



Displaced People Seek a Dignified Life in Patio Bonito

At the end of this third day of the take-over by displaced persons, the perspectives of the 1500 people who have taken refuge in the neighborhood of Riberas de Occidente, in Patio Bonito (Kennedy sector), don't look good. In the past few hours, their removal -threatened and then taken back various times throughout the day- now seems certain.

If the removal is carried out, it will be done with the predictable violent reaction of the repressive strategy used by the authorities, who have denied these 300 families the necessary minimum services needed for their survival, and who have always rejected any type of negotiation or accord since this take-over began.

The condition in which these people find themselves -among them 550 children, 100 pregnant women, and handicapped and elderly people- is at the limit of bearable: stuck in these houses (the majority of them without doors, windows, electricity or potable agua) and with food reserves almost finished. It has been reported that the police are not allowing the entry of any more food.

Communication with the outside world is restricted for representatives as well as outside delegations. When foreign "media-activists" of IPO tried to interview displaced people through the wire fence, the police told the interviewees that they could not be next to the fence.

This is the paradoxical situation in which these people find themselves: on one side, they are denied their rights as displaced people (guaranteed in the 1991 Constitution), and, on the other hand, are harshly persecuted upon defending their rights to a just and dignified life, which, on paper, are defended in the Constitution.

The displaced are not asking that the houses -more than 100- be given to them, rather that they be given permission to buy them at a fair price. This is precisely the motive of the protest: the government has denied them the possibility of buying these homes because their condition as displaced persons (in many cases, caused by the same government), "does not guarantee on-time payments"

The responses to the repression include judicial measures, the creation of a support committee between the civilian community and international and national organizations, and the accompaniment of the protestors, so that the following three proposals are completed:

- Pressuring the authorities to end the confinement of the 1500 displaced people and to start serious negotiations
- Guarantee the creation of a high-level commission (including the International Red Cross and the UN High Commission on Refugees) which will participate in the negotiations.
- Guarantee, at all times, the security of the population, especially that of those leaders who risk their lives speaking publicly.

Among the various forms of support given to the displaced people, it is important to note that demonstrated by the resident community of Riberas de Occidente, who, in an assembly of 400

people, recognized the rights of these displaced persons and their support of the protest.

It is necessary, thus, to wonder and ask what will be the government's response to this situation. Will there be political will to start a dialogue with the protestors, or will repression be the only solution? Will the entry into the complex of international protection organizations and participation in negotiations be permitted? Will minimum conditions for survival finally be guaranteed to these people, who are already victims of one or many displacements in their life?

The International Peace Observatory (IPO) was present these past three days in the displaced people's protest in Patio Bonito, trying to monitor the progress of the events and send out truthful and independent information, not only at a national level, but internationally as well.

As direct witnesses to this permanent take-over, for us it is a duty to condemn the fact that the authorities (the Bogota Mayor's Office, the Kennedy Sub-Mayor's Office and the national government), being guilty of denying access to minimum resources for survival, are unable to find alternative solutions and opt for forced displacement.

We ask, finally, that the competent authorities commit themselves to find, together with the protestors, a serious and respectful solution for the rights of everyone.

IPO makes a call-out to the international community to back the struggle of the displaced people in Patio Bonito. This is not about a struggle unique to Bogota, but rather it is a symptom of the inhuman war that Colombia is suffering, fruit of a state policy of death against the *campesinos* of the country. In other parts of Colombia, where IPO walks together with *campesino* communities in their non-violent struggle for land (in the Middle Magdalena, Arauca and Chocó), we have been witness to the crimes perpetrated by the Colombian state and other armed actors against the civilian population, causing fear, breaking the social fabric and forcing displacement.

For all of this, we denounce the incapability or unwillingness of the national and regional government to find alternative solutions to forced displacement and their guiltiness in denying *campesinos* and Colombian citizens in general, access to a just and dignified life.

