

Colombia

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Action on



Gloria Cuartas former Mayor of Apartado and a progressive political figure in Colombia

Checkmate to the State of Law in Colombia

by Gloria Cuartas and Didima Chavarro

Translated by John I. Laun, a CSN volunteer translator

We can attest to the fact that during the six years of the Uribe government the diplomatic corps in Colombia and the United Nations know that it is an illegitimate government, that it is authoritarian and is imposing the values of a society which gives privilege to lying, corruption, and disloyalty as the guiding principles of an economic model which protects a national minority and transnational financial capital. The constant violation of human rights and impunity should catch the world's attention.

In August of 2008 the degradation of the armed conflict

Checkmate to the State of Law in Colombia continued

in Colombia, the penetration of the policy of democratic security and therefore the excessive expenditure of the national budget on warfare and the injecting of the government of the United States into

“Operation Checkmate” presented by the Colombian government as a perfect operation of military strategy, dealt a fatal blow to Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, and the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross ...

Colombia’s internal affairs are disquieting developments

The supposed successes of the Uribe government are based upon the breaking of the principles and fundamental values which sustain the State of Law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Pacts and Conventions of Geneva of 1949, which form a part of

International Humanitarian Law, have as a purpose humanizing war, establishing ethical norms for the actors in conflicts, especially in civil wars, such as the distinction between combatants and non-combatants; providing for protection and help for these latter; picking up and treating the sick and wounded; and respecting those detained or imprisoned.

“Operation Checkmate,” presented by the Colombian government as a perfect operation of military strategy, dealt a fatal blow to Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, and the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as guarantors and protectors of those detained and the sick in zones of conflict.

Cesar and Gafas, the two members of the FARC who contributed by action or omission to the release this past July 2 of 15 persons who had been deprived of their liberty, said they had seen that some of the men who got out of the helicopter wore emblems of the Red Cross and of other organizations such as TeleSur. (we still do not know how much money was paid for the release of the hostages or what the role of military action of the United States and Israel was)

The video presented by CNN, to the horror of the world, allowed all to see the truth which President Alvaro Uribe hid. There is ample evidence that he sought to hide to the world the use of the logo of the ICRC and the emblem of the Red Cross.

Operation Checkmate was staged upon a simulated theater scene (which violates another expression of art and puts it at the service of war), rehearsed many times and calculated down to the last detail, as Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos and General Padilla explained; as a result, it could not be a product of the idea of just one individual to carry on his own a symbol of an international organization. The military officer who affirmed that he was frightened upon seeing so many guerrillas and for that reason took out the emblem was not telling the truth. But also the haste of the President in assuming political responsibility and issuing the order that no one would be punished for this abuse continues to be suspicious. One has to question the following: What does political responsibility mean for the government and its President?

One can expect anything from this

government and this President; this has been its habitual conduct, fortified by the communications media which do not stop recording and magnifying each word, situation or event which befalls him, including those of a private character, exploiting the emotional capacity of large sectors of the national population. What will happen to the State of Law and with it the destiny of a country which advances upon blind belief in a figure of the mass media which declines to make autonomous use of deliberative reason and criticism, which are basic principles of legitimate democracies? The attitude of a good part of the Colombian population which considers correct everything the government does is remarkable and worrisome. And, in passing, its acceptance as legitimate the arbitrary State, to which the people in “faith” deliver their rights to the ruler, in return for a military security which classifies as a “terrorist” everyone who thinks differently. The tendency is for democracy to become an amorphous body supporting a strongman (caudillo) who under the umbrella of the State marginalizes dissent and places those with different views under suspicion.

The media’s creation of a presidential figure, installed in the collective unconsciousness, has brought the people to see in Uribe one sent by God, the Messiah, the promised one who will save Colombia from all its ills. There is a mandate to eliminate all thought which may be the seed of communism. And this type of leader is the one chosen to continue “purifying” the world of those who defend the dignity of life and justice. The communications media, or more accurately their owners, exonerate him from his institutional obligations; from

Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grassroots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN is the only current project of Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Latin America

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the responsibility of guaranteeing social, economic and cultural rights; even of failing to comply with the Constitution and laws. Crap covers the space in which the strongman moves, but does not touch him; the narco-parapolitics touches his cousin, Senator Mario Uribe; the director of DAS, Colombia's FBI; the president of the Uribe-supporting "U" political party; and several members of parliament of the parties of the Uribe coalition.

