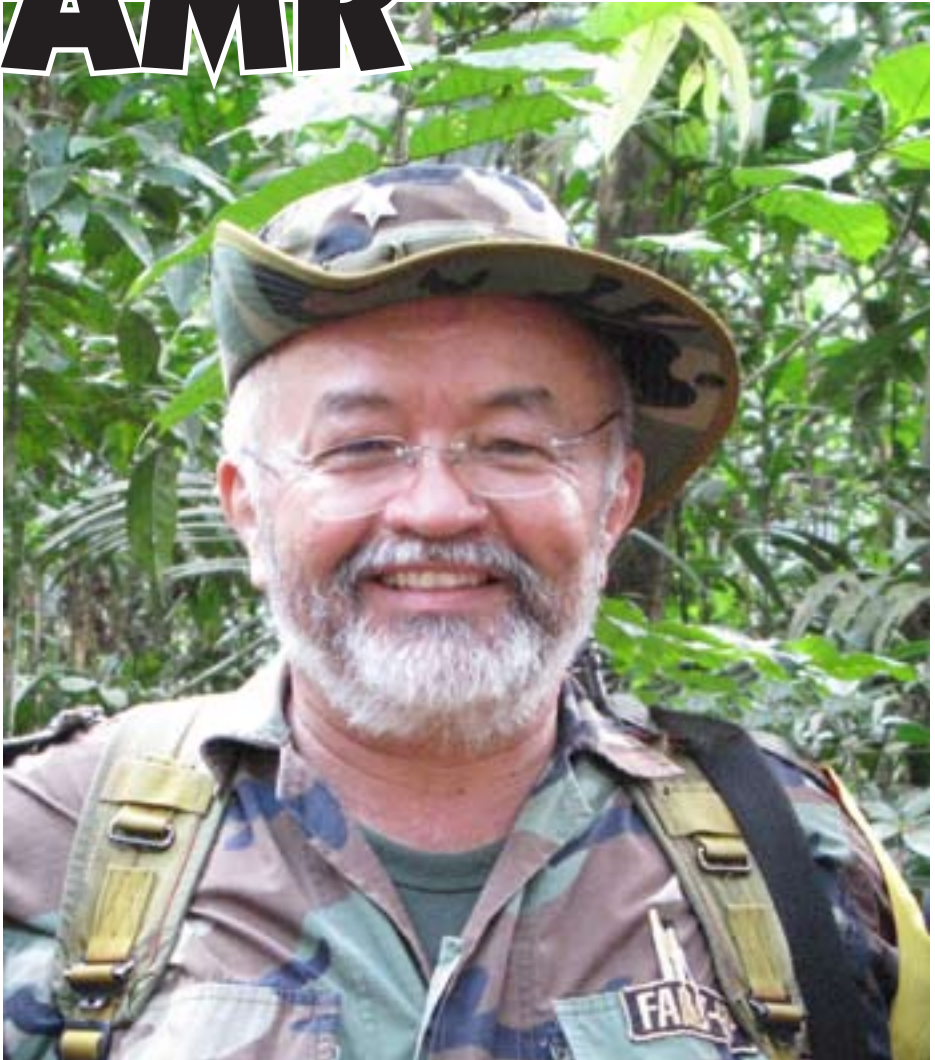


# AMR

Australian Marxist Review  
#48 JUNE 2008



## **Towards the new Colombia**

Interview with Raúl Reyes

## **The Women of FARC**

**IDEAS  
THEORY  
POLICIES  
EXPERIENCE  
DISCUSSION**

**\$3**

**JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA**



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***This issue of the AMR is dedicated to the memory of Comrades Raúl Reyes, Manuel Marulanda (who passed away on March 26, 2008) and all who gave their lives in the patriotic and revolutionary struggle for peace with social justice in Colombia.***



Cover: Raúl Reyes

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# **Hacia la Nueva Colombia – Towards the new Colombia**

## **For a political solution to the armed conflict**

Interview with Raúl Reyes

On March 1, 2008 Colombian forces, with the assistance of the US military from their base in Manta, Ecuador, launched an attack on a camp of representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP) located in Ecuador. They were in Ecuador for the negotiation of the humanitarian exchange of prisoners. Amongst those assassinated by the Colombian forces was the revolutionary commander Raúl Reyes, a member of the Secretariat of FARC and a well known and respected international spokesperson and negotiator for FARC. He was brutally murdered just hours before a French delegation was due to arrive to negotiate the release of French-Colombian citizen Ingrid Betancourt by FARC. In the following interview he explains the origins of FARC, what type of organisation FARC is, its aims and dispels the lies propagated by its enemies, including the US and Colombian governments, that it is a terrorist organisation.

### ***Could you please give us the background to and origins of the armed conflict in Colombia?***

I can tell you there were many historical, cultural, political and economic aspects to the current situation in which the US, from the very beginning, pushed the Colombian people towards the war we are living today.

A relationship was built between the ruling class in Colombia and the government of the US to prevent the revolutionary struggle in Colombia. In Marquetalia in the 1960s, the peasants were asking for the rebuilding of infrastructure, bridges, schools, teachers and teaching materials. [Marquetalia is a mountainous area in central Colombia which remained a

guerrilla enclave after “the violence” of 1948 – 1958] It was the same with regard to health. They wanted doctors, medicines, some shops where the peasants could buy products and some supplies.

The people wanted no more than that and to continue to live in that region but without the harassment of the government and the Colombian army. The response of the government and the army to the peasants’ demands was to treat them as though they wanted to create “independent repub-

lics”. The government wouldn’t allow the influence of the Cuban revolution, the “bad example” of the Cuban revolution, to lead to the creation of a “new Cuba” in Colombia.

To prevent such a situation, the Colombian government counted on the support of the US government and used other forces such as the *Batallón Colombia* which had recently returned from the war in Korea. The Colombian ruling class thought the same way as the US government, that



Manuel Marulanda Vélez (sitting) with resistance forces from Marquetalia.

they could eliminate the forces of [future guerrilla leader] Comrade Manuel Marulanda in two weeks. However they didn't take into account the fact that the budding little army of the guerrillas had political resistance and military capacity as well as mass support. They didn't take into account the fact that many international journalists had visited the area, including some French journalists, who had told the government not to intervene militarily in the area [Marquetalia].

