

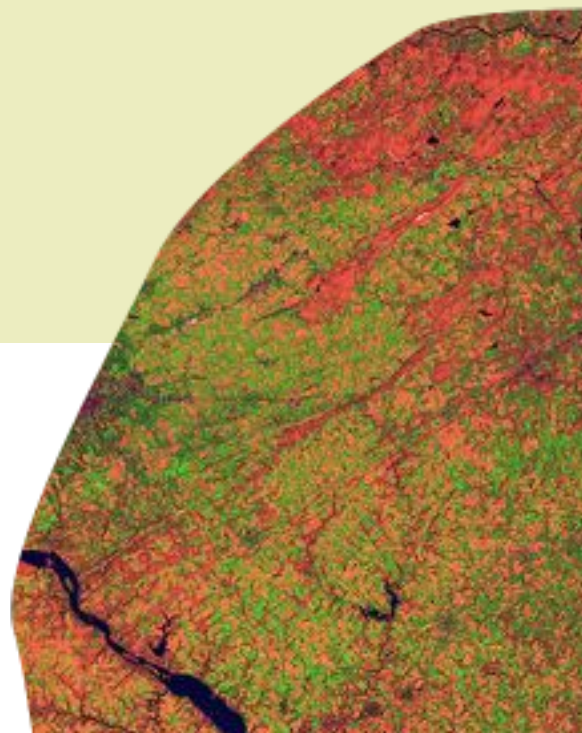
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FORMAS



Peace Community of San Josè de Apartadó

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Where is this grassroots initiative implemented? Who are the promoters?

The political and social initiative of the Peace Community of San Josè de Apartadó (CdP) takes place in the Urabà Antioqueño region, in the northwest of Colombia, not far from the border with Panama, in the tropical mountains of the Serrania De Abibe, 7 km from the city of Apartadó.

"The CdP is an informal civil society organization established on March 23, 1997, following two massacres, sadly known, carried out by the military in September 1996 and February 1997. The members of the Community commit to: not participating in the war, directly or indirectly; not carrying weapons; not providing information to any armed group; publicly denouncing human rights violations committed by armed groups; participating in community work; not responding to violence with violence; not accepting monetary compensation from the State for victims without first ensuring truth and justice. The CdP currently has about 300 members. The veredas (villages) that are part of this reality are located in a very vast and impervious territory, largely characterized by mountains and forests in the northwest of Colombia. The Peace Community of San Josè de Apartadó represents one of the experiences of "Humanitarian Zones" that emerged during the Colombian armed conflict to counter repeated and continuous violence. The CdP was created with the aim of defending its right to neutrality, life, and territorial protection. When the CdP was founded in 1997, its leaders had requested government protection to ensure that no armed factions would enter their territory. In this sense, the government's commitment has been gravely insufficient." (from the Operazione Colomba website)

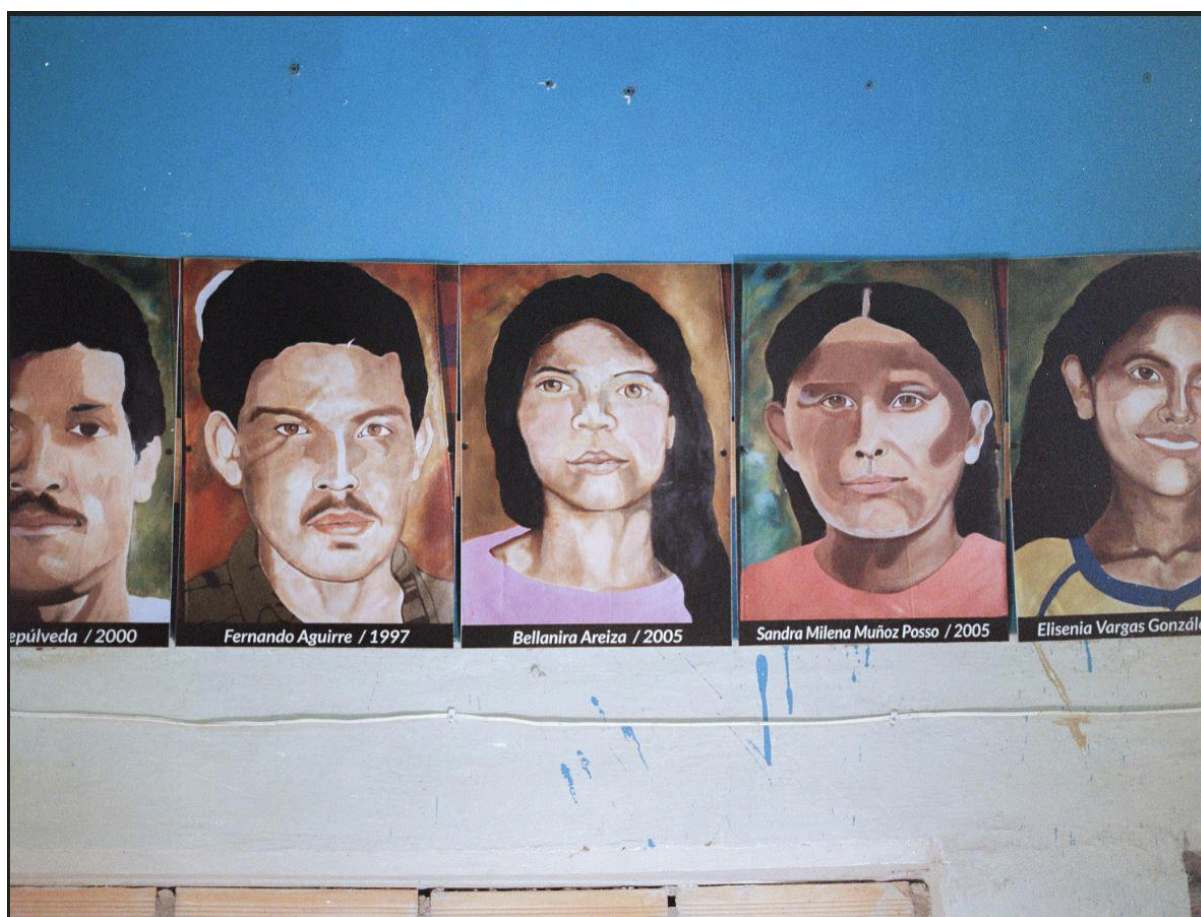
A very important role, deemed fundamental by the members of the Community for the existence and resistance of this project, is the presence of international accompaniment groups; given the high level of violence and control exercised by paramilitary groups in the area, the Community has requested a permanent unarmed international civilian escort to take part in all their activities and movements, without interfering with internal political and economic dynamics, in order to reduce the possibility of attacks against civilians. The eyes of international observers ready to denounce a human rights violation, or in more serious scenarios, their own injury or death, would have a greater impact than the same crime occurring in the absence of these figures. The mechanism roughly follows the statistical reality that in conflicts with low media coverage, war crimes and civilian killings are more frequent than in conflicts with a higher degree of media exposure and international presence.



