

Reconciliation and Peace in Colombia: The Impact of the Visit of Pope Francis

Gerard Powers

**Coordinator, Catholic Peacebuilding Network, Director of Catholic Peacebuilding Studies
Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Keough School of Global Affairs
University of Notre Dame**

October 20, 2017

UN Headquarters

Introduction

Thank you, Mr. Donnelly and Archbishop Auza for your kind invitation to be part of this event. It is a privilege to be on this panel with you and Ambassador Mejia, Msgr. Henao, and Ms. Gamba.

The process of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Colombia is primarily the task of the people of Colombia. But the people of Colombia want and need the support and accompaniment of a host of outside actors. I have been asked to speak briefly to two ways in which Catholic institutions are doing so: (1) the role of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute in monitoring the peace accord; and (2) the role of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network in accompanying the Church in Colombia.

Kroc Institute's Role in Monitoring Peace Accord

Under the terms of the Colombia peace accord, the Kroc Institute is responsible for monitoring implementation of the accord. This is the first time a university has been given such a role in a peace accord. Why Kroc? Two reasons. First, Notre Dame has been in Colombia for many years, especially through the work of several professors, and through the work of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, whose secretariat is at Notre Dame. Second, the Kroc Institute has developed the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM), the world's largest data base on peace agreements. PAM tracks implementation of 34 comprehensive agreements since 1989. Less than one-third of these agreements contained review mechanisms for assessing implementation, and many of those with review mechanisms only assessed security issues and only did so at the end of the process, leaving no opportunity for improving implementation along the way. To address this gap, the Kroc Institute developed the Barometer Initiative for Colombia, an innovative method to assess implementation of all provisions of the accord in real time as it is being implemented and to use comparative data from other accords to suggest options for improving implementation.

What is the Barometer's methodology? The 300-page peace agreement is coded according to 558 actionable items clustered under 74 subthemes and 18 Themes. Kroc Institute staff in Bogota, whose offices are located at Caritas Colombia/ Social Pastoral, and staff at Notre Dame collect

and analyze information from numerous sources, including information from local governments, the UN and other international organizations, think tanks and charitable organizations. Kroc staff also do on-the-ground interviews and observations. As you can imagine, given the complexity, length, and contested nature of the accord, monitoring implementation is not for the faint of heart or the drive-by peacebuilder. It is a monumental undertaking.

In a preliminary assessment of implementation completed in August, our monitoring team concluded that the Colombia process is slightly ahead on implementation at the 9-month mark compared to other peace processes. Our analysis indicates high levels of implementation in a number of priority areas related to short-term goals: ending hostilities, the cantonment process, laying down of arms, and establishing institutional and legal mechanisms for implementation and verification. This progress creates a foundation for achieving implementation of the medium to long-term objectives. But moving from short-term to mid- and long-term objectives poses new challenges in key areas, such as guaranteeing security for former FARC members and local leaders; reincorporating former combatants; agreeing on a Framework Plan for land reform, economic development, and other issues; implementing the innovative Territorial Peace approach; and developing truth and justice mechanisms. The failure to move forward on key issues like these could lead to cascading negative effects.

The best strategy for preventing the renewal of war and achieving economic and social progress in Colombia is to implement the agreement to the fullest extent possible. In other cases in which peace accords have been implemented at a high level, 84 percent have avoided a return to armed conflict. High levels of implementation also lead to greater economic development, improved educational and social services, and enhanced prospects for political stability. Implementing this historic peace accord will not be easy and there will, no doubt, be setbacks. It is a complex process that will require a sustained commitment by many actors within Colombia and around the world over a span of years, not months.

Supporting Catholic Peacebuilding in Colombia

In the second part of my remarks, I want to say a few words about the role of the Catholic community in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Colombia.

I coordinate the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (cpn.nd.edu), which is just one of many faith-based initiatives to accompany the peacebuilding work that Msgr. Henao has described. Founded in 2004, CPN is a network of 23 institutions whose secretariat is at the Kroc Institute. CPN helps this diverse set of Catholic institutions that are already deeply involved in peacebuilding to find ways to collaborate on initiatives they could not do alone. CPN consists of *bishops' conferences* – e.g., Colombia, Congo, the Philippines, United States; *universities* – e.g., Notre Dame, Georgetown, Boston College; *development agencies* – e.g., Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Colombiana, Catholic Relief Services; *peace institutes* – e.g., Cardinal Martino Institute in Congo; and *lay organizations* – e.g., Pax Christi International, Sant'Egidio USA.

CPN focuses in several areas:

- Mapping and analyzing Catholic peacebuilding in Colombia and elsewhere.

