



Wageningen Disaster Studies



Informing the public, transforming policy Pax Christi's advocacy and lobby activities on Colombia

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INFORMING THE PUBLIC, TRANSFORMING POLICY

PAX CHRISTI'S ADVOCACY AND LOBBY ACTIVITIES ON COLOMBIA

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMUNORCA	Asociación de Municipios del Norte del Cauca (Association of Municipalities of Northern Cauca)
BBO	Bureau for Policy-development for Development Cooperation
ELN	National Liberation Army
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IKV	Interchurch Peace Council
MP	Members of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRK	The Netherlands Red Cross
NUFFIC	Netherlands University Foundation for International Cooperation
US	United States
VNG	Association of Netherlands Municipalities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a best practice study on Pax Christi's advocacy and lobby activities on Colombia. The main objective of best practice studies is to derive the positive lessons from experience to enable constructive change and improvement in current and future programming. The study is based on desk research and interviews. No fieldwork has been conducted in Colombia itself, but some Colombian respondents have completed written questionnaires sent to them.

The situation in Colombia is characterised by a situation of overt conflict between the government, paramilitary forces and two guerrilla movements. Systematic violence takes place through human rights violations, kidnappings and attacks on civilians and authorities. Estimates of the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) range from 2 till 3.4 million persons and the conflict parties increasingly attack elected officials and local level authorities. In 2002 alone, 600 mayors were threatened, and 12 mayors and 71 legislators killed. The functioning of local authorities, democracy and governance has therefore been so seriously undermined, that Colombia's has been called a "besieged democracy".

Pax Christi has organised three delegations from local representatives to Europe, from Dutch Members of Parliament (MP) and from European mayors to Colombia respectively, in order to focus European political and media attention to the human rights violations and attacks on local democracy in Colombia. The specific goals of the project included: putting Colombia on the (European and Dutch) political agenda, enabling the formulation of a common policy approach between involved representatives and institutions, including Dutch Members of Parliament and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and creating a sense of solidarity between European mayors and their colleagues in Colombia. It was also hoped to identify and implement some aid and awareness programmes in Colombia itself. An additional goal was to raise the awareness about the high number of IDPs and their fate. The visits were accompanied by an intensive media campaign.

The first and major finding of this best practice study is that the organisation of the three delegations has been a highly effective instrument to raise political and media interest. This means they have helped to achieve the goals set for Pax Christi's lobby and advocacy programme. The missions have also locally been experienced as important, if only by the simple fact of having established contacts with the outside world, apart from more tangible outputs.

A second major finding is that a range of follow-up activities have been identified and implemented at the local level. Those activities have reportedly created a significant local impact, apart from different secondary spin-off activities and side effects. Taking part in and organising the missions also have brought local counterparts in further contact with local networks, organisations, international agencies and NGOs in Colombia. The activities have in general contributed to the strengthening and empowerment of local authorities and the active involvement of a number of local organisations.

The MPs and mayors have experienced the missions as valuable due to the first hand engagement and exchanges achieved during the visit and the fact that their personal interests could be accommodated. They felt facilitated in their work and have been able to raise the issue effectively in several parliamentary debates, so much so that Colombia remained on the Dutch political agenda and continued to receive Dutch development aid, apart from other implications and effects. The sustainability of the impact of the delegations obviously depends on whether the parliamentarians remain in their post, as it is not easy to transfer the experiences gained to successors.

The delegation of the mayors showed that mutual solidarity and denouncement of violence against democratically elected functionaries is feasible as a mobilising concept. The mayors have been able to identify or solidify several follow-up actions and have become active in networks or groups dealing with Colombia. Their trip also raised interest in the local and

regional Dutch press, while they also discussed the issue with colleagues and in the framework of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). Finally, Pax Christi has acquired the 'political nose' and skills to carry out the required political handwork for organising this type of activities effectively. To enable this, in-depth and specialised country knowledge proved to be of the essence. This, however, requires a particular expertise that needs to be built up and maintained, as it gets easily lost due to current tendencies to work on 'projects'. Therefore, the sharing of information and lessons learned within Pax Christi should be further strengthened.