The Colombian army didn't listen and launched an armed response [to the peasants' demands] with 16,000 members of the army against 48 guerrilla members. The end result was that the army could not defeat the comrades and were forced to leave the area. What they did was to spread all over the territory and that is the origin of FARC. And in that context they realised that they couldn't just represent the interests of a small group of *campesinos* [the peasantry] but rather all the exploited and repressed members of Colombian society.

The Communist Party of Colombia sent Comrade Jacobo Arenas to build solidarity with the comrades from Marquetalia. Jacobo was accompanied by Comrade Hernando Gonzalez Acosta

who was killed two years later. Jacobo Arenas became one of the founding members of FARC, and became a very good friend of Comrade Marulanda. Comrade Jacobo decided to stay and he became the ideologist of FARC. He became very important. This was recognised by the enemy to his last days. He died at one of the meetings of the secretariat [in August 1990]. At that time there were five members of the secretariat.

So the origins of the conflict with the FARC itself started there, but there is an historical background to these origins.



Jacobo Arenas

## **History of wars**

In Colombia we have always had guerrillas, we have always had wars. We have had, according to historians, 67 wars in two centuries. And in the past 50 years – a war just against FARC – just after a war that developed out of one between Liberals and Conservatives. The Conservatives fought for the interests of the Church and of the ruling class, with the support of the US. They pursued the Liberals who they thought were very close to the Communists.

In April 1948, for example, there was a war against the Liberals who were led by Comrade [Jorge Eliécer] Gaitán which left more than 300,000 dead and many more injured, widowed and dispossessed of their lands. The police, which were part of the state, pursued the Liberals and used to visit them at their homes, would torch their houses, attack their wives and destroy the children of pregnant women in their stomachs.

Then the Liberals decided to become organised as guerrilla forces. Their leaders decided to organise in defence of their interests in the same way as Comrade Marulanda, who came from a Liberal family, had done. Most of them became organised

as guerrillas. Comrade Manuel Marulanda's cousins were members of the guerrillas as well. He became a guerrilla himself, a chief because he was a very brave combatant. He became a revolutionary and a member of the Communist Party.

It is not true that only today there are many dead people as a result of the current armed conflict. It has a very long background, even before 1964.

Marulanda's troops, Joselo Lozada, another comrade that we used to call "Balino" among many others, Jaime Guaraca, who is still alive, Comrade Jaime Bustos who is also still alive – were founders of FARC together with Comrade Marulanda.

From that time until today there have been different generations of guerrillas, people who could be the grandchildren of those original founding members. This was fed by the other wars that have taken place since the independence struggle against the Spanish Conquistadors [who met resistance from the time they arrived in 1498 until independence was achieved in 1819] when we confronted Spanish imperialism. Now we are confronting US imperialism and other imperialist forces for our emancipation.

## **A new socialist Colombia**

If you study the agrarian program of the guerrillas, from July 20, 1964 we say we are a revolutionary force that will struggle to prevent war but, because we are revolutionary, the government has forced us to take up arms. This explains why we took up arms. FARC doesn't want war; FARC's struggle is for peace but peace with social justice, a struggle for the exploited, the workers, the peasants; a struggle against the policies of the IMF and all the neo-liberal policies – those policies that have been drawn up by the monopolies.

FARC does not accept peace as being the peace of the dead. FARC is not fighting for reforms; we are fighting to change the structure of the state. Our struggle is for political power so we can start the construction of a new Colombia; a new Colombia based on socialism but a type of socialism that corresponds to the needs of the Colombian society.

We take into account the experience of the republics of the former Soviet Union. It was very unfortunate that it collapsed due

to several reasons, mistakes that they committed. We look to the experiences of China, the experience of Mao Zedong, also of the comrades from Vietnam, Comrade Ho Chi Minh and all those leaders. Obviously, we examine the experience of Korea, of Cuba and other experiences but we're looking at them to help us to improve our own experience, to enrich our experience.

We need to take political power, the power of the state so we can transform Colombian society for the benefit of the majority. We have Cuba here in the region and we've got FARC who are in solidarity with the Cuban revolution but we can't expect to build in Colombia a similar experience to that of the Cuban revolution. We can't repeat history but they have a lot of experience that we could draw on in our struggle. That's the reason FARC really appreciates the Cuban experience.

We consider international solidarity with the Cuban revolution and all of those revolutionary processes around the world an obligation. It is very important for us to link these struggles of the Commu-

**FARC doesn't want war; FARC's struggle is for peace but peace with social justice ...**

nist Parties and the international Communist movement around the world, the workers' struggles because the struggle of FARC is to the benefit of all the anti-imperialists, all the anti-oligarchs, those sectors that are interested in building a new type of society. For us the new type of society is a socialist society. There is no other.

***What do you say to those who accuse FARC of being a terrorist organisation?***

I have already explained to you what FARC is, how it began but we need to tell them again. FARC is a people in arms; revolutionary men and women. They are Communists in arms. Our ideology is Marxism-Leninism enriched by Simón Bolívar's experience and thought and the experiences of all the revolutions from this continent and around the world.

Because FARC is a revolutionary organisation of a Marxist-Leninist character, of course the bourgeoisie and the class enemies see us as an antagonistic enemy. And, in fact, we are an antagonistic enemy because their "democracy"

is repression of the people who struggle for democracy for the entire people; the democracy that they, the ruling class must accept.

We refuse the globalised world of exploitation that they want to impose on us. They call "terrorist" all those policies that are against the US. For them this is democracy but for us, who are on the side of the people, that means war and that is what we need to fight against; for us to be able to be independent from the imperialist forces.

That is the reason they call us "terrorists", but I would draw your attention to the fact that FARC is an organisation of Communists in arms. This is the reason that the enemy, the gringos and other states as well as the Colombian oligarchy use because they are unable to defeat us militarily and therefore they have to use names to denigrate our organisation and try to isolate us from the people.

They try to name us as they are. They use terrorism, state terrorism that violates human rights. You look at Guantánamo, the US jail there and the way they treat all those people, chained all day.

**FARC is an organisation  
of Communists in arms.**

Even though the jails are super modern from where nobody can escape, they keep them chained every day and these are the people who talk about human rights and freedom and justice and the right to dissent. This is the speech, the discourse of the hawks of war.

In the end it doesn't really worry us that they treat us like that. It would worry us if ever they were to call us their allies because we're looking for a different type of society.