- Accompanying the Church in Colombia, Mindanao (in the southern Philippines); and the Great Lakes Region of Africa.
- Based on the experience of accompanying the Catholic community in these areas, we seek to contribute to the further development of a theology, ethics, and praxis of peacebuilding. We are focusing on three sets of issues that are especially important in Colombia and these other areas: the role of the Catholic community (1) in formal and informal peace processes; (2) in transitional justice/reconciliation, and (3) in conflicts over extractives.

CPN's work has benefited enormously from the engagement of Caritas Colombiana/ National Social Pastoral over the past dozen years. Among many other things, in 2007, more than 50 Catholic peacebuilders from 2 dozen countries came to Bogota for a week to learn about Catholic peacebuilding in Colombia and to discuss common challenges. In 2012, CPN hosted a 4-day strategic planning session for 17 bishops in leadership positions at the bishops' conference and their senior staff. In 2016, the leadership of the Colombian bishops' conference joined two dozen other peacebuilders from around the world for a 3-day working session on lessons learned about Catholic peacebuilding. CPN is now working with Caritas Colombiana/ Social Pastoral and other Catholic institutions in Colombia to develop long-term projects on reconciliation and conflicts over extractives.

Colombia as a School of Peace

For too long, Colombia has been a poster child for intractable conflicts. But, as Msgr. Hector Fabio Henao has said, it is also a School of Peace. Colombia is perhaps the world's best example of Catholic peacebuilding. As Professor John Paul Lederach, a Mennonite, has said: Colombia is one of the "few places where the infrastructure and ecclesiology of Church structure so neatly aligns with the multilevel and multifaceted demands of peacebuilding."¹ The role the Pope is playing in supporting the peace processes and in imploring Colombians to reconcile is only possible because of the fertile peacebuilding ground prepared by decades of work by the Catholic community with multiple actors addressing the complex of issues at all levels. The litany of the Catholic community's peacebuilding work includes the role the bishops are now playing in facilitating the ELN negotiations and in working with the UN to monitor the ELN cease-fire. It includes the role played in ensuring victims had a voice in the FARC negotiations and providing support for resettlement and trauma healing for those victims. It involves advocacy on human rights and land restitution. And it involves working with the Holy See at the UN (and episcopal conferences around the world) to enlist international support for the peace process, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

The Catholic Church in Colombia has been most effective when its activities at the local level have been integrated with its activities at the national and international levels. Moreover, its effectiveness has depended upon its ability to integrate the Church's three sets of assets: beliefs, teachings, and rituals; an institutional presence that stretches from the most isolated areas of the Amazon to the UN; and its People Power.

The latter two assets – the capacity to employ institutional resources and to mobilize people – are metrics typically used to evaluate the peacebuilding work of political actors and NGOs –

important metrics to be sure. But they don't fully explain the Church's role. The Colombia peace accord provides a comprehensive and innovative framework and process for ending decades of violence, moving toward political and communal reconciliation, and building a just and sustainable peace in Colombia. But much more is needed if a culture of peace and reconciliation is to replace the culture of violence that is so deeply ingrained after decades of armed conflict. If Colombia is a School of Peace, the course requirements are not Math 101 and Rocks for Jocks; they are Organic Chemistry, Systematic Theology, and Poetry. This is where the Church's role is particularly important.

In parts of Colombia, there are Catholic parishes with demobilized paramilitaries, former guerrillas, narco-traffickers, and government soldiers – as well as returning displaced people who have been victimized by all four. Those parishes are using the resources provided by Caritas Colombia, agencies affiliated with Caritas Internationalis, the UN Development Program and others to help with the long-term process of rebuilding that fractured community. But even with all these essential resources and skilled personnel, that parish will not achieve the reconciliation Pope Francis has been talking about unless there is something more. That parish faces a fundamental pastoral challenge of re-evangelization, rediscovering its mission and identity in its deepest religious and spiritual sense. Among many other things, parishioners must experience and internalize the true meaning – including the communal meaning – of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion in their conflict-torn community.

This sacramental imagination is the kind of “soft power” that political scientists talk about. This soft power includes the respect and moral credibility enjoyed by Pope Francis, the Colombian bishops, and many others. It includes the soft power of the themes from Catholic social teaching highlighted by Archbishop Auza in his remarks. It includes the soft power of Catholic institutions and communities whose presence spans the wide landscape of peacebuilding. This kind of soft power gives Catholic peacebuilding a depth and texture that is the deep foundation of a sustainable peace. It is the soft power which gives the Church in Colombia hope that it can help build the culture of peace and reconciliation that Pope Francis spoke so eloquently about during his visit.

1. John Paul Lederach, “The Long Journey Back to Humanity: Catholic Peacebuilding with Armed Actors,” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics and Praxis*, Robert Schreiter, Scott Appleby, & G. Powers, eds, (New York: Orbis, 2010): 50-51.