On the other hand, criminal responsibility has been established for Uribe's buying of the vote which approved the political reform by which re-election was approved, but miraculously President Uribe continues to be spotless and free of any omen for the future.

As in the movie "The egg of the serpent" or in the style of Primo de Rivera in Spain in the 1930's, social fascism hatched when majorities submitted meekly to the strongman, whom they permitted in the form of a determiner "to usurp political and judicial power", and by the stroke of a pen do away with what was left of the State

of Law in order to consolidate change.

The same day as that of Operation Checkmate—according to what Magistrate Jaime Araujo said in his dissenting opinion on Act 156 of 2008, where the court majority decided not to review the legal validity of the law which gave life to Presidential re-election—the Constitutional Court complying with the order of strongman Uribe "killed the State of Law ... by validating an unjust, illegitimate, illegal and criminal unconstitutional situation ... which was the product of a crime." Facing the underminig of the State of Law, of International Humanitarian Law and of Human Rights by an illegitimate government and with all kinds of "check" or "mate" operations being accepted by the country's majorities in exchange for "Democratic Security", we are still left with the hope of reestablishing the value of life, democratic socialism based upon dignity and social rights, the recovering of sovereignty, unity, Latin American integration and finally "the legitimate and justified right to civil disobedience", not

being obliged to obey he who acts de facto and, for that reason, is illegitimate.

But this is not only true within Colombia. The complacent attitude of the ICRC when confronted with the abusive use of its emblem in Operation Checkmate, is surprising. If it is permitted to use treachery and stratagems to subject the enemy, if the armed actors lose faith in the credibility of this organization and its symbol, what function remains for the International Red Cross?

The damage to neutrality and security of the international organization has national and international repercussions. In fact, medical organizations are beginning to complain that they cannot carry out their labors because of the lack of confidence which has been generated in them after Operation Checkmate. Those who before saw in them an ally, a relief from the arbitrariness of the enemy, now suspect that they may be camouflaged. The implications are not so simple nor so local.

Gloria Cuartas is the former Mayor a Apartado, and **Didima Chavarro** is an attorney.



People from a rural hamlet near Tiquisio tell to a CSN delegation of their suffering.

Operation "Checkmate" marches and expectations

by Ana Teresa Bernal
Translated by Stephanie Di Bello,
a CSN volunteer translator

It is undeniable that we all wanted to see the hostages free without a single drop of blood being shed. In order to achieve this there were three options: Humanitarian Accord, unilateral hostage releases, or a highly intricate and intelligent operation like Operation "Checkmate".

It was a far-off possibility that Ingrid Betancourt and the 3 Americans would be freed in a unilateral hostage release because, as we all know, for the FARC they were like the precious stones of the crown in the prisoner exchange negotiation process, which was seen by them as a priority even before the break-up of the Caguán negotiations.

This is why Operation "Checkmate", which took place on July 2 of this year, turned into the news of the year for Colombians. The largest expression of joy came 18 days later, on July 20 (Colombian Independence Day), when hundreds of thousands of people marched for the release of all of the hostages. This march was the Colombian society's fourth large-scale demonstration, and with each moment they have articulated a variety of emotions, stances, and expectations.

However, in the middle of this diversity I believe that the general consensus of citizens is a rejection of the use of violence, which throughout the years has been especially cruel to the Colombian population. The degradation of the internal conflict and its complexity allowed brutality to dominate, especially in rural zones. Thousands upon thousands of persons were affected by paramilitary groups which use methods like forced

page 4

disappearances, massacres, anti-personnel mines, torture, and all sorts of unimaginable atrocities. On the other hand, the guerrillas have continually used kidnapping, to the point that today more than 2,800 persons are deprived of their liberty.

But this glimpse into Colombia's interior is very simplistic. Throughout the year we have seen the media focus almost exclusively on news that reveals the blows administered to the FARC Secretariat and shows President Uribe reiterating the successes of his security policy, almost always referring to the defeat of the Colombian guerrillas through the use of force.

The urgent question is: in light of such capacity for citizen mobilization and the success of military strategies, what is the next step for Colombians?

