructing Peace in the Territories (CONPAZ) and the Inter-faith Peace and Justice Commission on trips to the city of Buenaventura and surrounding river communities in the Chocó and Valle de Cauca provinces.

In May 2018, FOR Peace Presence accompanied a humanitarian mission to the Chocó región following the kidnapping and killing of four local community leaders. FOR Peace Presence accompanier, Kati from Connecticut, shared this reflection about the accompaniment:

“The Naya River, in a remote part of Western Colombia, serves as the public road for the 64 Afro-Colombian communities living in wooden houses on stilts along the riverbanks. The backdrop is a lush green forest. This area doesn’t have reliable cell service, so word also travels by boat. While we rode along the four-hour route from the mouth of the river to the community we stayed in, the leader traveling with us would often ask to pause for a minute to share the details of their upcoming assembly to people on the riverbank. We’d wait until they shouted back “sounds good!” and then continue on our way. Most people work as farmers and fishermen, but the recent attacks have left civilians fearful of continuing the work that sustains them and their families. The poor phone service only furthers the sense of isolation and insecurity.”

FOR Peace Presence also conducted

- Periodic visits to observe the humanitarian spaces of Puente Nayero and Punta Icacó, situated in the neighborhood La Playita in Buenaventura.
- Accompaniments to support peace-building processes as well as workshops on justice and memory in the indigenous and afro-Colombian communities along the San Juan and Naya rivers.
- Accompaniments to observe the process of founding new humanitarian zones, particularly in San Pedro de Ingará, Chocó as well as the Comunidad Cabecera in Chocó. These accompaniments are particularly important to support the creation and expansion of innovative ‘peace community’ models of civilian safe zones across rural and urban Colombia.



FOR Peace Presence continues to accompany the Tierra Digna Research Center for Social Justice on the ground. The organization provides legal assistance to the communities in César and Magdalena, who for years have suffered from threats and environmental damage due to coal production in Colombia. Aside from legal assistance, Tierra Digna also supports the communities in recounting their narratives to the rest of the country.

FOR Peace Presence also continues to work with ASOTRACAMPO, who are still awaiting news about the process of land restitution for members of their community. The members have expressed concerns that with the new government, their situation will become de-prioritized and there will be no resolution seen in the near future, if ever.

FOR Peace Presence accompanies the community of Nilo, Cundinamarca, whose residents live outside Colombia's largest military base, Tolemaida, and have filed national and international petitions with legal institutions such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to assert the protection. In Bogotá, we provided political accompaniment to Nilo community leaders at a meeting with the Secretary General's Office to support and demonstrate international attention to the implementation of the Colombian Constitutional Court's ruling in favor of Nilo's legal process.

The community of Nilo currently faces legal action by the Ministry of Defense in Colombia over the ownership of land in the area. FOR Peace Presence accompanies this legal process and foresees continuing need for accompaniment in 2019 and beyond.

From our Political Work...

Our political accompaniments included attendance at meetings organized by the Association of Conscientious Objectors (ACOOC) in support of their right to conscientious objection to military service. In addition, we supported the Association of Farm Workers (ASOTRACAMPO) at the National Land Agency regarding their demand for re-settlement following eviction from their land outside the city of Barranquilla in a 'free-trade' zone.

FOR Peace Presence remained active in the network of international accompaniments working in Colombia. Periodic meetings with organizations such as Witness for Peace, Peace Brigades International (PBI), the Swedish branch of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR), Peace Watch (PAS), and International Action of Peace (IAP) served to share security information relating to the Colombian context and support each other with respect to physical and political accompaniments.

In 2018, the 3rd Universal Periodical Review on Colombia was held in Geneva, during which the International Fellowship of Reconciliation's (IFOR) Representatives to the United Nations in Geneva presented [a statement](#) on February 2nd to the United Nations Human Rights Council about the ongoing situation in Colombia, which was drafted in close collaboration with FOR Peace Presence and the organizations we accompany. In a further cooperation, representatives of ACOOC and CONPAZ were invited to Geneva, in order to personally speak in front of the Human Rights Council about current issues of conscientious objectors and human rights defenders in Colombia.

A joint effort from accompaniment organizations on the ground in Colombia enabled an official visit by Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, to Colombia in November 2018. During this visit, he met with some of our partners and visited the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.





**FOR PEACE
PRESENCE**



OUR MISSION

FOR Peace Presence provides physical safety, political visibility & solidarity by accompanying communities & organizations that embrace active non-violence to defend life, land, and dignity.

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