



Report: III Humanitarian Action

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The III Humanitarian Action for Co-existence and Peace in Northeastern Antioquia took place from April 4 to 11, 2006.

Bearing in mind the economic blockade and human rights violations that the campesinos from this region have been subjected to jointly by military and paramilitary groups, this event was carried out in the rural community of Lejanías in the municipality of Remedios, Department of Antioquia.

Regional Context

The people from Northeastern Antioquia, who were forcibly displaced from other parts of the country, have fled from violence since the 1950's. At this time, they continue in an ongoing state of internal displacement. Until January 17, members of the XIV Brigade remained in a base set up only 270 meters from the school in Lejanías. This is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Since May 2005, the presence of the base and military members has forced most of the inhabitants from the region to flee out of fear of confrontations between illegally armed groups and the public force.

The State supposedly guarantees fundamental rights as much for internally displaced persons as for any other citizen. Nonetheless, these rights are denied or violated on a daily basis. In their place, the State's only ongoing presence is the army and the paramilitary squads that terrorize the people in order to expropriate their land and take it over to clear the path for multinationals. At this moment, 22,000 hectares of land in Northeastern Antioquia have invalid land deeds or problems with these deeds. In other words, the government is negotiating the land with private interests without consulting the people who live on this same land.

The economic blockade strongly affects health conditions. The army does not allow medicine to come into the region, saying that it could end up in the hands of the guerrilla. There is not one hospital, clinic or health post. Malaria, dengue and other illnesses are common, but there are no medications to treat them. When people get sick, they have to bear it without any treatment or medical attention, or they have to be carried in hammock for days. The communities and organizations working in this region do everything they can to achieve a basic food supply and democratic structures allowing for the population's survival. Nonetheless, they continue to suffer.

Objective

- Mitigate the economic blockade and human rights violations the communities from Northeastern Antioquia suffer due to the military and paramilitary groups.
- Provide the campesinos from this region with physical accompaniment, medical and odontological brigades, youth groups offering educational workshops to children, youth and adults, as well as human rights organizations receiving testimonies concerned with the violations, forced disappearances and death threats that have been carried out by the previously mentioned armed groups.
- Broaden the support network for **CAHUCOPANA** (Corporation Humanitarian Action for Co-existence and Peace in Northeastern Antioquia) and the campesinos from Northeastern Antioquia.
- Increase the visibility of the situation suffered by the region.

Obstacles

Along the way to the encounter, inconvenient circumstances came about with the military forces, which tried to sabotage the III Humanitarian Action by holding up the humanitarian action for over an hour and a half at several checkpoints.

In Puerto Berrío, the delegates from the Senate's human rights commission had asked for a meeting with Colonel Jorge Alberto Segura at the XIV Brigade's military base. Nevertheless, when we arrived, the army supposedly was not ready to receive the group made up of members from **CAHUCOPANA**, the Senate commission and international accompaniment organizations. In the beginning, the Colonel did not want to talk with the entire group, but the international organizations insisted on him meeting with everybody. This allowed for the trip to proceed more easily, because the army had intended on continuing to delay us even more (though a military/civic day was improvised).

Although the Senate commission and the military forces had agreed that the army could not carry out such activities as it has done in the past, and the commission told the colonel that the armed presence created fear amongst the campesinos, as well as violated international humanitarian law, these words were useless. The Colonel said he could not confirm they would not carry out activities, and all he could guarantee was that we would arrive to the site.

As we left Puerto Berrío, the armory for the Calibío Battalion from the XIV Brigade had a banner, which read: **"We don't need defenders of the terrorists. We need defenders of the people. National Army.** (*No necesitamos defensores de los terroristas. Necesitamos los defensores del pueblo. Ejército nacional.*)" Due to the delays at the military base and the checkpoints, we could not reach the municipality of Segovia, where we had planned to carry out a political/cultural event.

We were only able to reach Remedios, Antioquia, where the police, military and paramilitaries jointly photographed and filmed the participants of the humanitarian action. When we left Remedios, we were followed and intimidated by **armed and hooded persons on motorcycles without license plates** for several kilometers, whose passengers were the same military or paramilitary members that were in the municipal center.

When we arrived at the Ratónera, which is a part of the municipality of Remedios, we came across military members from the XIV Counter-Guerrilla Battalion, who told us that this was a guerrilla-sponsored event, we were sympathizers, and that the persons attending would have problems (as a way to intimidate the campesinos).

When we reached the rural community of Lejanías, where the III Humanitarian Action was going to take place, we saw military members from the VIII Energy Pipeline Plan Battalion and the XIV A.S.P.C. Battalion camped in the school and within the community, putting the lives of the campesinos at risk by using them as human shields. Another commission was appointed to speak with the commanding officer, but it was also useless since they ended up going through the community distributing provisions to every house. The military members also dressed up as clowns to dissuade people from attending the different workshops, as well as hung banners inviting persons to demobilize.

But who? The campesinos or the members of humanitarian action? Because there were no members of illegally armed groups present.

The military also brought a former member of the Neighborhood Action Board (J.A.C) from the community of Puerto Matilde as a supposed demobilized person. One by one, this individual accused the different campesino leaders from the **A.C.V.C.** (Campesino Association from the Valley of Cimitarra) **and CAHUCOPANA** of being guerrilla members.

The presence of the Senate's human rights delegation was a hoax for the campesino communities. The delegation led them to believe that they could count on the government's help, but the delegation really did not do anything to support the event carried out or the security of the local communities. After the meeting at the military base in Puerto Berrío, the delegation abandoned the caravan and came the following day in helicopter. After the delegation arrived, they met with the army members and walked through the community with them. The campesinos saw how the delegation came to provide support to **CAHUCOPANA** and the III Humanitarian Action, but that in the end they left in helicopter with the military commanders. For the campesinos, this created confusion and mistrust.

Achievements

- Despite the different obstacles created by the military forces, the III Humanitarian Action was successfully carried out.
- The campesino communities were provided with physical accompaniment, as well as medical, odontological, legal and recreational services.
- Through the participation of different organizations, the violations and abandonment inflicted by the **Colombian State** on the campesino communities from Northeastern Antioquia were presented nationally and internationally.

Participation

International Peace Observatory (IPO): We participated in the Support Committee in Bogotá and accompanied the humanitarian action to Remedios and Segovia. We also provided four persons for international accompaniment in Lejanías during the week of preparation, in the campesinos travels to the event and in the caravan of organizations that came to the region.

ACVC Cultural Group from the south of Bolívar – Through our presentations, we provided happiness to clear people's minds for a moment, and let them forget about the uncertainty caused by the violations the communities are subjected to.

Recommendations

1. Educate the campesinos in organization to increase their participation and commitment in a future event and in the development of their communities.
2. Organize a timeline of activities with the different organizations carrying out workshops.
3. Oriente specific activities for each member of the organizing team in order to improve the development and efficiency of future events.
4. Have the necessary and adequate logistical support in future occasions to avoid possible problems.
5. In terms of the part of the trip that is done on foot, from the departure point to where the event takes place, coordinate the march for the whole group so that no member wanders off.
6. Pressure the military forces more forcefully so that community spaces, like those of the event, are respected.
7. Organize a timeline for the international accompaniment.
8. Clarify with the campesinos the role of the government institutions for the event, or do not invite these institutions.