

Alternative report Submitted to the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the situation of Colombian migrants, refugees and victims abroad.
September 2017

The Colombian diaspora has historically been invisibilised and excluded from the political realms. Furthermore, the Colombian government does not assume its responsibilities regarding the 15% or more of its population now living abroad. Concurrently this community has organised itself in order to be recognised, to contribute to the peace-building process and projects for the new country all Colombians deserve. One of the tasks in this process was to supply information and ideas from more than 20 Colombian organisations in order to prepare this Alternative Report. This document also includes contributions gathered from various international meetings held by the migrant and exiled communities over the last ten years.

One crucial shortcoming is the fact that the Colombian government does not hold any official account of the number of Colombians living abroad. While the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) counts 3, 378, 345 Colombians overseas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave a rough estimate of more than 4, 700, 000. On the other hand, the World Bank declared that 2, 122, 100 Colombians now reside out of the country. The Colombian Chancellery lead an inquiry with over 100 associations of Colombians abroad which found more than 8, 000, 000 of us live in a foreign country.

Another issue concerning the diaspora that must be addressed is the Colombian State's lack of clear and precise policy in its consulates or embassies regarding migrants, and even less in the ways of concrete programs to facilitate the relations between migrants and their home country. There is also a serious lack of voluntary return policy which would guarantee the establishment truth, effective reparation and non-recurrence. The minimal inclusion of this part of the population within the Victims and Migration Law is further proof of how little importance the Colombian government confers to this community.

The only time migrants are mentioned by the Colombian government, is when discussing remittances. According to the numbers offered by the Balance of Payments of the Bank of the Republic, between 2000 and 2008, remittances went from US\$ 1, 371 million to US\$ 4, 700 million. The year 2016 closed with a total of US\$ 4, 858, 7 million. In 2017, the remittances from single month of January climbed to US\$ 380 million. These numbers clearly demonstrate the migrants' importance for the Colombian economy. This contribution to the national economy also appears to be our sole duty; while our economic, social and cultural as well as our civic and political rights as Colombian citizens – even if abroad – continue to be limited if not ignored.

Recommendations for the State of Colombia:

The Alternative Report has 15 recommendations ensuing from our work of consultation with organisations of Colombians abroad. We wish to emphasise the following:

- 1) To organise an International State Summit between Colombia and host countries, thus defining the situation of Colombian refugees and victims once the termination of the Colombian Armed Conflict is agreed.
- 2) To make efforts in order to establish tripartite agreements or mechanisms between the Colombian government, the host countries and the UNHCR in order to achieve a stabilisation of Colombian refugees who do not wish to return. This process must involve organisations of the diaspora so that those who want to stay can do so with basic and sufficient guarantees and without prejudice to rights as Colombian citizens, as refugees protected International Humanitarian Law as well as the legal norms of their country of residence.
- 3) To automatically recognise refugees as victims in the *Sistema Único de Víctimas*.
- 4) To carry out a comprehensive population census for Colombians abroad.
- 5) To actively promote a collective history integrating migration, refugeedom and victimhood as an essential part of the reparation and truth process.
- 6) The Comisión para el Esclarecimiento, la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición must create a specific commission on the Colombian diaspora resulting in a special report on Colombian exile and migration. This sub-commission should be represented by migrants and refugees, and should provide a differential approach.
- 7) To guarantee economic reparations to refugees and victims living abroad under the same conditions as they had at the time of leaving Colombia.
- 8) To form a coalition of States, the UNHCR, the IOM, the Colombian government, and various organisations of Colombian migration, victims abroad and Colombian refugee-communities, in order to monitor the Human Rights situation of Colombians abroad.
- 9) We recommend that the Colombian State establish a Ministry of Migration.
- 10) To support and initiate agreements with host countries to promote and ensure the well-being of migrants in their professional lives, their education and sports as well as their cultural rights and heritage.