I think that it is dangerous and reactive to simplify the situation as has been done alleging that all of the problems of the Colombian reality depend upon the liquidation of the FARC. Although it is true that throughout the years the guerrillas have been a problem to be solved, I do not believe that all of the troubles of Colombia can be laid at the feet of the FARC, even less so now that they have truly been debilitated. A negotiated way out with the FARC must be tried to avert further escalation and degradation of this conflict. What's more we cannot forget the hostages who are still in captivity.

Colombia has other conflicts and other crises to resolve. For example, the land problem that with each passing day becomes another factor that could indefinitely perpetuate this conflict simply because there was never a wish to resolve it in a democratic manner.

Millions of displaced people wait for their land to be returned and for the restitution of their rights; a political reform that makes the exercise of politics transparent and credible is urgent; a judicial reform is needed, but only if the goal is to strengthen the dignity of the courts and the separation of powers. Emerging criminal groups must be confronted. They are remobilizing to exercise their power in various regions of the country, trying to reproduce the horror in order to serve narco-trafficking and private interests. The treatment of the curse of drug-trafficking should be seriously evaluated by all of those who have contributed to the failed strategy, because the results clearly show the failure of something that has cost countless human lives and all kinds of resources.

Therefore, Operation Checkmate and the fight against the FARC cannot be seen nor converted into the only goal of Colombians. The marches revealed that we are an active and diverse society, capable of showing our power as citizens, but we should not simplify them to the point that "we cannot see the forest for the trees".

ANA TERESA BERNAL M
President of REDEPAZ and Member
of the Reconciliation Commission



CSN IN ACTION

Austin, Portland and Gainesville are starting to organize study groups on Colombia, as a first step toward organizing core groups, which will become chapters under the new procedures for chapter formation set forth in the new bylaws approved at the last national meeting

Ancizar Gutierrez, the young Embera-Chami leader from the Putumayo, wrote a letter to CSN requesting donations to buy musical instruments for a musical group. As Ancizar writes, the Embera youth are very enthusiastic about this project for several reasons : one is that it will keep them from getting in trouble by joining armed groups that recruit youth in the area or by becoming drug-addicts. Another reason is that they will emphasize songs and rhythms in their own Embera language, thus conserving their own original culture and their native tongue as a treasure for future generations, conserving its expressivity and profound mysticism. They are already rehearsing with old guitars, but they need drums, Andean flutes, chirimias, castanuelas and other Colombian folk instruments which can be bought in the city of Pasto. They need to collect a total of \$2,000, which includes the cost of transportation for the 15 hour ride from Pasto to El Tigre.

If you wish to make a donation for this specific project, send a check to CSN and indicate the funds are for musical instruments to help in this magnificent cause.

Patrick Bonner of California is traveling from Los Angeles to Modesto, representing CSN on a panel on the Free Trade Agreement, invited by the California Fair Trade Coalition. Thanks Patrick for your generosity.

John Henry Gonzalez, who with his wife

Marylen courageously leads the Movimiento Campesino Cajibío sister community of our CSN-Central New York chapter, has consented to give training to the Embera-Chamies in the Putumayo, sister community or our Kansas City chapter. John Henry's exceptional qualities of leadership and organizing make him the perfect "trainer" to expand his philosophy of empowering the base and CSN's desire to connect our own network in Colombia

On July 15 2008 Jack Laun visited with two women leaders of displaced persons from the Putumayo and their friend and advisor Armando Ribon. They described the many hardships they have faced before leaving their homes. They explained how crop fumigation of coca is damaging food crops and how the price of legal crops is so low and transportation so difficult and costly that the people in Putumayo have no real economic alternative to growing coca. They also pointed out that there are plans underway to privatize water systems in the Department. They also expressed concern about damage to biodiversity and described how difficult it was to deal with the violence in their home communities which come from the FARC guerrillas and the paramilitaries. They showed Jack a flier issued by the Aguilas Negras (Black Eagles paramilitary organization) which threatened the two of them and several

other people by name with death. As a result they were forced to leave their leadership roles in the Putumayo community and travel to Bogota, where they continue to advocate on behalf of the thousands of displaced persons from the Putumayo. (We are not publishing their names because to do so may endanger their lives.)