We would like to have relationships with all the countries of the world including the US but on the basis of equality, which is reciprocal and which benefits all involved; not those sorts of policies that impose on our sovereignty. That is the reason FARC is an anti-imperialist force.

We are not enemies of the US people; we admire the US people – we admire those sectors that are against their government's policies and their way of thinking. For all the years of existence of FARC, even though the security forces and the government's policies have been against us, we have always been open to having a dialogue and to have respectful relations with the people of the US.

## ***What is the revolutionary program of FARC?***

I need to tell all those who will have the opportunity to read or listen to what I'm saying; FARC approved the popular program of the guerrillas on July 20, 1964. We have had conference after conference up to the ninth conference during which we have been studying this program and adjusting it to the new conditions, adapting it to the new socio-economic conditions. It is called the agrarian program of the guerrillas. This is, in other words, the program for the new government of Colombia when FARC takes power. That is the program we are going to put in place as we are an anti-imperialist force. [See annex for summary of program.]

We would like to put in place land reform that would take the big latifundists' properties, the land extensions and give free land to the peasantry and to arrange credits to the peasantry, we will give land to those who want to work it. In Colombia, nobody else wants to put in place a land reform and that is precisely one of the reasons we have a lot of support from the peasantry.

Of course, as I mentioned, the majority of the members of FARC are of peasant origin. We don't have it in mind to give land to

people in order for them to continue to be poor but to teach people and give specialised assistance and credits to allow them to work the land.

On the other hand we have to have a commitment from the state to guarantee prices that correspond to the costs involved in working the land. The policy of giving credits will help with the education of their children, so they can go to university, to study at secondary school and to specialise in agriculture so that agricultural techniques can be refined so they can produce more and better.

In Colombia there is the concentration of land in the hands of a few big landowners and in the hands of drug traffickers or paramilitary.

They own the most fertile land, best located in terms of being close to cities and industrial centres. This concentration of land ownership forces the peasantry to leave the land and to be displaced into internal exile in

the mountains where they can't produce anything except amapola [the red opium poppy] which is the basis for heroin production.

The neo-liberal model has pushed those peasants to go into the depths of the jungle. The displaced peasantry don't have access to good roads in those areas limiting their potential. They don't have technical assistance or credits to create an infrastructure.

Colombia was one of the main exporters of coffee. It's not important any more, now that they produce better coffee in Brazil. Here in Colombia, the government simply abandoned the coffee producers. So now we are looking at that place that should be supplying the coffee in the area which has instead been occupied by the paramilitary.

### ***Land reform***

The geographical position of Colombia is very good and should be able to provide for the entire population but to do that we need to stimulate the work of the

**There is the concentration of land in the hands of a few big landowners and in the hands of drug traffickers or paramilitary.**

peasantry. It hasn't been possible to give land to the peasantry because the big landowners have organised paramilitary mercenaries who have the support of the army, the police and the government. It hasn't been possible to organise land reform. They don't allow land reform.

One of the ministers of the current government has got thousands of head of cattle, he's got the best land and he's got the best breed of horses, very expensive horses. He comes from a really bad background in the paramilitaries. His wealth comes from unscrupulous business dealings – Mafioso business. He represents the interests of the landowners in the government of president Uribe.

FARC is fighting for land reform.

At its eighth conference, in 1993 FARC approved a platform for a transitional government. The platform of 12 points expressed the necessity of having a government of democratic progress because for FARC the priority is peace.

What I have been telling you, reform is the path of social justice, the peace in which sovereignty and independence is respected, a peace which will end the exploitation for our people, for the workers.

## ***Transitional government***

In that platform we expressed the necessity for land reform; a land reform in which we give the land back to the peasantry so that they can work. Without having a government that has the power in its hands it can't be done. But that is one of our main demands and our political platform which we say requires a government that is representative of all forces of society – progressive, democratic and revolutionary forces, Bolivarian forces in which obviously the Communists will have to play a role.

All those insurgent forces can't exclude the Indigenous people, the peasants, the women, the youth. It has to be a government in which the workers in alliance with the peasantry have to be at the centre.

Then, of course, because it will be a transitional government, it has to be supported by other sectors of society. That proposition is sound. This is the platform for an alternative government which will be able to open political spaces for participation that allows national reconciliation among Colombians.

It will give the possibility for the initiation of dialogue for peace, for negotiations and so we can start the process to recover our independence and eliminate the

dependency on the US. That proposition for a new government is broadened by a new document which is called *The Manifesto* in which we explain the political, ideological, social and cultural conditions of our struggle.

We've drawn up a few ways in which we can eliminate the political crisis the government of President Uribe finds itself in as a result of the participation of the masses who don't want to continue living with oppression and exploitation by the current government.

This involves the education of the masses about the connection between independence and their lives. FARC is committed to this program, with all its forces. During this year we're going to work toward our objective to which international solidarity is indispensable – the solidarity of Communists, workers, the peasantry and all those intellectual sectors interested in the defence of freedom and the rights of the peoples. Through this we are seeking a Colombia that can actually achieve peace with social justice.

### ***Is it possible to find a political solution to the internal armed conflict in Colombia?***

I can tell you yes, it is possible. That is one of the struggles that FARC has pursued since 1964 in Marquetalia. We have never renounced our commitment to a political solution to this armed conflict because, for us, the end of the conflict in the country cannot be brought about through war. The end of world conflict can't be war. It has to be socialism, by which we eliminate class struggle, that we eliminate the struggle between exploiters and exploited.

In this context FARC has made several proposals. We have carried out several dialogues with the Colombian government, for example with President Belisario Betancur in 1984.

We signed some accords at La Uribe [a town in the Meta department of Colombia]. Those accords in which the government gave the commitment to FARC to make some changes to allow the peasants, indigenous people, the youth, workers, intellectuals and

**We have never renounced our  
commitment to a political solution  
to this armed conflict ...**

teachers to have more freedoms and more rights.

So this dialogue with Belisario Betancur was very important to FARC. Our comrades Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas participated in this dialogue. Many people came to talk to us, we signed the accords – I am one of the signatories to the accords. But once we signed the accords and we started to put them into practice, those enemies of peace took power and started to obstruct those programs which we had signed with President Belisario Betancur.

