2022 was a big year for us, as we celebrated our 20th anniversary! The past two decades have been transformative and have allowed us to make lasting connections with at-risk communities across the country. After twenty years standing alongside our partners, we continue to witness the power that protective accompaniment has to create real change and lasting peace.

We closed out the year 2022 with an incredible milestone. Our field team member María Eugenia Mosquera Riascos, or Maru as we call her, has been selected as the 2022 Women Building Peace Award recipient by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). This prestigious award not only reflects Maru’s dedication to peacebuilding throughout Colombia, but the fundamental role that women have in creating long-lasting change and peace. Read more about her story on page 9.

Nevertheless, 2022 was again a tumultuous year for Colombia. The wave of violence which increased significantly during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia has not stopped yet. Colombia is still one of the most dangerous places in the world to defend human rights, 189 social leaders have been killed in Colombia in 2022 and despite the peace agreement between the former FARC-EP rebels and the Colombian government in 2016, there has been a shocking increase in the number of massacres; 94 to be precise, the second highest rate in 17 years.

The year 2022 also marked a historic change in Colombian politics. Leftist Gustavo Petro won Colombia’s presidency and is the first progressive to do so in the country’s history. Petro has vowed profound social and economic change and promised that his government will be a government of peace and life. The implementation of concrete peace policies in Colombia is urgently needed. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), there are currently six different armed conflicts in Colombia. Decades of war have resulted in 8.8 million victims. In the past 50 years, several bilateral peace negotiations took place between the Colombian government and different armed groups. In 2016, a bilateral peace agreement with the largest Colombian guerrilla group at the time, the FARC-EP, was signed and thousands of combatants demobilized.

Six years later, civilians, historically victimized and marginalized throughout decades of conflict, experience similar or new patterns of violence. However, despite some progress, implementation of the peace agreement is slower than expected. The Comptroller General of Colombia noted that at the rate of the former government, the treaty will not be fully implemented until 2047. Without exception, all points of the peace agreement are behind schedule.

After the peace agreement, many regions in Colombia saw armed groups leave, only to have them replaced by a new criminal group. Other regions simply did not benefit from bilateral peace agreements, as the dominant armed group did not negotiate a peace agreement.

These experiences are neither new nor unexpected. Bilateral negotiations with a single armed group in a multilateral conflict are, at best, shortsighted. The concept of “Total Peace”, coined by the newly elected president, is multifaceted, focusing on social and environmental justice and emphasizing the importance of constructing peace that takes numerous expressions of violence into consideration and that focuses on victims’ rights. Negotiating with different armed groups simultaneously is a crucial element of the concept of Total Peace.

Over the second half of 2022, significant steps were made towards starting peace negotiations and dialogue between the government and several armed groups, including FARC-EP dissident groups, paramilitary successor groups and the guerrillas of the ELN (National Liberation Army). On the 21st of November, the first official talks between the Colombian government and the ELN, currently Colombia’s largest guerrilla group, began. Additionally, at least 23 other illegally armed groups have expressed interest in entering into peace talks as well.

Many human rights defenders view Petro’s peace plan as highly ambitious, holding the potential for a significant shift in paradigms. The very name itself, “Total Peace,” evokes a sense of utopia, akin to a cherished dream for many.

At such moments, the urgency of the need for continued international observation and strengthening the self-protection strategies of threatened communities crystallizes, but in reality, our work goes on day-in, day-out. We maintained a full schedule of accompaniments throughout different regions of the country, including Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Meta, and Cesar. The commitment, insight and resilience of our team of national and international accompaniers, both in the field and when representing FORPP before Colombian State representatives and international entities, further builds upon our years of presence in Colombia. For a detailed overview of our accomplishments in 2022, please refer to pages 3 to 10.

In solidarity,
Emily, Enrique, Kati, Manuel, and Maru
FOR Peace Presence Team
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Empowering Community Resistance on Traditional Lands

By providing a physical and international presence, we have significantly enhanced the sense of security for the communities we accompany. This support and related advocacy enables them to cultivate their land and produce food, despite facing threats and restrictions from armed groups. Additionally, it empowers them to assert their rights and defend their territories.

