

[CHURCH](#)[COLOMBIA](#)[BISHOPS](#)[INDIGENOUS PEOPLE](#)[VIOLENCE](#)[APPEAL](#)[PEACE](#)

Colombian Bishops appeal for resumption of peace process

The Catholic Bishops of the Pacific and Southwest regions of Colombia issue a statement appealing for the resumption of a peace process "in the perspective of respect for human rights, peoples' rights and international humanitarian law."

By Linda Bordoni

Colombian bishops of the country's Pacific and Southwest regions are calling for attention and for a response to the dramatic situation in which many communities find themselves as tension increases in the country.

"On several occasions we have drawn attention to the difficulties that many people are experiencing in the Pacific and Southwest region and we have asked the Colombian state for a global solution that resolves the structural causes that are at the basis of the humanitarian crisis,"



the bishops say as they express solidarity and concern for the exacerbation of the conflict in the Chocò region, in the diocese of Quibdò and in other regions of Colombia's southwest.

"Let us raise our voice as Pastors again and ask to resume the path of peace in the perspective of respect for human rights, peoples' rights and international humanitarian law," they say.

Vulnerable communities

The area in question comprises territories where mainly indigenous and afro-descendant communities live.

It is especially for these communities that the bishops express concern. In their statement entitled "Strengthening the construction of peace in the face of the escalation of the conflict" they appeal to the National Government, and to other state bodies, "to establish conditions for a dignified life and mechanisms of protection for communities and social leaders".

The bishops go a step further asking for attention towards alleged "collusion between members of security forces and illegal groups" that have been reported by human rights organizations and by the Diocese of Quibdó.

They note that "armed groups must be aware of their status as aggressors of the civilian population and therefore accept the refusal they are subject to because of their criminal actions".

Need for political solutions and dialogue

Kicking off the new year, the Colombian bishops reiterate the need to pursue political solutions to end the armed conflict with ELN rebels and to reach an agreement with the self-proclaimed paramilitary AGC militants and other groups.

The bishops conclude their statement noting that they await a "sincere response of the various protagonists, through concrete gestures of an authentic will for peace," and they ask the people of Colombia to "pray and commit themselves to building a fair, fraternal and violence-free country."

Power vacuum

The number of indigenous people killed in the Southwest and Pacific areas in Colombia has risen sharply as armed groups seek to seize control of the power vacuum left by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) after they demobilised as part of the 2016 peace deal.

The resulting power struggle has left indigenous movements, which defend land sovereignty, in the middle of violent efforts by armed groups to gain territorial control. The violence has been heightened further by the region's drug trade.