At that time we signed a ceasefire, a bilateral ceasefire. President Belisario Betancur ordered the troops to stop all types of military actions and offensives. At the same time, Comrade Marulanda, through the media, wanted all the comrades from FARC to cease all military operations. That was really big news in Colombia and created hope and expectations among the Colombian people that the military confrontation had disappeared. But then, as I have mentioned, the attacks of the enemies of peace began and started attacking all those accords.

### ***Unity in struggle for peace***

As part of the accords we created the Union Patriótica, the UP. The



Patriotic Unity was part of the accords in which all those aiming for peaceful solutions were prepared to participate. The Communist Party of Colombia was heavily involved with all of its membership enrolled in the Union Patriótica. It included some members of the Liberals and the Conservative Party. It created expectations among the people who trusted that it was possible to find a peaceful solution. It became a political party for peace; a party that belonged to those who wanted reconciliation without the need for guns. FARC was in there.

The first presidential candidate was Jacobo Arenas. He was a great writer, a leader coming from

the oil industry, a great man, very clear ideologically with a great political education. Once people knew he was the presidential candidate and he was travelling to Bogotá to launch his presidential campaign, the machine working against peace found out and started planning how to kill him.

So the secretariat of FARC decided not to send him, in order to save his life. We chose another candidate [Jaime Pardo], somebody who hadn't been a member of the guerrilla forces – he had been an academic, a magistrate of the Supreme Court, a great orator as well. In a short time he managed to become very popular among the people and with the Union Patriótica, the second largest political force in the country.

At the elections the movement managed to run some members for parliament and some local governments but then the repressive forces of the state began assassinating all those members of the Union Patriótica, including the presidential candidates. Jaime Pardo Leal was assassinated and then succeeded by Bernardo Jaramillo – a young person, 25 years old.

He was also assassinated and the enemy immediately spread the word that FARC was responsible for his death. They couldn't

sustain that accusation and they had to accept that he had been assassinated by the paramilitaries.

Apart from those two candidates for the presidency, they killed several governors, members of parliament, members of local government, the leadership, priests, youth and students. We can say that more than 5,000 people, members of the Patriotic Unity, were assassinated by the paramilitaries and nobody has actually paid for this orgy of blood that really decapitated the leadership of this initiative.

We had sent some comrades from FARC to the Union Patriótica, including a member of the high command – Iván Márquez – who is now a member of the secretariat. He became a member of the Senate but when we heard about these plans to eliminate all the members of Union Patriótica we ordered all those comrades to withdraw in order to save their lives, among them Iván Márquez.

In spite of all this, we do not renounce the possibility of a peaceful solution to the armed conflict.

After the government of Belisario Betancur, there was the government of Virgilio Barco [1986 – 1990], a member of the Liberal Party who kept the dialogues going but we couldn't make any

progress. He didn't prosecute anybody for the execution of all those members of the Union Patriótica, the Communists and workers. Apparently nobody was responsible for these crimes, despite the fact that there were reports that these came from the armed forces themselves.

They tried to say that it was orchestrated by the Communists but in reality we had lost all those comrades. He sent some members of the government to talk to us, to our headquarters in La Uribe. We didn't make any

advances but while the dialogue was in place we demanded that they comply with the accords which were signed by the government of Belisario Betancur.

Then [César] Gaviria became president and he was the one who really began to implement the neo-liberal policies.

There was a moment during the dialogues when the Popular Liberation Army [EPL] demobilised and withdrew its troops. [EPL was founded by the Maoist breakaway Communist Party of Colombia (Marxist-Leninist). It demobilised



The government has forced us to take up arms.

in 1991]. There was an infiltrator who was a member of EPL who betrayed the revolutionary struggle and took three and a half thousand men and joined the members of the paramilitaries. This link gave him sufficient support to become a member of the Senate. He received \$300,000 to achieve the demobilisation of those comrades.

So when César Gaviria took power, EPL had been greatly weakened. Some comrades from the National Liberation Army [Ejército de Liberación Nacional – the ELN], were also trying to demobilise. There were also two other small leftist groupings like the Indigenous army [Quintín Lame] that was also being demobilised and a smaller group called the PRT, the Workers' Party. Of course there was also the 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement, M-19, which had very good relations with Cuba.

The M-19 was formed after the elections of April 19, 1970 when the candidate for the National Popular Alliance [ANAPO] was defeated, a poll widely considered to be fraudulent. M-19 has since demobilised to form the M-19 Democratic Alliance. It had carried out some very good publicity. In spite of being weakened by the repression they were members of the guerrilla coordination committee "Simón Bolívar" (Coordinado-

ra Guerrillera Simón Bolívar) that had forged an alliance among the guerrilla forces. These forces created a national guerrilla unity but were from an anti-communist perspective so FARC could not actually participate.

There were several factors that the Colombian Government tried to use to eliminate FARC militarily. At that time we were living through the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a big test for us all. Comrade Jacobo Arenas died on August 10, 1990, the Colombian government and the ruling class thought that with these events and the election of César Gaviria as President, whose main objective was the implementation of neo-liberal policies, it would mean the end of FARC.

FARC didn't accept these policies therefore the government decided to launch a huge military campaign on December 9, 1990. It was the same day that the Constituent National Assembly was being held. Their idea was to weaken FARC by killing a few members of the Secretariat, believing that being already weakened, we would accept their positions.

The ruling class did not take into account that FARC was an experienced revolutionary organisation and they actually suffered several

defeats. The army lost more than 120 of its members and aircraft and with that the dialogue ended.

The remains of the guerrilla forces organised a response to the attack made on its national coordinating committee headquarters, Casa Verde. These united actions really worried President Gaviria who thought he had eliminated the guerrilla forces.

We never renounced the possibility of progress through the process of dialogue and negotiations and to this Gaviria said he was prepared to talk anywhere and anytime. So FARC said, "All right, let's do it but we need some guarantees and some bases from which all the military forces are withdrawn."

The government didn't accept our proposition. They proposed 20 different areas, trying to push FARC to reject the offer and to promote the idea that FARC wasn't interested in peace. We decided to pick one of the 20, Cravo Norte on the border with Venezuela.

We already had some relationship with the Venezuelan govern-

ment which wasn't Hugo Chávez but Carlos Andrés Pérez [president from 1989 to 1993]. At that time, President Carlos Andrés Pérez had offered his country for us to be able to continue the negotiating process. We agreed and went to Venezuela to initiate the process of negotiations with Venezuelan president, Carlos Andrés Pérez.