Ann Tiffany and Rae Kramer of the CSN-Central NY Chapter will give a presentation about their sister community of Cajibío for the CSN study group in Buffalo.

I write on behalf of the Colombia Support Network to invite your library to participate in our fall outreach campaign. We are offering lectures and videos on the grave situation of human rights in Colombia focusing on Dane County's sister community of San Jose de Apartado.

In spite of tremendous suffering, this community was the first peasant community in the country to declare itself a peace community to avoid displacement. It launched a nationwide movement for non-violent resistance unknown before and gave communities a sense of power and solidarity.

CSN has played an important role in this development and wishes to enhance the knowledge of this fascinating developing in Dane County.

Please contact us if you desire more details about this project by calling Cecilia at the CSN office at (608) 257-8753 and leave a message.



Amazed children in Tiquisio listen to Ann George speaking in English.

The Importance of Community Radios: the case of Tiquisio

By Cecilia Zarate-Laurin

Tiquisio is a small village located in the heart of the beautiful Serrania de San Lucas in Bolivar state in northern Colombia and literally sitting on top of a gigantic gold mine coveted by multinational corporations, particularly Anglo Gold Ashanti from South Africa, that is known in Colombia as Kedahda.

The good people of Tiquisio, who work both as small miners and peasants, have suffered under the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the Colombian Army. From 1978 to 1997 the ELN (National Liberation Army) was present in the area. This group assassinated whoever refused to pay their "taxes." In 1997, 1998 and 2001 the area was taken over by the paramilitaries, who stole cattle, raped women and committed a series of massacres and killings. They claimed to be cleaning the area of guerrillas because the multinationals were coming and would give jobs to everyone. The cleaning carried out, the Army has controlled the region since 2003. The Army occupies a small hill in the middle of the town and from the hill shoots mortar shells above the small community, supposedly directed against the guerrillas. The Army assassinates, detains and disappears people, according to testimonies given by the people to a Colombia Support Network (CSN) delegation. The soldiers sing a song saying: "We want to swim in a pool full of guerrilla blood." They are paid money and given two weeks vacation for every guerrilla they kill. The Army carries lists of local people branded as guerrillas, without evidence.

Since the Colombian government has declared it a "red zone," it receives very little investment from the government. For the same reason there are no public services: the community lacks clean water, and a proper sewer system, health and education. The sanitary system drains into a branch of the Magdalena River where people fish, children swim and women clean clothes. Their school has a ratio of 52 students per teacher and the health services have been dismantled. All of this on top of a gold mine. For all the above reasons, many people have left and gone to join the 4 million internally displaced people in Colombia (Almost 10% of the population of 44 million in the country). It has also created distrust and the disintegration of society.

Recently Kedahda has increased its presence in the area and people are afraid that the multinational is going to get all the



Father Rafael Gallego parish priest and leader of the Citizens Movement for Tiquisio.

privileges. In the years 1988–98, tons of gold were taken without the profits being invested in the region. Tiquisians have always considered the mine communal property. They worry that the multinational will take all the profits, forcing local people to leave their small mining and work long hours with low salaries. Others expressed their concern for the effects big mining operations could have on the environment. Others worry that many people will leave and this would be the end of their community. Responding to an Urgent Action launched by CSN on April 22, the multinational openly declared that when they see their security threatened they seek the Colombian Army. (See www.colombiasupport.net) This Army receives yearly millions of dollars from the US government despite their terrible human rights record. (See www.colombiasupport.net CSN Report: The Colombian Army: Terrorism, Thievery, Bungling and Massacres-Update)

But the people of Tiquisio decided to reconstruct their community as a civilian alternative to the armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis in a collective way to protect their self-determination, life, human rights and a space for dialogue. Therefore they created the Proceso Ciudadano por Tiquisio, PCT (Citizens Process for Tiquisio) since they do not want to leave Tiquisio, and remain attached to their little plots. The PCT organized mothers, youth and small miners to develop a community life plan and the conditions for a better life. They develop cultural and educational activities, try to improve their economic problems through community agriculture and seek to help for a negotiated solution to the conflict in the area. The CSN delegation was impressed by their tremendous sense of community.