INTRODUCTION

Pax Christi received a subsidy from the Thematic Co-financing Programme of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its current strategic multi-annual plan. Starting from 2005 Pax Christi intends to carry out annually two best practice studies in relation to this programme for a period of four subsequent years.

Pax Christi hopes to achieve the following goals by carrying out these best practice studies:

- The documentation of its successful activities;
- Making available the experiences gained from the best practice studies to project managers and others within Pax Christi to improve its learning capacity;
- To share best practices and experiences gained with Pax Christi's partner organisations and strategic allies (Cordaid, Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), Pax Christi International etc.);
- To create a basis for policy dialogue with relevant stakeholders;
- To contribute to policy and strategy building within the own organisation;
- To contribute to the development of quality criteria within Pax Christi and to its overall evaluation practice.

The Disaster Studies Group of Wageningen University has been invited to carry out these best practice studies. Disaster Studies has proposed to do each year one more limited study (type I) on the basis of a file study and interviews in the Netherlands, and one more elaborated study (type II), comprising fieldwork in the country of operation as well.

This report concerns a type I study on Pax Christi's lobby and advocacy campaign with regard to violent threats against local democracy in war-torn Colombia carried out in 2002 and 2003. This report is based (only) on desk studies and interviews (see annexe 1 for Pax Christi files studied and persons interviewed).

Approach and methodological aspects of best practice study

The main objective of the best practice studies is to derive the positive lessons from existing experiences to enable constructive change and improvement in current and future programmes. Best practice studies have a more limited focus than full-fledged evaluations in that they focus on learning, dialogue and change rather than on accountability. They share with other evaluative approaches a number of problems such as the problem of attribution and causality, the replicability of findings and the problem of how to arrive at a sound judgement on the basis of often contradictory and multifaceted data (the valuation question).

Literature on international campaigning by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also pinpoint to the difficulty in assessing what impact can be directly related to NGOs' advocacy and lobby activities. "Evaluating impact is difficult, and the results are usually ambiguous and debatable, but the process is essential to NGOs' effectiveness and credibility" (Nelson 2000). In this best practice study we indeed also tried to investigate the process, by finding out how the lobby-activities have been perceived and appreciated by participants and people from related institutions and organisations. In this connection, we would like to highlight that the 'construction' of ideas, policies and approaches takes place in interactions within and outside the organisation, while changes do materialise (or not) in the same manner. The emphasis on dialogue with Pax Christi's personnel and other stakeholders was therefore more than part of a correct procedure; we saw it as a constituent part of our methodological approach.

Therefore, we have put emphasis on sharing our approach and findings with stakeholders within Pax Christi and elsewhere, and as much as possible applied a discursive and dialogic approach that enabled inputs and sharing of experiences and views.

We have used the opportunity to present our tentative and intermediate findings to a reference group set up by Pax Christi for this purpose, and to Pax Christi's internal discussion and training weeks (the so-called 'blokweken') to elucidate response. We have met the reference group at the beginning of the study and reported two times to different audiences during the 'blokweken'. Suggestions received at these occasions were incorporated in the study.

As consequence of these methodological considerations, we decided not to work according to pre-determined and inflexible evaluative frameworks, but rather to systematise findings and views on the basis of the incoming data when the study evolved. Especially the conflict-ridden context in which Pax Christi operated demanded an open-ended approach to allow for situation-specific considerations and inputs of all those involved. Having said that, this does not imply that we did not attach importance to verifiable facts, objectifying information and plausibility, and we have followed normal procedures of probing and cross-checking where possible and compared verbal information with information available on file.

The present report is organised as follows. First it gives the background to the conflict in Colombia and the history of the project. Then it deals with the results of the different delegations and finally highlights some more general and secondary results.

