

CARAVANA HUMANITARIA POR LA VIDA



HUMANITARIAN CARAVAN FOR LIFE BAJO ATRATO CHOCÓ, COLOMBIA. FROM THE 5TH TO THE 13TH OF AUGUST –2019

International and national social organizations, human rights defenders, trade unions and NGOs who participated in Humanitarian Caravan in the Department of Chocó, express our deep concern for the serious humanitarian situation that is being lived there. Several unfavorable dynamics are in play which put the inhabitants of this territory at imminent risk, such as the abandonment by the Colombian State and the lack of public policies, absent for several decades, causing extreme poverty, misery, inequality and death throughout the mentioned department.

During the caravan it was possible to verify violations to the right to life, to social, cultural and environmental and territorial rights, in part due to the absence of governmental social policies to address these realities of inequality and death. Institutions such as the Ombudsman's Office, national social organizations and the United Nations have denounced this situation of risk to the people and to the environment - constant murders, rapes, sexual assaults, forced individual and collective displacements, torture, genocide, threats and confinement, common assaults against human integrity in this territory. Furthermore, extractivism, deforestation, drug trafficking, aerial spraying, megaprojects such as Maderas del Darien and infrastructure plans such as interoceanic canals, highways, electrical interconnection and channeling of the tributaries of the Atrato River are projects as part of a development and reordering policy in the territory which go against the life plans and priorities of the ethnic communities in this territory.

Likewise, the constant fear of the inhabitants of this region was evident, with the caravan encountering a generalized fear of discussing cases of human rights violations, an imposed behaviour in the territories we were able to visit. Fear and silence have become a measure to evidence the violent internal factors which create a behaviour of not speaking out and denouncing violations of Human Rights. There is evidence of a strong relationship between the paramilitaries and the state armed forces, the armed actors with the largest presence and influence in the territory. (According to a historical analysis of the region since the 80s; this also records major military actions such as the bombings that formed part of the Genesis operation, carried out by the Colombian military forces in 1997). This situation has led to date to investigations into senior officials of that

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period such as RITO ALEJO DEL RIO. It is a cause of concern to the Caravan that this relationships of mutual benefit between the state and criminal groups can easily repeat itself, involving the commanders of the Public Force of North of Choco, western Antioquia and territories under jurisdiction of the Seventh Division.

The Caravan was also able to highlight the fact that that the Colombian State's presence in the territory is only visible in the deployment of armed personnel, who exercise a powerful control over the circulation of goods and people, with no government plans or actions as to social issues, such as guarantees of return for the displaced people or the recovery of land belonging to the black and indigenous communities abandoned due to bombings and the Colombian conflict.

Regarding health, public services, education and access routes, the situation is very precarious. Cases of malnutrition are common in black and indigenous communities. There are a lack of facilities and / or medical posts and suitable personnel, a lack of drinking water. There is an absence of electricity supply. Poor maintenance of rivers means that navigation is frequently difficult. These circumstances must change in order to improve access to the most remote areas of the Atrato River and its tributaries, to enable people to transport their products and strengthen their own economies, and guarantee the rapid evacuation of people in case of illness and/or the need to transfer patients. Regarding education, it is necessary to strengthen the communities by building and supporting primary and secondary schools, as well as creating a center of higher and professional education that offers coverage to all the inhabitants of this territory. Such solutions provided by the government must, in turn, be within the framework of respect for the river, special jurisdictions, the environment and life in the territory, to guarantee the existence and permanence of the populations, respecting their worldview, culture and customs.

Measures or strategies constructed to deal with this serious crisis must be agreed with the communities to ensure both respect for their own forms of government and their effectiveness. The Atrato River is a subject of rights and the state is obliged to ensure its conservation, protection and maintenance. The Colombian state is also called on to mediate in land border conflicts between black and indigenous communities. On the issue of gender, there is a lack of support and pedagogy for communities to be able to design plans and programs for the empowerment and real participation of women in

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organizational structures. The topic of gender equality has failed to be touched upon by the Colombian state, and even less so guaranteed. If as an issue it is not considered by local, departmental and national government agencies, even less so in the communities, leaving half of its population, in this case, women, excluded from the development of their peoples.

It is urgent to comply with and respect the agreements between the State and the black and indigenous communities that have been signed, after mobilizations and the exercising the right to protest through mingas. Likewise, the opening of dialogue with the irregular armed actors of the region in order to diminish the effects of the armed conflict, with the participation of the communities, with the input of civil society, is also of utmost urgency and importance.

Finally, the implementation of plans to guarantee these previously described shortcomings is urgently required. Prior agreements must be reached with the communities in order to guarantee life, territory, the environment, social and cultural rights, with delegates of this Caravan willing to contribute in the construction of these plans in favor of the population, as guarantors and overseers in their correct implementation in accordance with needs of the environment and the communities. The department of Choco is a source of life for all the inhabitants of the planet, boasting one of the most important water resources in the world.

The call is not only to the Government of Colombia, but also to the national and international community, to the Ombudsman's Office, to the Church, to national and international social organizations, human rights defenders, to strengthen these improvement and accompaniment plans, resulting in a better quality of life and thus strengthen a free and sovereign Colombia.

caravana@redcolombia.org
<https://caravana.redcolombia.org>

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