Personal reflections

Alice Maria Salazar

A former M–19 combatant, Alice is part of a Women’s Collective of reintegrated guerrillas who work nation-wide to defend the rights of women who were members of insurgent groups.

The State peace processes have always had this content, a ceasefire, an end to military confrontation, but they don’t create spaces for all those excluded sectors. There are many more people outside this society for whom the state never works: the street vendors in the informal sector, a large section of the population outside the education system, the health system, housing provision.

So we shouldn’t be talking about reintegrating those with weapons, but we should start to reintegrate all those who don’t feel the presence of the state, unless it is pursuing them, judging them, putting them in prison. There are many who don’t feel the presence of the state because there is no social policy that covers them. I don’t see much peacebuilding, I see a lot of talking and not much doing. I think that peacebuilding implies working for better living conditions for all, a political environment that includes all Colombians; when I see the peace demonstrations I feel that it is more opinion that is being built, but no work that really defends rights, and includes sectors that have always been excluded, and makes democratic demands. No, all they do is recite the word peace.

Jazmin Agudelo

Jazmin works with the Horizons of Freedom Foundation, defending the rights of prisoners in various Colombian prisons.

Sometimes I want to believe in the formal peace processes, sometimes I can’t let myself lose faith, sometimes I want to understand them but I am sadly confronted with the real situation, with what I live with all the time, day and night and I realize that they are not working, that they continue to be
marred, that they have no aim, that the motive is more selfish than we thought. The motive is more immediate, it’s more a kind of political publicity. They’re not managing the root of the problem experienced by the general population, and I think we need that. Many members of civil society are going to continue to suffer just so that some of the actors and participants in these dialogues achieve their own objective, because each one will continue seeking his own objective. They are going to continue managing the negotiations and the dialogues for their own interests and the civilian population will get a raw deal for sure.

**Jorge Otalora**

*Jorge was kidnapped by the ELN in north Tolima in 2001. He was freed after two months thanks to the intervention of the National Coffee Growers Federation, whom he has worked with for 19 years.*

Kidnapping is one the most horrible crimes that can happen to someone. The privation of liberty either from minute to minute, hours, a day, a month, years, it’s always in my mind and it’s in the background any time something happens. It’s like drowning.

These are people that have other objectives. Now the ideological objectives they had are no longer relevant nor is it what motivates them. I think that at this moment, undoubtedly, what motivates them is a common drug-trafficking cartel, pure and simple.

The government is obliged to be constantly looking for ways to make contact and to see how to reach them, to obtain the freedom of all those people retained for so many years. They are obliged to do that and to continue to insist and look, using all means whether at a national or international level. We need to wait and see if their counterparts will accept an intervention like that and at least give some kind of sign.

**Santiago Chaparro**

*Santiago is 54. He has lived for 30 years on the streets in a poor area of Bogotá. He now works singing his own songs on buses.*
In the sense that people are beginning to realize what a disaster this war is, and what a disaster intolerance is, I think that they are going to start to realize that peace is something we should find as quickly as possible, if not then when we do find it, there’ll be no one to enjoy it.

There’s a big problem, we know that there’s a segment, quite a large segment of the population that maybe because they are sensitive to it do as much as they can to propose dialogue, to try to reach agreements, but I think there is a serious problem. We can do the part that corresponds to the state, either through voting, or through marches because we know that the state in one way or another has to listen to us, but the other side in the conflict, I don’t know if any of what Colombia says to them about being tired of the war has ever gone further than their ears. In this sense the problem is that everything that is done is sterile, it’s like serenading a guest of honour who hasn’t arrived.