THE CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA

Colombia has had a long history of conflict, influenced by many different factors, like (agrarian) land issues, control over narcotics trade, corruption, and weak local democracy. The internal conflict has led to human rights violations, kidnappings and attacks on civilians and authorities. There are many different parties involved in the conflict, most notably are the National Army, the paramilitary groups, and two guerrilla movements: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). These various groups finance their violent activities by income derived from the trade in narcotics and through ransom money obtained from kidnappings. The attacks on 11th of September 2001 in the United States (US), and the resulting 'War on Terror' have complicated matters further. The involvement of the US in the internal conflict, for instance by allowing the military to use more force in the fight against narcotics, has had a further negative impact on peace talks between the warring parties (Douma 2003).

Colombia's current humanitarian situation

No substantive peace talks have been held with the two guerrilla groups and the conflict continues despite the Government's robust security policy, including a military offensive in southern Colombia (*Plan Patriota*). The number of Colombians seeking protection, both within the country and abroad, is still growing. According to Government estimates, there are between 2 and 3 million displaced people, 1.6 million of whom are officially registered. However, NGO figures suggest the presence of more than 3.4 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The recently enacted Justice and Peace Law develops the legal framework for the demobilisation process, but there is a fear that it fails to adequately address several important concerns, for example reparations for violation committed by irregular armed groups. Its application and humanitarian impact will be closely monitored by the international community. A proposed humanitarian accord between the Government and the FARC, involving the exchange of kidnap victims for FARC prisoners, has yet to materialise.

Source: UNHCR 2005, pp. 353-354

Attack on local democracy

Attacks, threats and kidnapping in Colombia, directed to people from local authorities, legislators and politicians have frequented the news. One of the well-known examples in which authorities were attacked is Ingrid Betancourt, a Colombian candidate for presidency, who was kidnapped in February 2002 by the FARC movement, and remains in captivity to this day. Her kidnapping, to many, stands as a symbol for the attack on democracy in Colombia. Many mayors in Colombia have received death threats, were kidnapped, or murdered. According to Paredes Zapata (2004) 600 mayors were threatened, and 12 mayors and 71 legislators were killed in 2002 alone. The functioning of local authority, democracy and governance has therefore been seriously undermined. Or as Bejarano and Pizzaro Leongomez (2002) call it, Colombia has gone from a "restricted" to a "besieged democracy". Currently, there are negotiation talks planned between the Colombian government and the FARC about release of hostages, as well as peace talks between the ELN and the government. These come at a time when the country is preparing for new presidential elections in 2006.

International attention

At the end of the 1990s the international community became more and more involved, by addressing the Colombian conflict and by promoting peace. This, however, cannot be solely attributed to humanitarian concerns alone. "One of the strongest arguments for internationalizing the peace process is that the Colombian conflict already has become

internationalized. Both the drug trade and the U.S. anti-narcotics war have placed Colombian political violence at the center of global security concerns” (Chernick 1999). This drug trade also has a “Dutch” element, as the trade from Colombia finds its way, and uses the Netherlands Antilles from which to export the narcotics. Again, this makes (political) attention from the Netherlands not a purely humanitarian issue; the country has a direct stake in the disarmament to guerrilla groups that are involved in narcotics trade.

Pax Christi Netherlands, through its lobby and advocacy activities, which we will elaborate upon in this report, has tried to shift Dutch attention to the human rights violations and attacks on local democracy in Colombia.

HISTORY OF PAX CHRISTI IN COLOMBIA AND RATIONALE BEHIND THE PROJECT

Since 1988, Pax Christi undertakes projects and programmes in Colombia. Programmes have been concentrated specifically on creating awareness on human rights violations in the country, supporting local peace initiatives like the so called "Peace Communities", and acting as a mediator between parties (Westerbaan 1999). Lobby and advocacy activities are also part of Pax Christi's work with regard to Colombia, in order to influence policymaking and obtain financial support for local initiatives.