This was happening in the middle of the war. While negotiating, the conflict would continue and those were the dynamics of the situation. Comrades Alfonso Cano, Iván Márquez and others, who accompanied them in the commission, were to negotiate in Caracas [Venezuela].

Some of the leaders would remain in Colombia, where the [government's] actions were really bad; aiming to destroy FARC and force the negotiators to sign a peace deal whilst at the same time intensifying the war. [A consensus couldn't be reached about a ceasefire, monitoring, etc]

Comrade Marulanda, Timoleón Jiménez and I remained behind in the country and were able to

**We never renounced the possibility of progress through the process of dialogue and negotiations.**

defeat those military operations. We were able to inform those at the negotiating table [including comrades from EPL and ELN who were not fully aware what to expect from the process] about our experiences on the ground and to let the negotiating team know that it would be impossible to reach an agreement.

It was difficult to make decisions seated at the negotiating table, differences started to arise. The government tried to divide and conquer the negotiating team by saying that “FARC is the biggest force, let’s talk to FARC first”. FARC replied, “no, we are not prepared to divide our forces, we don’t accept just negotiating on our own”.

So then there were some movements in Venezuela with a coup d’état against the president Carlos Andrés Pérez. The instability created took away the conditions for us to continue negotiations in Venezuela but then Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari offered the territory of Tlaxcala Mexico, for us to continue the negotiations.

### **Govt pursuing military solution**

We came to the realisation that the ruling class in Colombia did not want a peaceful solution but wanted, to defeat and to eliminate the guerrilla forces. Despite all this we attended although we could not actually move forward.

The government and the guerrilla coordinating committee had to go back to carry out consultations with their own leaderships and in that process we developed the eighth conference of the guerrillas under very difficult military conditions. [The Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Body was revived in the early 1990s and involved FARC, EPL and ELN]

We managed to have several military victories against the government and the army and César Gaviria, the president of Colombia, said that we weren’t interested in peace and cancelled the peace negotiations.

So we ended by saying no more peace negotiations with this government, the enemies of a peaceful solution. This is just to

**We came to the realisation that the ruling class in Colombia did not want a peaceful solution.**

give you an idea of all the efforts we have been through.

Then there was the Ernesto Samper government. He said he would like to negotiate with FARC. He asked us what we needed in order to begin negotiations. We said we would like to see the withdrawal of all armed forces in La Uribe and he said, "Alright, I'm going to demilitarise the area."

He, Comrade Marulanda and I went there but they sent the army aiming to eliminate us over there. We responded and the generals of the army told Samper not to do it because it would be a "betrayal of the homeland" and he decided not to do it. He didn't have much power because he was supported by the paramilitaries and drug traffickers.

Dialogue was not possible. So that option was eliminated.

We continued with the confrontation in our poor country, fought with greater power and achieved greater victories until the presidency of Andrés Pastrana from the Conservative Party [1998 – 2002]. Pastrana had said that if he became president he would carry out the peace negotiation process personally and he asked again: "What do you want to continue?"



Manuel Marulanda Vélez

So we had a full meeting of the Secretariat and the High Command of FARC and decided if Pastrana was prepared to withdraw armed forces from a particular area, we could not rule out the possibility of a peaceful solution. So we decided on five municipalities. At that time it was very difficult.

We proposed La Uribe, La Macarena, Mesetas, Vista Hermosa and San Vicente Del Caguán which was the most difficult for us because we knew that there was a battalion there from the army. The decision from the FARC High Command was, all right, if they demilitarize the five municipalities, we would go and Raúl Reyes would be the person in charge of the negotiations and we thought, "Well, that would be very far away but we think that President Pastrana would do it."

He said, "Well, I want to go and

talk to Marulanda” and he went as president-elect. He said “I’m prepared to reach peace with you and that can be a quick process. Just allow me to take up my position and I would like to talk to Marulanda.” Marulanda said “Go set up your government because this won’t be set up that quickly.”

He thought that the only thing they had to do was to return the weapons and that was it. We told him that to do this we needed the five municipalities to be demilitarized and he said “All right, I’ll do it.”

We had at that time 300 members of the [Colombian] army under our control as prisoners. This was during the time in which he was meant to demilitarize their efforts. Then he said some can be demilitarized but not all of them. There was a problem because there was a counter-insurgency batallion there in [the municipality of San Vicente] el Caguán. We wanted the total withdrawal of forces from the five municipalities to be able to go into dialogue.

It was a big struggle with some time wasted but we didn’t move from there. We set up the negotiating tables in [the town of] San Vicente Del Caguán and they developed plans to see how they could assassinate us. We continued there until we reached the

document called the “Twelve-point Platform for a New Colombia”.

### ***Political and belligerent force***

There were three meetings between Pastrana and Marulanda. Many ministers went and talked to Comrade Marulanda. We became a belligerent force and this is how we can show that we had actually made efforts to find a political solution to the armed conflict.

Unfortunately, Pastrana as a representative of the land-owners, the bourgeoisie and the interests of the US thought that FARC would give their weapons up and that we would follow him. That is the reason that he refused to sign any of the accords and decided to put an end to the negotiating process – and to support the government of Uribe. [President Andrés Pastrana broke off negotiations with FARC towards the end of his term. In August 2002 current incumbent Álvaro Uribe was elected. His platform included escalating the conflict against the guerillas.]

Alvaro Uribe came to power. He really represents the interests of the more conservative sectors and we did not think there would be any negotiations with his government because he was not prepared to accept a negotiated

solution. He – with Bush – is one of the warmongers of the US who looks for military solutions.

Despite this, we believe it is possible to find a solution, a political solution to the armed conflict in Colombia. We asked for the withdrawal of forces from Putumayo and Caquetá and we believe that we could proceed at the same time with the humanitarian exchange of prisoners.

Because the prisoners are involved in this conflict, we are negotiating a humanitarian exchange of political prisoners in which we'll give everybody our commitment for the exchange of all our comrades who are detained in different jails.

Uribe doesn't want this because he has aspired to offer a military solution and we have asked for the withdrawal of all forces for 45 days only, in which we would have enough time to sign an ac-

cord. Uribe says "No! I won't do it."

We think that we can't ever renounce the possibility of a peaceful solution to the armed conflict. If the government continues to insist that FARC, as a negotiator has to put down their weapons and bow down to the neo-liberal policies, FARC won't do it. That won't happen because we have a commitment to our people and to the peoples of the world.

