



Monthly Update

October 9, 2013

Plowing New Ground in Colombia



As the government of Colombia and the FARC guerrilla forces move closer to a negotiated settlement, ICRD is making important strides in its effort to promote a stable reintegration of former combatants into civil society. As mentioned in an earlier Update, most disarmed fighters in the past have not been welcomed back into their home communities, nor have they been able to find gainful employment. This, in turn, has contributed to a high incidence of crime in the country as these disarmed combatants have rearmed to join narco networks or other criminal enterprises

as their only option for putting bread on the table. By the Colombian government's own conservative estimates, at least 17% of demobilized former paramilitaries have moved into violent criminal networks.

To address this weakness in current government programming, ICRD is working with women's networks and with religious and native spiritual leaders to facilitate social reconciliation. Over the course of the summer, ICRD conducted workshops and roundtables in Medellin, Cali, and Bogota, with male and female religious, university, and military leaders, as well as former combatants (both within and outside the prison system). These groups identified specific reintegration challenges and commonly held spiritual and social values that might be useful in addressing them. They also initiated planning for follow-on workshops in three specific conflict-affected regions. In parallel with this, ICRD is working with business leaders to align them with local communities in addressing the need for legitimate employment opportunities.



ICRD's Executive Vice President, James Patton, meets with indigenous shamans from Antioquia to discuss their spiritual heritage and role in conflict resolution.

Finally, to increase the government's effectiveness in this same arena, the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (the government body tasked with all aspects of reintegration) is actively collaborating with ICRD in this effort. The potential of these networks of female and religious/spiritual leaders to help facilitate improved relations between former combatants and the communities to which they will return has never before been brought to bear in any systematic and collaborative way; so ICRD is once again plowing new ground.

Although additional funding is needed to continue the effort, we remain confident that the process is sound and will bear the intended fruit, much as our efforts in Pakistan have been doing with the madrasas.

With Best Wishes,
Doug Johnston
President, ICRD

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