Lobby and advocacy

"NGOs advocacy is an act of organizing the strategic use of information to democratize unequal power relations" (Jordan and Van Tuijl 2000, pp. 2052). This narrow definition of advocacy differs much from the standard definition, which usually includes the aim of advocacy to change policies. For this study we would prefer a more encompassing definition by Nukuro (2000: pp. 2) where advocacy is defined as: "the act or process of convincing leaders and decision makers to use their powers and influence to support an issue or cause by the making or changing of law, policy or programme and in the allocation of resources". Lobby and advocacy campaigns by Pax Christi indeed aim to establish public and political awareness and encourage (policy) change. "These campaigns have mobilized moral outrage into political action on topics where the targets are clear, the cause obviously just, and the abuses graphic. Yet the political victories in practice and securing their implementation generally requires continued political pressure" (Nelson 2000). Lobby and advocacy organisations try to translate this moral outrage into political action by turning media attention towards a certain issue or subject, or try and rally support directly from people that are able to make changes, politicians.

Pax Christi's advocacy efforts

Pax Christi, by organising a delegation of parliamentarians has aimed at creating policy change, and as Nelson (2000) points out, in that case it is certainly a question of continued political pressure. Bringing politicians as close to the situation as possible creates awareness and a sense of solidarity, which cannot be recreated by media attention alone. The question is then whether a delegation is sufficient for continued political pressure from the participants of the mission, and whether the replication of such an activity will lead to the same results elsewhere.

In recent years there have been several international delegations from and to Colombia, to increase international awareness of the Colombian situation and to stimulate a sense of solidarity between the European Community and Colombian churches, NGOs and local leaders. The project, discussed in this best practice study, has deployed the organisation of delegations as a tool for advocacy and awareness activities. The project consisted of the following main components:

- A visit from indigenous leaders, mayors and NGOs to Europe;
- A delegation of Dutch parliamentarians and NGOs visiting Colombia;
- A delegation of mayors from various European cities visiting Colombian counterparts

The third component was especially motivated by Colombian reports of attacks on local authorities. In the last few years, guerrilla movements and paramilitary groups increasingly targeted mayors and other members of the local authorities. They were subjected to death threats, kidnappings and murder. Pax Christi felt that this attack on local democracy needed to be more prominently on the political and media agenda. A media campaign was an integral part of Pax Christi's efforts.

Besides raising awareness to the human rights situation in Colombia, goals of the project included: putting Colombia on the (European) political agenda, enabling the formulation of a common policy, and creating a sense of solidarity between European mayors and their colleagues in Colombia. An additional goal was also to raise the awareness about the high number of IDPs and their fate.

The three components of the project will be further elaborated below, evaluating them through archive studies and interviews with the delegation-participants and other persons involved.

DELEGATION OF INDIGENOUS LEADERS, MAYORS AND NGOS

Description of activities

From 10 till 17 November 2002 a delegation of ten prominent Colombians from the Cauca region made a European tour to Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France to raise awareness and solidarity among European partners vis-à-vis the situation in Colombia. In 1998 the region of Cauca was designated to become a demilitarised zone following the peace talks between the government and the FARC, but after the failure of the peace dialogue in 2002, the region became subject to armed struggle and violence again. Violence is mostly directed against civilian targets, including local-level democratic structures. The delegation comprised the Governor of Cauca, indigenous leaders, mayors and NGO representatives. The five mayors concerned all had received death threats. The mission's aims included: gaining political and financial support for local democracy, for civil resistance by the indigenous peoples, and for the '*Plan Alterno*', the integral development plan for the Cauca region. Marianne Moor from Pax Christi Netherlands and Natalia Orozco, assistant of Pax Christi in Paris guided the mission. The mission carried out an intensive programme of visits (see annexe 2).

Analysis of outcomes and results

First of all, the visit took place as planned. Interest was created among the European institutions to support the '*Plan Alterno*', but they indicated that there needed to be more guarantees that the government of Colombia would not spray the agricultural projects funded by the European Union with herbicides, while also government counterpart funding needed to be secured. As a follow-up, the lobby in Colombia and Europe continued and different stakeholders wrote letters to the respective Colombian and European authorities concerned to bring the matter again to their attention.

The non-armed resistance of the indigenous people of Cauca aimed at a lobby for respect of their way of life without interference of armed parties. They looked for political and financial support, including international observers and human rights training. As a follow-up, a list of six concrete activities was agreed to, four of which were falling under the direct responsibility of Pax Christi Netherlands.