Connecting struggles and communities on a regional, national and international level

We have successfully facilitated the coming together of diverse communities at regional, national, and international levels. This platform has allowed for the exchange of experiences, the building of solidarity, and the forging of connections between different struggles. Through this network, communities have found strength and support in their shared goals.

Expanding Support Networks and Advocating for Community Rights

Our intensive advocacy efforts have yielded significant results in strengthening the rights of communities and broadening their support networks. We have taken the violations of cultural, social, economic, and human rights to national and international platforms, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and fighting for justice on their behalf.

Raising Awareness of Community Struggles

Through more than 400 communications, we have effectively exposed and brought attention to the human rights violations faced by the communities we accompany. These efforts have elevated the visibility of their struggles on both national and international stages, fostering understanding and mobilizing support for their cause.

Securing Dignified Conditions and Safety for Displaced Communities

In the Pacific region, our holistic accompaniment approach has played a vital role in mitigating the humanitarian crisis faced by displaced communities. We have successfully advocated for dignified living conditions and security guarantees, ensuring the well-being and safety of these vulnerable populations.
The year 2022 proved to be a year filled with both challenges and exciting opportunities for FOR Peace Presence and Colombia. As we reflect on the past year, we would like to take this moment to share with you 12 noteworthy highlights, one for each month.

January: Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Buenaventura

The Pacific region, Buenaventura in particular, has always been a hotspot of conflict in Colombia and in 2022, the already critical situation had worsened. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 322,966 people were victims of forced displacement, the majority in the Pacific region. Besides displacements, another phenomenon is increasing: confinements. Confrontations between armed groups, landmines and threats against community leaders or even whole communities have confined entire villages. In 2022, OCHA recorded the highest number of confinements in a decade, reaching 108,000 cases.

Since the beginning of 2022, the situation in and around Buenaventura has grown more critical than ever due to constant clashes between armed groups, making a humanitarian crisis inevitable. Access to healthcare and food became impossible, and armed confrontations took place within the confines of humanitarian spaces, violating International Humanitarian Law. 5,000 people were forcibly displaced and fled the region.

In January we intensified our permanent accompaniment to displaced and confined Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in Buenaventura due to the lack of state response, security guarantees and humanitarian attention. Collaborating closely with these communities, we organized and facilitated a humanitarian mission, venturing into the conflict-affected area to deliver urgent assistance as part of our comprehensive protection strategy.
February: 20 Years of International Accompaniment

In February, together with our partners, accompanied communities, the diplomatic corps and international organizations, we celebrated our 20th anniversary. How did it all start? Why did we arrive 20 years ago to San José de Apartadó, a small and remote village in the mountains of Colombia?

In 1998, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) awarded its annual international peace prize to the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. As a pacifist organization using nonviolence to resist war and injustice, we were inspired by the community’s courage and values. In January 2000, the community sent an invitation to us to join its third anniversary.

At first we did not fully understand the urgency of the situation. But a month after receiving the invitation, armed men entered the San José town center with a list of names in hand and within the first year of the Peace Community’s founding, 48 of its members were killed.

An international activist delegation visited San José de Apartadó in March 2001, co-organized by FOR (today FOR Peace Presence, FORPP). Our group saw the place where a young man lost his leg to a landmine left by the army. While the man cried, troops nearby not only did not seek help but laughed, an indication of how far the war had dehumanized its participants.

Of more than 60 murders of Peace Community members up to that point, there had been no justice for any of them. Eduardo, a leader of the community who was killed in 2005, told us: “We know there will be another massacre, we know we will go down, though we don’t know when or who will fall. We ask that you be with us and keep the memory of this experience alive. We want you to be a witness to our process.” The community wanted FORPP to come to Apartadó. In fact, with the concept of protective accompaniment in mind, we believed that such a presence might mean more than just being a witness. Maybe, with the support of an international team backed by a network of institutional support, the Peace Community would not only be able to resist violence, but also thrive and create a path forward. Our team arrived in San José de Apartadó in early February 2002.
March: 25th Anniversary of the Peace Community

March 23rd, we accompanied the 25th anniversary of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. Together with the embassies of Canada, Sweden, Austria, Germany and Belgium we accompanied this important celebration. But, how did the Peace Community start?