*The dome, the center of the main village, inside which are the portraits of people killed since 1997.
Photo by Mattia Marzorati.*

Who are the beneficiaries?

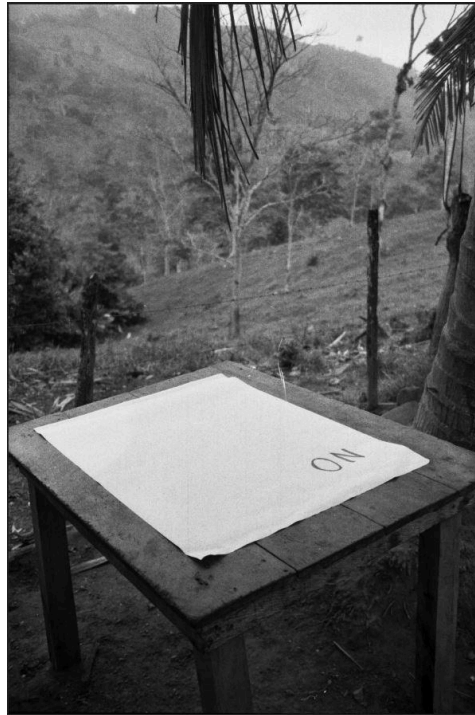
The direct beneficiaries of their action are the members of the CdP themselves, as through the establishment of a humanitarian zone they can attempt to be independent of the powers of the armed groups that extensively control the entire area. The peasant communities of the whole region benefit from their action, as they block or delay mining and deforestation projects that would devastate the territory. Furthermore, the constant public denunciations that the Community writes on social channels, in monthly reports, or through international human rights organizations, serve as one of the few communication channels with the outside world—meaning both Western countries and the Colombian population outside Urabà. The political, geographical, and narrative isolation of rural areas is an obstacle that facilitates the suppression of the rights of those who do not live in large urban centers. On a broader level, in a global logic, the beneficiaries of an action that somehow hinders drug trafficking (especially towards Europe and the USA) and the destruction of high-biodiversity rainforest areas can be said to include everyone.



The interior of the dome. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

The presence of the CdP has been described by some experts as an "ethical wall" that blocks the uncontrolled and illegal deforestation of large areas of the rainforest in that region. Additionally, the Community is preventing the advancement of extractivist projects by multinational corporations that would contaminate protected rainforest areas with high biodiversity and freshwater basins. Their way of sustaining themselves through food autonomy is an example of how peasant populations can live off the land without giving way to monocultures of cocoa, maracuyá, or other crops that make peasant economies fragile and impoverish exploited soil. Furthermore, their adaptation techniques to climate change do not involve chemical substances but rather the adapted use of various ancestral farming techniques, crop rotation, and the planting of crops that seem to be more resistant to the specific weather conditions of each season.