Our revolutionary convictions prevent us from doing this. The prisoners involved, those held by FARC and those comrades held by the army, the Colombian government and by the US are a product of the armed conflict. Because in FARC we don't see a real political will on the part of the government to look for a political solution. We have thought that it is not possible to hold these prisoners for an endless time in the jungle or in the jails.

**We are negotiating a humanitarian exchange of political prisoners in which we'll give everybody our commitment for the exchange of all our comrades who are detained in different jails.**

That is why the initiative of the humanitarian exchange, the necessity to sign an accord for the freedom of those exchangeable prisoners, could open the doors for a peaceful solution, to begin to find a peaceful solution to the armed conflict.

Obviously, to do this we have got different conditions for the humanitarian exchange. For this we asked for the withdrawal from Florida and Pradera in the Valle del Cauca, which is in the southwest of Colombia, for the prisoners' exchange. We would like the cessation of activities in those two provinces. It is a very big expanse of territory and that is a necessity.

For this type of negotiation FARC cannot be considered as a terrorist organization because we are a political organization and we do not accept dialogue under conditions of not being considered a political and belligerent force. So we would like to stop the instru-

ments [of the state] trying to capture members of our high command and we are going to insist on those political processes.

We understand that the process towards peace is not easy, in the same way; it is not easy to take political power. We understand that it is just a matter of time and the accumulation of forces. The reason we ask people to support this initiative is that in our society there are guerrilla forces like the EPL, the ELN, the indigenous people, the academics, the teachers, the students, workers, all those sectors who aim for a peaceful Colombia.

We consider these negotiations, this dialogue, has to include all those social expressions. It cannot be a dialogue between us and the government. It has to involve the people. The people have to be active and have to contribute, to express what they want to resolve.

**Politically, it has an economic and social background. This is how we see the issue of a peaceful solution to the conflict, to the humanitarian exchange.**

We don't accept dialogues behind the people's backs because we're not negotiating rendition, we are going to negotiate the end of the conflict through peaceful means. Politically, it has an economic and social background. This is how we see the issue of a peaceful solution to the conflict, to the humanitarian exchange.

How are we going to end the issue of prisoners of war unless we finish by political means the armed conflict? Until the conflict ends we will have dead guerrillas, injured guerrillas. In the same way we will continue to have military in our hands, military deaths, members of the military in jail and also the civilians are affected by this because this is a conflict which has been very polarizing.

There is a sector of the population which supports the military solution and a section which is ignorant or brainwashed and also supports this. On the other hand we have the people who believe in peace, who believe in the Bolivarian Revolution and support revolutionary Cuba and Venezuela, who are a very anti-imperialist sector. This is considered by the Colombian government to be public enemy number one.

### ***Talking of prisoners, what is the situation of FARC members Simón and Sonia who are being held as prisoners in the US?***

This situation is calamitous because they have been unjustly sentenced and were extradited to the US, which is totally illegal. There is no basis in international law. It is a political issue. It has been used as blackmail against FARC and it was orchestrated by the governments of Uribe and George Bush.

Neither of these comrades is responsible for any of the accusations made against them.



For Simón they have invented several stories. They are not true. They have accused him of being a member of the Secretariat of FARC but he has never been a member. They accused him of being the chief of the Bloque Caribe [A bloque is made up of 5 or more fronts] but he has not been a member of that bloque either. Then, because he is an economist and a banker, they have said he was the chief of finance of FARC. They have also said he was the responsible commander who shot down a US helicopter. That is not true, either. Later, they said Simón was trafficking drugs, which is absolutely false. FARC is not involved in drug trafficking.

They haven't proved any of these accusations because the accusations have no legal substantiation. In spite of this they have flown several people to the US, paid for by the Colombian army, to serve as witnesses against Simón. This case has created a difficult situation for the US and the Uribe government because even US juries have not been able to reach a consensus about the accusations.

This is a political problem and for



that reason they want to keep him in jail under any circumstances. Despite the fact that they haven't been able to prove anything against him they tell him: "Look, you belong to a terrorist organization". They have kept him in solitary confinement, chained without being able to see daylight, in isolation and under permanent pressure because they are trying to destroy his morale and destroy him intellectually and ideologically.

**We call for  
the broadest solidarity possible.**

But we can say that our comrades have shown great strength and that gives pride to all the members of FARC and all the Colombian people. He isn't new to the accusations and the inhumane treatment he is receiving in the US.

We have to give thanks here for the negotiations of Senator Piedad Cordova for visiting our comrades Sonia and Simón in the US jails. They are heroes of the Colombian revolution and we call for the broadest solidarity possible.

Together with the five Cuban heroes, also being held in US jails, they deserve international solidarity from all Communist parties, workers' parties and all anti-imperialist organizations as well from those defenders of human rights and the dispossessed. Simón and Sonia are included in the list of exchangeables. At the

time of signing a humanitarian exchange, these two comrades must be included among those to be liberated in exchange for all the prisoners in our hands. [Among those in FARC's hands are the three CIA members captured at the time their aircraft was shot down.]

***Do you have any other points you would like to make?***

I would like to inform your readers that FARC has a cohesive leadership around the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism and around its leader Manuel Marulanda. He has a lot of military, political and organizational experience. We accompany him in this leadership, the members of the Secretariat and those of the High Command. We all have different individual responsibilities and collective responsibilities and, because we

**FARC is a growing force, a revolutionary army which will not renounce the objective of taking political power; an army that admires the revolutionary struggles and applies proletarian internationalism.**

are a political party, everything is done by collective decision. At the same time, we contribute according to our different capacities.

Against us there is a huge campaign on behalf of the imperialist forces, not just militarily but also in a propagandistic way in which they say that our commander in chief has died or they hope that he will die because they have been unable to eliminate him.

There are many members of the army who have come with a commitment to eliminate Comrade Manuel Marulanda but they haven't been able to do it. The amount of money the US has invested in this effort is enormous but it hasn't been possible. They have a large number of advisers working with the aim of eliminating FARC and its leader, Manuel Marulanda.

FARC is a growing force, a revolutionary army which will not renounce the objective of taking political power; an army that admires the revolutionary struggles and applies proletarian interna-

nationalism. This is because we are convinced the future of humanity is socialism.