The delegation got the opportunity to highlight the prevailing crisis in the Colombian local democracy, and how elected office bearers and local authorities were suffering under violent threats and armed interference. There was widespread solidarity, political backing and support for local peace initiatives among the organisations visited, especially the human rights NGOs. National and European Members of Parliament (MPs) were prepared to travel to Colombia to show their support *in situ*. As concrete possibilities twinning, international inter-municipal co-operation and project-level support were identified as future initiatives to work on.

The delegation itself was also a unique political event, leading to further exchange, communication and collaboration of the Colombian partners as well. A salient aspect of the delegation was the interest shown by the media. Members of the delegation gave interviews to newspaper and radio correspondents. Several organisations and authorities visited issued statements or declarations.

The time schedule and logistics of the mission were tied and preparations have been thorough and complex in setting up the meetings. The provision of information to the persons and organisations visited was done in a professional manner, in all the different languages required. Adequate background information was collated and distributed and a feedback report made available after the mission was completed.

Lessons learned and best practices

- The organisation of the mission of Colombian leaders, mayors and NGO representatives to Europe in and of itself has been *an effective instrument to raise political and public interest, and media attention.*
- The mission also has succeeded in identifying a number of *concrete follow-up activities.*
- It is not easy to say which delegation per se has been the most influential, it is probably especially *the combined impact of the three delegations together that has been particularly effective.*
- The local representatives confirm in retrospect that *several concrete follow-up actions have started.* For example, the executive director of the Asociación de Municipios del Norte del Cauca (AMUNORCA) has sent us detailed information on follow-up projects that are being implemented or prepared, including the twinning project with Hannover, the NUFFIC project for the strengthening of democracy in Northern Cauca, and another local democracy project. The director of the Asociación Cultural Casa del Niño has shared with us detailed information on the results of projects undertaken for the (Afro-Colombian) youth as part of overall municipal policy and attempts to stem the violence in the region.
- The local representatives also indicate that *the contacts established are valuable to them.* They mention the contacts with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) as an example. Contacts, 'being in touch' have *an important value in and of themselves.*
- Apart from international contacts, taking part in and organising the missions also have *brought them in contact with local networks, organisations, international agencies and NGOs in Colombia.*
- As a side effect, the delegations have raised *stipends* to enable three Afro-Colombian youths to continue their studies. This is appreciated as something special. This has also helped induce the formation of a *youth movement* that carries out a number of activities for this target group, having reportedly a number of positive impacts at the personal, group and local levels.
- The combined effect of the different missions and activities has reportedly contributed to the *empowerment and strengthening of the local authorities*, especially also in its work with regard to *human rights and international humanitarian law.*
- The *participation of the local population* in diverse activities has been stimulated and increased. Contacts have been made with local groups and authorities in the neighbourhood as a consequence of the different visits. Information has been distributed.
- Though not visible to the eye, there is a lot of *local spin-off* of the delegations and visits, also due to the preparatory and follow-up activities carried out.
- Local delegates have also *learned personally and feel motivated* to continue their efforts for peace.
- From an organisational point of view the *mission has been prepared well* with documentation available in the different languages required

DELEGATION OF DUTCH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND NGOS

Description of activities

A delegation comprising seven Dutch parliamentarians and representatives of the Netherlands Red Cross, Cordaid and Pax Christi Netherlands visited Colombia from 27 June till 4 July 2003. The director of the Center of International Cooperation of the Free University, Kees van Dongen, chaired the mission. The delegation aimed at gaining insight into the complex problems resulting from the internal conflict in the country and to identify possibilities for Dutch and European involvement and support activities. A specific topic of interest was the role of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba in the transport of drugs to Europe. The delegation familiarised itself with the political situation and Colombia's own policy framework. It reviewed the peace dialogues and focused on the role of the international community. During visits to Bogotá and the regions the delegation met representatives from central local government, academia, farmers, a wide range of NGOs and civil society organisations as well as representatives from the international community.