A part of this PCT process is their community radio station called "Ecos de Tiquisio: the Voice of the Feeling of Tiquisio" which has goals such as the construction and development of peace in the town and region, to stimulate and recover their cultural identity, to create conscience in the audience of the importance of participation, of building a public space and for

becoming active citizens to help in the strengthening of democracy and to oversee that their rights as citizens are respected. And a very important goal is to integrate the community so they will be the leaders of the radio station.

Contacts were made with regional radio networks, such as the Network of Community Radio Stations of the Middle Magdalena (AREDMAG), to train the locals and the radio station started to broadcast in 2003.

On April 19 a threat was received signed by the "Aguilas Negras" (Black Eagles), a wing of the paramilitaries. The threat said "from today forward, consider yourselves dead guerrillas, you sons of bitches; ask the media to save you, you sons of bitches of anarchists, you bunch of bandits of the FARC and the ELN." One of those mentioned in the paramilitary threat was Father Rafael Gallego, who is in charge of the Ecos of Tiquisio community radio station, a great supporter of the PCT, who has repeatedly called attention to the fact that the Colombian army keeps the military base on the hill controlling the town. Father Gallego is the parish priest and is a philosopher and theologian specializing in human rights and International Humanitarian Law. He is a first class community organizer. He has led the creation of the radio station, the peasant school-farm and above all he is considered a threat by all the local economic, political and military powers. After leaving town for a few months because of the threats, Father Gallego is back in Tiquisio. The PCT wants to become a Constitutional Assembly Process focused on defending their rights as set forth in the progressive 1991 Colombian constitution.

CSN has invited Father Rafael on a speaking tour to the United States and Canada. Plans are set for October 26 to November 22, 2008. Let's get ready to receive him with open arms!



MOURNING ORLANDO FALS-BORDA

by Cecilia Zarate

CSN deeply mourns the passing last August 14 of the celebrated sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda at age 83 and mourned two years ago the death of his wife, sociologist Maria Cristina Salazar, two dear friends of this organization

I first met Orlando many years ago at the wedding of my cousin Sara Ortiz with Orlando's young brother Juan Fals-Borda in Bucaramanga. His unaffected manner and his kindness were evident to me from that moment on. My dinners with Orlando and Maria Cristina when I visited Bogota were always a great pleasure, as we reminisced and analyzed the situation of the moment in Colombia. Once, Orlando told me that he had escaped from a long imprisonment thanks to an amulet which indigenous friends from the Amazon had given to him. On another occasion, Maria Cristina proudly showed me the framed oil painting of the Marquise de Valdehoyos which one of her descendants had given to Orlando. The donor had first wanted to throw the painting away in the trash, but then thought, correctly, that Orlando would appreciate it more, given his studies of the history of the Coast. Orlando and Maria Cristina responded with great dignity to the torment of their persecution, torture and the false accusation against them by the military that they were M-19 guerrillas.

But enough of anecdotes. Orlando Fals-Borda was above all a Colombian who felt an immense responsibility for his country, without ever bragging or claiming credit for his contributions. With the force of his spirit and his knowledge, he

founded with father Camlto Torres the first Sociology department in Latin America. A leading university professor and investigator, he was the author of many books and articles, including his 1955 doctoral thesis at the University of Florida, "Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes: A Sociological Study of Saucio" and the pathbreaking 3-volume study of Colombia's civil conflict, *La Violencia en Colombia*, which he co-authored with German Guzman Campos and Eduardo Umana Luna.

His scientific focus and analysis, always objective, rational and ethical, characterized his work. Rigorously and with sensitivity Orlando concluded that social scientists also had political responsibilities. It was not sufficient to conduct an exhaustive investigation of a community and then give it a warm good-bye. His methodology of *Investigacion Accion Participativa* (Investigation and Active Participation) is in essence the ethical duty which in Orlando's eyes required giving back to the community being studied, repaying them for their generosity toward the researcher and empowering the community to take into its own hands its development. It was in that spirit that Maria Cristina received several CSN delegations when she was working with women flower workers. Orlando was a member of the National Constituent Assembly which produced the 1991 Constitution and was until his death the Honorary President of the Polo Democratico Party.

In his scholarship and his role as an educator he will be greatly missed. But we particularly valued his unceasing commitment to the search for justice and to achieving a more equitable Colombia. May he rest in peace.

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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