In the middle of the 1990s, as violence escalated and peasant farmers suffered from extrajudicial deaths at the hands of armed actors and forced displacement, the people in San José de Apartadó began to talk about how to return to their lands and escape the spiral of violence. This plan manifested into what would become the Peace Community.

Conscientious objectors to the war, the Peace Community demanded their rights as civilians to not be involved in conflict and denounced the use of arms within their territories, committing to a variety of principles in the process (including cooperative communal work, prohibition of alcohol, the non-use of illicit drugs, the non-entry of armed actors, non-use of weapons and the refusal to provide information to armed actors).

Despite the existence of IACHR (Inter-American Court of Human Rights) provisional measures, the Peace Community has paid a high price for its firm conviction: since its founding, more than 300 members have been assassinated. Two emblematic violations are the massacre of La Unión in 2000 where six leaders of the community were assassinated and the massacre of February 2005 in Mulatos and La Resbalosa, where eight people, including Community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra and three children, were massacred in a joint military and paramilitary operation.

April: Implementing Urgent Protection Measures

In April, after continuing combats between the Colombian army and the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces AGC and the explosion of a bomb on the only road connecting the municipal capital of Frontino with Blanquita-Murri, which resulted in the death of 7 soldiers and left the community confined, we responded to the calls of the Interethnic Commission for Peace of La Blanquita-Murri for protection and international presence. We started supporting the community through the implementation of protection measures and a humanitarian space and specifically strengthened the Indigenous Guard in its protection and security protocols.
May: Verification Mission in Buenaventura

In May, in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, we organized and accompanied a verification mission in Buenaventura. Due to armed confrontations, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities were subjected to economic blockades, confinements, forced displacements, murder and disappearance of their inhabitants. Many of them fled to the city of Buenaventura, where they reside – and still reside – in temporal shelters that often lack basic conditions. During the mission, we witnessed firsthand the dire conditions in which the displaced communities were living and experienced the fear that permeated the territories. Additionally, we had the opportunity to meet with Canadian Ambassador Marianick Tremblay. In this meeting, we conveyed our deep concerns regarding the humanitarian crisis and shared our suggestions to improve the situation. It was an important platform to advocate for the rights and well-being of those affected by the crisis.

June: The Path to Truth

In June, alongside the election of progressive Gustavo Petro as the new president, Colombia’s Truth Commission presented its final report on the country’s long-running civil conflict. Established as part of the 2016 peace deal, the commission’s mandate was to meticulously document human rights abuses and provide insights into the root causes that perpetuated the conflict for such an extensive period.

The long-awaited report from the Truth Commission said the effect of the conflict between the Colombian military and rebel groups has been “massive and intolerable”. It also called for substantial reforms in Colombia’s approach to drug policy, and urged redress for the victims of the conflict. Notably, the report also delivered a scathing critique of United States policy in Colombia, highlighting the disastrous social and environmental consequences of waging a drug war. It further noted that despite being aware of the Colombian military’s involvement in extrajudicial killings and collaboration with right-wing paramilitaries, the United States continued to deepen its relationship with the armed forces. FOR Peace Presence contributed to the work of the Truth Commission with a report on the influence of the United States on the Colombian conflict.
July: University of Resistance

In July we accompanied the University of Resistance in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. The University of Resistance is a network for indigenous, Afro-Colombian and campesino communities from different parts of Colombia to share knowledge that promotes the autonomy and dignity of each community. José Roviro Lopez, member of the internal council of the Peace Community, states: “The objective of the University of Resistance is to create alliances between communities. This means creating a link between communities and exchanging experiences. The idea is to strengthen the experiences that each community has so that we can share with one another in order to resist violence and to be able to defend our territories. Beyond participating, it is a commitment to ourselves to defend land and territory.”

FOR Peace Presence invited representatives from our other partners, the Mapiripán Association in Defense of the Environment, the Inter-ethnic Commission for Peace of La Blanquita-Murri and communities that are currently displaced in Buenaventura to the University of Resistance and made their participation possible.

August: Strengthening Holistic Protection in Buenaventura

As a response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Buenaventura and the silence and neglect from Colombian authorities, the Juntanza or Social and Popular Interethnic Board was formed by the displaced indigenous and Afro Colombian communities to actively advocate for their rights. Our field team has played an integral role in the development of the Juntanza. We accompany the Juntanza specifically to provide protection based on a holistic approach that includes a focus on care for victims of long term displacement. We believe in holistic protection that includes both physical accompaniment and psychosocial support, as numerous death threats have already been received by Juntanza members.