Analysis of outcomes and results

The programme was carried out as planned, and has received much positive feedback from participants as well as from people from other organisations and the Dutch Embassy in Colombia. The programme and activities had been diverse and were carried out well throughout. A comprehensive mission report was published combined with a set of recommendations written by Pax Christi and Cordaid and the Netherlands Red Cross as far related to the humanitarian situation. Collaboration between the different Dutch partners also was strengthened as a consequence of the mission. In the files we encountered also concept press statement and proposed strategies to be followed. Cordaid and Pax Christi jointly formulated a future lobby agenda, while the participating MPs have undertaken or supported several activities in Parliament and beyond.

Lessons learned and best practices

- Participants of the delegation highly appreciated *the structure and content* of the delegation-programme. They found it offered room to include one's *personal interests* and were very positive on the structure of the delegation: organised as a *fact-finding mission*, with an *independent delegation-leader* and an *objective report* at the end of the delegation. One minor, negative criticism was that a day of rest after arrival would have been preferable, as the schedule was very tight and tiring.
- The participation in a mission entailed a level of *direct engagement*, which is impossible to get through other means of communication. Its impact is also expectably higher than through other means of communication. The mission members opined that they received '*unique*' and '*impressive*' *first hand information* on different aspects, including the *drugs problem and the link to the Netherlands Antilles*. It was appreciated that they did not remain only in the towns, but were able to visit the *countryside* as well.
- The mission was also successful, as it was able to focus on *one major problematique* instead of dealing with all types of different problematic issues in the country.
- Parliamentarians familiar with or interested in Colombia indicated that they got a lot of useful *additional information* for their work or approach. Parliamentarians felt to have been *facilitated* by the mission to put more effort and substance in the Colombia dossier.
- External observers rated this mission as one of the *most successful* parliamentary delegations from a lobby point of view
- In concrete terms, *questions were raised in Parliament* about the Colombian situation and the issue of demobilised soldiers was raised in Parliament. Information was also used to formulate *amendments in Parliament and cross-party alliances* were facilitated by joint participation of parliamentarians in mission.

- As a more general consequence, *Colombia has risen in importance on the political agenda*. In a 2003 review of Dutch aid relations many countries disappeared from the list of Dutch target countries, but Colombia remained on the list, in large part due to the mission. The focus of Colombia programme, was, moreover, redefined towards *human rights, conflict and humanitarian issues*. The Minister for Development Cooperation also has visited Colombian president Uribe on her way to Mexico. More recently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a humanitarian mission to Colombia. This indicates that also the humanitarian attention asked for the situation in Colombia has led to some tangible follow-up.
- Both during the preparations and in the follow-up Pax Christi has successfully *focused on (invested in) particular MPs* that were prepared to take the necessary steps, even though they represented smaller parties. Also the lobby on officials was strong and successful.
- The effect on parliamentarians is however only sustainable if they remain in Parliament or as spokesperson on the Colombia dossier, otherwise the *impact may quickly evaporate*. With regard to some MPs the *impact has been negligible* either due to a lack of interest or to changing portfolios.
- The investment Pax Christi makes in knowledge and solidarity are primarily useful if the recipients will remain in their positions. The effort is already undermined when he or she has to hand over their work to a successor. These kinds of lobby-activities therefore do not necessarily lead to sustainable and durable solidarity and partnerships. They should almost be repeated every 5 to 10 years or so.
- The *political timing of actions* was excellent and, moreover, demonstrates that Pax Christi has a *good feeling for the political dimensions* of the work.
- A negative remark was made on the *press conference* at the end of the week, where parliamentarians had made a press release which was so general of nature, that Colombian journalists present at the conference were visibly disappointed by it's lack in addressing real issues and the apparent absence of agreements or actions on the part of the parliamentarians.
- It was difficult *to inform the participants* properly prior to the mission, as most of them only read the information on Colombia and the programme in the plane. Yet, the reader was found to be excellent. This problem was partly due to the (unavoidable) organisation of the programme immediately on the first day of summer recess (MPs are exhausted by that time) and the nature of their job as parliamentarian, which is very much dictated by the news of the day and the very activity at hand, compounding a thorough and long term approach and a proper preparation.
- The delegations create expectations with the people and organisations they visit. These expectations are initially not completely fulfilled, as they do (obviously) not see an immediate return of their efforts. It is of the essence that the organisations and people involved in Colombia receive feedback on the later impact and consequences that the delegation had. We are not sure whether that has been done systematically, though we certainly have the impression that local participants are still very appreciative of the efforts undertaken and the impact locally.