We send greetings and see a big future for the Cuban revolution, the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, the process that is beginning in Ecuador with President Correa, the process that is being led by Evo Morales in Bolivia and also the steps toward building a new society that, independent of US policies, are being taken by President Cristina Fernández in Argentina.

We greet Daniel Ortega who is a legend, a well known comrade who took power with the Sandinistas, who spent time in government and who is now back in power. We wish the comrades from the Sandinistas the best that they may carry out all the changes in the interests of their people. They are our brothers. We feel we must give solidarity to all those revolutionary organizations and we would like to thank all those political parties, social and revolutionary organizations who give solidarity to our struggle.

**It is important to demand  
the withdrawal of the US troops  
from our territory.**

We say, like Ché Guevara said, that solidarity is a feeling of humanity, particularly in these times when imperialism wants to plan war against the peoples. But this future has to be built together. This is our invitation and I would like to thank you. I would like to give thanks for the solidarity to the workers, to the trade union movement, which expresses its solidarity to the Colombian people in different ways.

I think that those levels of solidarity can be improved in the way they put pressure on the Colombian government to withdraw from the areas where we want to be

able to conduct the humanitarian exchange.

In the same way, the social organizations demand that in Colombia we initiate a process of political solution to the armed conflict so this can end and reconciliation can be made possible among Colombians. In this way it is important to demand the withdrawal of the US troops from our territory because they are violating our sovereignty.

This expression of solidarity can spread to other organizations. I think that you can help us in that way – to express solidarity with our struggle.

***The interview was conducted in Spanish and translated into English. The points taken from the Manifesto were also translated from Spanish and summarised.***

## **Annex:**

The Manifiesto of FARC-EP is a document issued by the organisation's Secretariat in September 2007 which states that "dignity is calling us to resistance to the illegitimate, outlaw government that has seized the [presidential] Palace of Nariño. It calls us to a convergence and to a National Accord to overcome the profound institutional crisis of governance which is striking down the country and to establish clear paths to a lasting peace.

"Colombia deserves respect. We can no longer tolerate this mafia of narco-paramilitaries and latifundists [large landowners], narco-traffickers and businessmen which, with the military support of the US and the drumming of the media, has converted Colombia into a war-hell with its massacres, mass detention of citizens, disappearances, poverty and looting and all the outrages of state terrorism."

In another document named: "Bolivarian Platform" for a "Government of National Reconstruction and Reconciliation" that dates from April 3, 1993, in summary its ten points call for:

1. A political solution to the serious conflict in Colombia
2. A Bolivarian doctrine for the military to focus on national defence. Arms will not be turned on the citizens of the country. The National Police will again become subordinate to the ministry of the Government, restructured as a preventative force, moralized and educated in the respect for human rights.
3. Democratic participation in decisions reached at the national, regional and municipal level. A unicameral parliament with full rights and media access for minority social and political groups.
4. Development and modernization of the economy with social justice. The state to own and control key areas like energy, communications, public services, natural resources. Fifty percent of the state budget to be invested in social wellbeing – to maintain employment, salary levels, health, housing and education in ways appropriate to the cultural traditions of Colombia. Ten percent for scientific research
5. A progressive tax system. A GST on luxury goods and services only
6. An agrarian policy which provides access to credit and technical and marketing

assistance on a democratic basis. Protection against unfair international trade practices. Every region will develop its own plan for breaking up the large landholdings and for helping producers get their goods to national and international markets.

7. Exploitation of the natural resources to be undertaken for the good of the nation and its regions. The contracts with the multi-national companies to be renegotiated. Contracts for the construction of more refineries and the development of the petro-chemical industry to be transparent.
8. International relations with all countries of the world on the basis of self-determination of the peoples and mutual benefit. Priority to be given to the

process of integration in the region and in Latin America.

9. The reviewing of all military pacts and the re-negotiation of the external debt.
10. A solution to the phenomenon of the production, commercialization and consumption of narcotics and hallucinogens. This cannot be done by military means but through agreements and participation in the national and international community.

# The Women of FARC

Colombia is a nightmare of human rights abuses including politically motivated killings, super-exploitation of workers and dispossession of peasant communities. While much of Latin America is now seeking solutions to the results of decades of neglect arising from the rule of privileged pro-US local elites, the government of Colombia is bogged down in a war on its own people. The bravery of the people in resisting this oppression is outstanding. Earlier this year, Anna Pha had the opportunity to speak to some of the bravest – women who have left friends and families behind to fight as guerrillas in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo – FARC-EP).

In Australia, women still have challenges additional to the ones they share with men as workers or students or unemployed. But the sight of committed Colombian women in their military uniforms gives the outsider pause for thought. What sorts of circumstances would cause these young women – with their whole lives ahead of them, as the saying goes – to opt for a hard life on the run from ruthless government forces and even more ruthless government-backed paramilitaries?

“Of course, the reality of Colombia helps to develop your consciousness because since I was born we have been living in violence deriving from the state,” said Iliana, an older guerrillera



Iliana

(woman guerrilla fighter) who was a young housewife when she answered the call to join the ranks of FARC.

“You start learning reality from life and inside the guerrilla movement; about the exploitation of man by man, the existence of poverty, a society where just a few hold the wealth that should belong to everybody while the majority die of hunger. There is no education for the children, people don’t have housing or healthcare and we don’t have the right to work in dignity. On the contrary – a person who manages to get a job gets poverty wages, doesn’t work in dignity but to die because their wages are just not sufficient to live.”

The statistics of this reality are staggering:

- Nearly four million people have been displaced by conflict, mostly instigated by paramilitary groups
- 1,700 Indigenous people have been murdered by these vigilantes
- 2,500 trade unionists and 5,000 members of the Patriotic Union political organisation have been assassinated

- Tens of thousands of people (peasants and Afro-Colombian communities) have been removed from their land for resource exploitation by transnational corporations
- The evictions are often accompanied by massacres and torture – between 1982 and 2005 there were 3,500 massacres in the process of the theft of over 12 million acres of land
- The US-funded military have been responsible for 950 execution-style murders since 2002
- Congressmen with paramilitary backgrounds and connections now occupy 35 percent of parliamentary posts.

“When I was a little girl, during the aggression against [the guerrilla stronghold of] Marquetalia, I was listening to the radio. I started to feel sympathy with Comrade Manuel [Manuel Marulanda – the long-serving military leader of FARC]. It became my ambition to know these guerrillas despite the fact that the government’s mass media never told the truth.