As part of our psychosocial component, in August we conducted a two day collective care workshop near Buenaventura. During the activity, psychosocial, social, and spiritual needs of the individuals and communities were addressed and collective care mechanisms were strengthened to improve both individual and collective well-being. The workshop was conducted in accordance with indigenous and Afro-Colombian spirituality which is extremely important for the communities.
September: Advocating for Communities’ Rights

Attempts at the regional level to find a solution to the humanitarian crisis in Buenaventura have been met without success, leading to the necessity of an advocacy week organized in September by FOR Peace Presence in Bogotá. The advocacy week was designed as a space for community leaders to express their concerns, highlight the contradicting reality in Buenaventura and propose concrete actions and possible solutions.

While the port of Buenaventura shows overflowing growth (60% of Colombia’s merchandise goes through Buenaventura), and despite the fact that the port generates more than $1.2 billion US dollars of income for the Colombian state per year, the population of Buenaventura suffers one of the worst conditions of poverty in Colombia: 80% live in poverty, and 41% in extreme poverty. Added to this, since the beginning of 2022, more than 1,000 families have been displaced from rural Buenaventura and there are still no guarantees for a safe return to their communities.

During the week, several meetings were held with representatives of the European Union, the embassies of Germany, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States to address this situation and humanitarian crisis. In addition, delegates from several state institutions such as the Attorney General’s Office and the Ministry of the Interior, among others, also participated, including UN agencies such as the UN Verification mission, UNHCR and OHCHR.

October: Investigating Vulnerabilities and Protection Strategies

In October, with the support of the Creating Safer Space Network, we started a research project focused on investigating initiatives surrounding risk and protective strategies, which aims to strengthen the nonviolent protection strategies of the accompanied communities in Buenaventura.

Buenaventura has a long history of civilian resistance and collective action in the midst of violent repression. This Participatory Action Research works with six Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in the region of Buenaventura to map collective and individual vulnerabilities to physical harm. Community members engage in critical analysis about structures that cause risk and study intersectional identities (race, gender, age, sexuality, place of residence, ability status) at the community level. The project also uses photography and collective history to explore diverse strategies that individuals and communities have developed to protect themselves, their lands, and their traditions by individuals and communities.
November: Team Member Wins Women Building Peace Award

In November, our compa and team member María Eugenia, or Maru as known by friends and communities, was announced as the recipient of the United States Institute of Peace’s (USIP) 2022 Women Building Peace Award!

As a peacebuilder and human rights defender, Maru has worked for over 30 years with women, Afro-Colombian, indigenous and small scale farming communities that have been the victims of social and armed conflict in Colombia. How did Maru become a Human Rights Defender?

Maru was born into a family of farmers in one of Colombia’s poorest and most violent regions. Her beloved uncle was a well-known activist with a local social justice movement. In 1991, her uncle was assassinated by a police squad in a nighttime raid, sending fear and panic throughout her family. She recalls that they were too afraid to send someone to identify his body the next day. It was 17-year-old Maru who went to the morgue to claim his body, deformed by gunfire.

“When we brought his body home, I promised him that I would follow his path of struggling for justice for all people.”

That vow has defined her life.

The independent Women Building Peace Council guided the process of selecting six finalists from this year’s nominations and chose the award winner. The council stated Maru’s selection was based on her skills and track record in using the many instruments of peacebuilding, her effectiveness in representing traditionally marginalized communities during the peace talks in Havana, and the impact of her 30 year commitment to advancing peace in Colombia.
December: Minister of Defense Visits Peace Community

In December, together with the new Minister of Defense, Ivan Velasquez, we visited the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

The Peace Community has been documenting and publishing Human Rights and International Humanitarian law violations by the Colombian army for the past 25 years, but the vast majority of crimes perpetrated by the Colombian armed forces are neither solved nor sanctioned by the state. On the contrary, contributions to state investigations by victims often lead to persecution or even assassination. In 2005, these issues led the Peace Community to institute a nonviolent protective strategy of non-collaboration with the Colombian State.