A protest poster against the construction of an illegal road on one of the Community's lands. As a result of these protests, two people were killed — 15-year-old Edinson and 30-year-old Nayeli — in March 2024. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

The CdP's primary stated goal is to defend the right to life, both human and non-human. They aim to uphold the human rights of civilians in conflict zones, respect for their neutrality, and the right to lead an existence free from the violence of drug trafficking, armed conflict, and capitalist economies. The fundamental values are life, freedom, and justice, respecting natural rhythms and spaces so that human presence does not harm other people or the environment. These values are translated into daily practice through respectful agriculture without chemical substances and an internal organization that allows every Community member to express their ideas through internal meetings. The Community works in groups to provide greater protection to its members—attacking and killing a group of three people is different from confronting a group of 15-20—and ensures a minimum subsistence even for those unable to work due to age or physical condition. Commemorations of crimes suffered over the decades through official, internal, and public acts are essential for the cohesion of the Community and maintaining the political goal of justice. These events occasionally involve national and foreign institutional representatives and always include international accompaniment for security and solidarity purposes. Independence from all forms of oppression is both a tool and a goal of the Community's nonviolent struggle, expressed on economic, ideological, political, and social levels, both privately and publicly. The independence of individuals, as long as they respect the previously mentioned rules, is evident in moments such as Colombia's presidential elections: there is no suggested voting or abstention line, but each person can decide according to their conscience whether and whom to vote for at the national level.



Monica, an international volunteer with the nonviolent organization Operation Dove, during the accompaniment of a Community member. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

The CdP was officially founded in 1997 and is still active and resisting despite ongoing threats, human rights violations, and murders. The effects of its actions are visible, even from satellite images, as the areas occupied by the CdP show a much lower level of deforestation compared to surrounding regions.



The remembrance of the Mulatos and Resbalosa Massacre, which occurred in 2005. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

Who are the actors involved? What is their background?

The main actors involved, besides the CdP, are:

- Illegal armed groups (paramilitaries from the Clan Del Golfo and guerrillas, the latter being less present since 2016, replaced by the Clan Del Golfo).
- The Colombian State, with which they officially severed all ties in 2005 due to its proven involvement in violent actions alongside paramilitaries that led to the massacre of some CdP members (just a few days ago, news emerged of an official rapprochement between the State and CdP).
- International observer groups such as Operazione Colomba, FOR, PBI, Memoria Viva de Los Pueblos and Colectivo Sur Cacarica which operate on-site as an unarmed international civil escort and serve as a deterrent against murders.
- NGOs that provide support to the Community, for example, legal assistance.
- Other farming communities, with which relations vary—some are based on strong mutual respect, while others are more confrontational due to collusion with mafias.

Which limits (institutional, physical, social, etc.) does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

Opposition from Colombian governments and illegal organizations through direct attacks on people's lives and repeated human rights violations is the greatest difficulty in carrying out this project. The lack of basic rights such as healthcare and education is another factor that creates significant challenges for those choosing to resist: poverty and economic instability increase vulnerability. Additionally, the climate crisis is putting farmers under severe strain, forcing them to constantly develop new agricultural techniques to cope with periods of excessive rainfall or drought. Javier Giraldo Moreno, a Colombian human rights defender, has identified eight strategies implemented over the years to carry out the extermination of the Community, the latest of which is the attempt to seize their lands through legal means, by misusing laws or using false testimonies, with the involvement of individuals linked to local mafia groups.



A mule undergoing surgery for a leg injury. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

The first step is establishing a space where people can operate freely—without access to land, this Community would not exist. The political will of individuals to resist injustice is exceptional, and their internal organization and high degree of flexibility allow them to face serious problems intelligently. Furthermore, without a vision that prioritizes the right to life over one's own life, this project would not be replicable in other conflict zones. International presence has been recognized as fundamental to protecting against massacres and subsequent displacement.



The remembrance of Nayeli by some members of the Community. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes? If yes, which?

This initiative is considered a global example of nonviolent resistance in conflict zones. Many individuals and communities worldwide have undoubtedly been inspired by this kind of action. Additionally, the so-called *universidad campesina* facilitates the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and practices with other Colombian and international communities facing climate crises and conflicts. The Community's importance has been openly recognized in limiting extractivist practices—both legal and illegal—deforestation, and biodiversity conservation. It is difficult to quantify how many people have not been killed or have avoided being recruited into armed groups thanks to the Community's efforts, but there is no doubt about its social and ethical role at local, national, and international levels. The Community's presence has

fostered a series of transnational collaborations among various political groups, social collectives, and institutions committed to defending human rights and protecting the environment.



Houses in the village of Mulatos. Photo by Mattia Marzorati.

Links

[El Clan del Golfo es el mayor responsable de los daños ambientales en Colombia](#)

[Estado colombiano y Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó sellan solución amistosa tras 25 años de litigio](#)

[Il diritto a vivere in pace della comunità di San José de Apartadó e della Colombia: l'appello degli accademici](#)

[Operazione Colomba - Report mensile](#)

[Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó](#)

[Este fue el acuerdo al que llegó el Estado colombiano con la Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó](#)

[Un doble asesinato en la Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó despierta el fantasma del paramilitarismo | EL PAÍS América Colombia](#)

[“Vivir en medio de la guerra sin ser parte de ella” - Comisión de la Verdad Colombia](#)

[Ejército deberá reconocer ‘falso positivo’ de seis personas en Apartadó](#)

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