**“From there you are transformed into a soldier defending the homeland and the revolution.”**

I began asking why the government, with all the support that it has from the US – lots of aircraft, troops, arms, cannons, mortars, aircraft and all the other assistance from the US – they were never able to defeat Comrade Manuel.

“So as a young girl I always had this question – why has a powerful government never been able to defeat this movement? The information about Manuel carried in the media caught my attention.”

Parents – even those living in the harshest and most insecure circumstances of rural Colombia – naturally worry about their sons and daughters deciding to take up arms in defence of the people:

“They are peasants who are not opposed to my decision. They feel pain for me over this decision but they have been lucky – they have been able to come and see me while I have been a guerilla. I have shared with them stories, accounts of my life. They are happy now, particularly my father. It is very difficult for my mother”, said Adriana, a young guerillera.

When asked if her father was proud of her as a guerilla, Adriana responded: “Yes he is. My mother is, too. She saw me after a two-year absence and she said that I’d made the right decision because she didn’t want to see me

with a lot of children, suffering. So that was the best decision.”

FARC does its utmost to warn aspiring guerrillas about the rigors of their way of life. From the outset, training and discipline are taken very seriously. Self-discipline and development are emphasised. The guerrillas willingly accept the conditions; they are convinced there is no other way to transform the unbearable social realities of Colombia:

“My experiences inside FARC have been many and varied. One of the ones that gives me the greatest pride, aside from being a member and being proud of that, has been to transform myself into a new person. This is the person of a new type dreamed about by Ché Guevara because here, when you become a member they change the mentality from the one deriving from civilian life. This is a bourgeois mentality – selfish. From there you are transformed into a soldier defending the homeland and the revolution,” said Adriana.

“I have learned a lot. Here we are prepared in all the fields of politics, military science, culture and learn ethical and moral values and Marxist-Leninist principles. We are inspired from the thought of Simón Bolívar to ensure that we are guerrillas who are working

24 hours a day for the triumph of the revolution to take power for the people. So we are guerillas of a comprehensive type.”

Activity in and around the guerillas’ camp involves training in various techniques and specialisations – intelligence and counter-intelligence, security, how to negotiate dangerous terrain, politics and organisation – and the routine activities of a military camp.

Iliana: “A normal day would involve attending to security. For example, when we get up in the morning we will get into formation so that there can be a review of the troops. Then they send us to have coffee. At six in the morning of a normal day we are all having breakfast, then we have to give a report to the commander. In the camp we have to report to the higher commander. After that we all clean the camp, all the equipment, then we go to the classroom to study different topics and attend to all the normal duties that need doing in the camp.

“At nine, we take a break. Some go back to the classroom, others join in maintaining security and others take up other duties. What is very important is that the security is always there and that there is never a lapse in security. The commander then decides if some



Adriana

of us have to do some reconnaissance. At midday we take our lunch and at one we go back to our normal duties once more. We need to look for firewood, latrine duty – all the things connected with the running of the camp. At three we have another short break and generally we all take a shower.

“At six, we have our dinner. I forgot to mention that at five we make another report and another turn at security. At six-thirty, after dinner, we gather again and go to the classroom to listen to talks or read some documents or some cultural item like a film, the news, until about eight. At eight we get into formation and then go off to sleep.”

The women carry out the same tasks and share exactly the same hardships as the men. Their attitude to their work is identical.

Adriana: "I feel exactly the same. I use a gun exactly the same as them. We feel prepared to take the combat up to the enemy in the same way as a man. This is not forgetting that in an army you can feel fear and fear doesn't wear pants. But if it is my turn to fight I will have to do it because our enemy has to be defeated ... it doesn't mean that we are made of steel; that we don't get tired, that nothing hurts or that bullets don't penetrate us. I am just a soldier, a human being who feels pain. Our hearts aren't made of stone but we are very serious about what we are undertaking. Our discipline is very, very serious."

The discipline is noteworthy but so, too, is the awareness that FARC is not an instrument of repression, a prop for privileged elites and a system of exploitation.

"We are FARC; an army of a new type. As we say in our documents, we have nothing to do with the brutal methods used by bourgeois armies," as one younger guerrillera noted.

Nevertheless, they have to deal with apprehension among some rural dwellers. Misunderstanding of the goals and methods of FARC are fostered by a powerful media that is owned by and wages a relentless battle of ideas on behalf of Colombia's wealthy minority:

"I can't imagine defending our people without having a real army like FARC. Even if they are not very clear about the meaning of our struggle, I aspire to the situation where they will open their eyes and understand why we struggle and that all the propaganda directed against FARC is not true. They [the government and the media] always characterise us as bad people and, unfortunately, there are people who believe them. When we speak with them and we express our

**"We are FARC; an army of a new type. We have nothing to do with the brutal methods used by bourgeois armies."**

love they become aware that we are not bad people. This is how we are recruiting them and working among the masses. They can understand that the changes we propose will be different.

“Sometimes we find homes where people don’t like us but a guerilla will arrive at a place where there are such people and the first thing we will do is go and greet them in a friendly manner to show them that we are human, who feel things and suffer like others. When we do this we can see the person we talk to will adopt a different attitude. There are people sometimes who think they can’t touch a guerilla or talk to them. They have in their minds that we are like a bourgeois army that will mistreat them and humiliate them; that they will be hurt. But when they find out that we are different they can see reality – that FARC is different.”

The guerrillas’ plans for what they, as individuals, might do after the triumph of the revolution are not well defined. This is hardly surprising. There is still an armed struggle being waged against anti-people forces that have no

desire for peace talks or even a humanitarian exchange of prisoners. The women were clear about the type of society they have committed their lives to building. Its features are straightforward and (even if some people don’t use the term socialist to describe them) are the hope of ordinary men and women the world over:

“We want to build a new state – an alternative to the capitalist state. We want to build a socialist state in which we will all enjoy equal rights, the right to life, to education, housing, healthcare and, as I mentioned before, to work with dignity, to work in order to live and not in order to die. Work should be for the benefit of the majority. Our work should provide the power to the Colombian people to get access to housing, health and wellbeing. The state should plan all those things needed by the people and not just work for a handful of families belonging to the oligarchy who have kept the Colombian people in subjugation and poverty their whole lives and in order that these oligarchs get richer off our sweat.”



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