The recent visit of the Minister is therefore historic and established possible follow-up actions from the government which may be an important indicator for possibilities for real participation from victims of the armed conflicts in building a durable peace and human security.

It is no coincidence that Ivan Velasquez is receptive to the claims of a community which has been using nonviolence and publicly denouncing human rights abuses, despite impunity rates and the possibility of threats from paramilitary forces. Between 2006 and 2012, Ivan Velasquez coordinated the commission that was in charge of investigating Parapolitics and in 2013 he worked as Commissioner of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG).
Accompaniment in Numbers

89
Political advocacy visits with embassies, Colombian government agencies and international organizations and institutions to call for urgent action in response to violence and threats experienced by frontline communities in resistance.

1
Speaking tour in Europe to raise awareness and advocate for human rights protection.

25

400
Communications to highlight stories, triumphs, and struggles of communities building peace.

56
Field visits and physical accompaniments to communities and human rights defenders under risk.

6
Meetings with Colombian military authorities to call for international humanitarian law compliance and to share our concerns regarding human rights violations.
About Us

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

Vision
FORPP envisions a nonviolent world in which: political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights are fully enjoyed, including the option of freely participating in social movements without being subject to violence or threats; processes of reconciliation are informed by collective memory and acknowledge traditions of resistance; all communities, and those historically marginalized, have the right to self-determination and fully participate in decisions regarding their lands, identities, and cultures.

Work Lines

Proactive physical international presence to dissuade attacks.

Research on unarmed civilian protection (UCP) to enhance and expand self-protection practices and efforts of conflict-affected communities.

Political accompaniment and visibility to raise awareness and generate political costs of attacks.

Strengthening protection and self-protection capacities of communities and human rights defenders to empower communities.

Our Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly are a collection of 17 interlinked objectives designed to serve as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity. FOR Peace Presence contributed to the achievement of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the following goals:

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-Being
4. Gender Equality
5. Reduced Inequalities
6. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
7. Life on Land
8. Climate Action
Where We Work

In 2022, we accompanied various communities across four departments in Colombia, namely Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, Meta, and Cesar. Our efforts in Valle del Cauca were focused on accompanying the Juntanza Interétnica Social y Popular de Buenaventura (JISP) and other indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in both urban and rural areas. These included the La Esperanza Community Council, the Humanitarian Space Puente Nayero, the Valledupar Cabildo, the Wounan Phoboor Cabildo, the Humanitarian and Biodiverse Reserve of Santa Rosa de Guayacán, the LGBTIQ+ Community of Puente Nayero and Punta Icaco, the AINI Women’s Association, and ASOECAD.

In Antioquia, we accompanied the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, the community of San José de León, the Interethnic Commission for Peace of La Blanquita-Murri, and the Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO). Additionally, in Cesar, we worked alongside the Casimiro Meza Mendoza Community Council (COCONEBO). Lastly, in Meta, we provided accompaniment to the Mapiripán Association in Defense of the Environment (Asodeamapi).
FORPP Staff

Claudia Emilce Lancheros Castillo, Accountant (Bogotá, Colombia)
Emily Schmitz, Operations Coordinator (Wisconsin, USA)
Enrique Chimonja Coy, Accompanier and Workshop Leader (Cauca, Colombia)
Kati Hinman, Development Coordinator, Co-Investigator (Pennsylvania, USA)
Manuel Müller, Program and Communications Coordinator, Principal Investigator (Bogotá, Colombia)
María Eugenia Mosquera Riascos, Accompanier and Workshop Leader (Cauca, Colombia)
Michaela Söllinger, Accompanier and Antioquia Coordinator (Antioquia, Colombia)

FORPP Board of Directors

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Dominique Aulisio (Florida, USA)
John Lindsay Poland (California, USA)
Pendle Marshall-Hallmark (Michigan, USA)
Financial Overview

Income and Expenditure Statement:

2022
Income by Source

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2022
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Our Sponsors and Supporters:

- Aberystwyth University (Creating Safer Space Network)
- Appleton Charitable Foundation
- Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI)
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- Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia (IELCO)
- Internationaler Versöhnungsbund - IFOR Austria
- Pensamiento y Acción Social (PAS)
- Triangle Community Foundation
- Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean
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FOR Peace Presence

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