

DECLARATION OF THE SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA AT ITS LXIII ASSEMBLY, 2006

The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia met from January 19 to January 25 of 2006, for its LXIII Assembly in Bogotá, within the framework of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of its presence in Colombia. The guiding aim of the synod was to reflect on the Word of God, to consider the contributions made to the people of Columbia in the field of education, service, the announcement of the Good News.

The following Declaration was drawn up as a result of our reflection on the future and its challenges in the hope that we shall be able to respond to the call of God both in mission and testimony.

1. We are facing the implementation of a single-pole economic model: Neoliberalism with its different faces such as the FTT, the FTAA, Puebla, Plan Panama, and the Colombia Plan. This model has been generating privatizations, labor reforms and impoverishing people, and diminishing life quality. There are currently (according to National Planning Committee) 20 million people below the poverty line in Colombia, 6 million of them indigenous peoples. The levels of unemployment and under-employment have increased, as have family violence, prostitution and child mistreatment, causing great damage to the social texture. Religious fundamentalism and 'messianic' leaders threaten communities' peaceful coexistence. Furthermore the implementation of policies referred at as *democratic security* benefit only a small sector of society.

In Columbia, according to international and national organisms such as Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and CODHES, human rights and international law are violated. Impunity is also on the rise, and the demobilization of armed groups as well as the approval of misnamed, "Law of Justice and Peace," do not allow the truth to be known. Justice does not take place nor reparation of the damage done to Colombian society by paramilitary forces during the last decades.

2. To perpetuate the current economic model, the electoral processes in our country are structured with the aim of maintaining, in government and in public corporations, leaders that guarantee the continuance of these political and economic policies. This political and economic model boosts military investment while reducing investments in social issues. At the same time these people use issues such as humanitarian exchange, dialogues with the insurgency, paramilitary demobilization and speeches about the peace processes for their own benefit.

In the face of this social context, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church declares and commits to the following:

We feel called by God,

- To fortify the ministries of education, service and of announcement of the Good News that Jesus has proclaimed (Luke 4:18-19).

- To be a prophetic voice that denounces every system that oppresses, marginalizes and excludes, that pushes aside and violates human rights, denying the possibility of a full life to the impoverished majorities of our country (John 10:10).

- To reaffirm that we are co-creators with God and hence responsible for all creation, which we must defend and protect from being destroyed by the present economic system (Genesis 1:28).

We assert that we believe that a peaceful society is possible and that we strive to achieve this aim understanding that the only way possible is the one stated in the Bible: the result of justice and peaceful conflict solutions through negotiation (Isaiah 32:17). We disagree with the international policies of countries and economic organizations that intervene in our internal affairs. We stand for the free determination of the people.

We assert that we are an ecumenical Church, called to build up the core of diversity, with religious and cultural plurality that allows us to reconstruct the social weave (Isaiah 65:17). We commit ourselves to work in the defense of human rights and to develop concrete actions within

family and in church to promote values that make a communitarian life-style possible. Thus in solidarity and in harmony within the community, we hope to construct a more just and peaceful society (Romans 12:2).

In order to defend both God's creation from the destructive forces and the dignity of humankind, we identify ourselves with alternative, fair and solidarity economic models where redistribution of goods and wealth contribute to the welfare of the people in general and the disadvantaged in particular.

Finally, we affirm that we see signs of hope in the leaders that distance themselves from the dominant economic model; and in the communities that construct life alternatives for which we pray. We commit ourselves, and invite the Presbyterians and our sister churches in Colombia and other countries to accompany us in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Protestantism's arrival in Colombia during the days of August 11 to 13 at the City of Barranquilla.

Bogotá, January 21 of 2006.

Translated by María Eugenia Mendizábal.