DELEGATION OF EUROPEAN MAYORS

Description of activities

A delegation of five European mayors (Eygalayes, The Hague, Hannover, Putten and Stockholm), two representatives of the Belgian and Dutch Association of Municipalities as well as two journalists visited Colombia between 14 and 18 October 2003. The aims of the mission were to raise and show international support in strengthening the position of local democracy under the present difficult conditions of war. The delegation was to urge upon the warring parties to respect International Humanitarian Law (IHL), especially vis-à-vis unarmed citizens and representatives of local democracy. It also would emphasize the need for social and development investments in the region affected.

Analysis of outcomes and results

The city of Hannover has entered into a twinning programme with seven municipalities in the northern part of the Cauca region that was inaugurated during the trip in the village of Villarica. After the visit the delegation issued a statement addressing the problems faced by their counterparts in Colombia and expressing respect for their threatened colleagues. They also called on armed parties to respect local democracy and the government to provide better security and allow and facilitate local-level dialogue.

Pax Christi has set up a media campaign in both Europe and Colombia through television and radio spots in support of the local democracy in Colombia as well as through other forms of media campaigning. The mayors had been asked to cooperate in the production of television spots. Articles on the trip and on local democracy in Colombia were published in the Colombian press. The mayors agreed to bring back home the experiences gained and to seek support among different relevant sectors. In the Dutch and German press (in-depth) articles on trip and on the problems of local democracy in Colombia have been published. The Dutch mayors gave briefings in national (VNG) and regional frameworks and gave talks and presentations. A project proposal submitted by Pax Christi and the Dutch Federation of Municipalities VNG has, however, been turned down by the Dutch embassy in Bogotá.

Lessons learned and best practices

- *Mutual solidarity and denouncement of violence* against democratically elected functionaries is important and proves to be feasible as a *mobilising concept*.
- The approach was felt to be very *innovative*, 'a welcome variation to the usual one-sided and politicised lobby of international peace-organisations'.
- Mayors were able to get a much *more in-depth and personal view on the situation*. They also came to realise some of the contradictions in the European policies.
- *Shared personal experiences* had the largest impact on the participants, while political differences were not a major problem. "Seeing the situation for oneself" creates such an eye-opener, that it seems to have an enduring effect on the people that joined the delegations of Pax Christi.
- The Dutch mayors reacted very *enthusiastically* and have become more *involved* in, among others *city diplomacy*, or in the *Ingrid Betancourt network*. Also the contacts of the VNG received an impetus.
- Mayors and other participants were enthusiastic about the, *well-coordinated delegation*. "It has led to increased *solidarity* of European mayors with their Colombian counterparts, and a variety of follow-up projects.
- The delegation has worked also as '*seed funding*' for future initiatives and re-emphasised the importance of existing *twinning project* with the city of Hannover.
- Dutch *local and regional press* paid attention to the mayors' trip and thus the knowledge and interest of local populations was raised on different pertinent issues with regard to Colombia

GENERAL AND SECONDARY EFFECTS

Analysis of outcomes and results

Apart from the results of those components per se, other results of the project mentioned by Pax Christi and by the people we have interviewed included:

- Nuffic has added Colombia to their country-list, presumably as a direct result of the lobbying activities by Pax Christi. VNG started actively to look for more funds for Colombia.
- The twinning arrangement between Hannover and Cauca was further grounded and supported.
- A project proposal for preparatory training in the framework of the Hannover twinning programme was and funded by Pax Christi Netherlands and carried out.
- A project proposal for early warning and peace monitoring was presented to Cordaid for funding.
- Directly after the parliamentary delegation, a donor conference was organised in London, wherein possible support for President Uribe was discussed. During this conference The Netherlands played a vital role in drawing EU support for Colombia.
- Long term collaboration between the different Dutch partners and joint lobbying were strengthened (Breed Overleg Colombia and Colombia platform). Also other partners (like NRK with a somewhat diverging agenda) felt satisfied. General sharing of information and lessons within Pax Christi can, however, be further strengthened, as other Pax Christi staff does not necessarily share the same thematic or regional interests.
- The delegations have increased the awareness and appreciation of Pax Christi's work. Pax Christi is perceived as knowledgeable and working for the Colombian general interest

Lessons learned and best practices

- The delegations have created a number of important secondary results.
- Relevance of in-depth and specialised country knowledge was a unique characteristic of Pax Christi compared to other organisations. This should be guarded and not lost due to a possible tendency to work on 'projects'. This, however, requires a particular expertise that needs to be built up and maintained.
- Lobby and advocacy requires 'political handwork' and a 'political nose'.
- General sharing of information and lessons within Pax Christi can be further strengthened.

CONCLUSION

In general, results of lobbying and campaigning by NGOs are ambiguous and debatable. This best practice study reports the results of Pax Christi's lobby and advocacy work on Colombia. This has been put into practice by organising three missions.

These missions have not only been professionally organised, they also have had impact in terms of European and Dutch public and media attention raised, by putting Colombia on the political agenda and by identifying and implementing follow-up activities. The participating MPs and mayors have learned a lot from this first-hand exposure and have become motivated and facilitated to raise relevant issues in their respective environments. Locally, the missions were also deemed important and reportedly led to several concrete follow-up initiatives. They led to new contacts and contributed to local processes of empowerment, networking and participation. In the Dutch context, the work of Pax Christi has been recognised by partner organisations and led to further collaboration and joint initiatives.

All in all, Pax Christi's lobby and advocacy work can be seen as a good practice. It is, however, essential to keep in mind that such a practice is based on a number of preconditions in terms of expertise, country knowledge and political space.

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ANNEXE 1 FILES STUDIED AND PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Pax Christi archive files studied

1. Visit of Colombian delegation to Europe (indigenous leaders, mayors and NGOs) 10-17 November 2002
2. Visit of Delegation of Dutch Parliamentarians and NGOs to Colombia 27 June- 4 July 2003)
3. Visit of Delegation of European Mayors to Colombia 14-18 October 2003
4. Jumelage between Hannover and Cauca
5. Media reports
6. Support Programme for local democracy in Colombia
7. Background information local democracy
8. Community-level early warning and monitoring system for human rights in Cauca
9. Video 'La democracia, el lazo que nos Une'

Persons interviewed

1. Arno Ambrosius, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bogota, Colombia
2. Arie Aragon, OUAFFROC, Colombia
3. Pablo Bastos, AMUNORCA, Colombia
4. Kees van Dongen, the Centre of International Cooperation, Free University, Amsterdam
5. Kathleen Ferrier, Member of Parliament
6. Erik Laan, Bureau for Policy-development for Development Cooperation (BBO)
7. Marianne Moor, Pax Christi Netherlands, Utrecht, The Netherlands
8. Gertie Mulder, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague
9. Andrés Paz Ramos, Pax Christi Netherlands, Cauca, Colombia
10. Jan van Putten, Mayor of Putten
11. Leen Revallier, Netherlands Red Cross (NRK), The Hague
12. Alexandra Sizoo, Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)
13. Cees van der Staaij, Member of Parliament

ANNEXE 2 MEETINGS OF COLOMBIA DELEGATIONS DURING EUROPEAN TOUR (10-17 NOVEMBER 2002)

Brussels

- Embassy of Colombia
- European Commission
- European Council
- European Parliament
- Mayor of Anthisnes
- Coordinator of Ingrid Betancourt support group
- Propaz (NGO)

The Hague

- International Union of Local Administrations
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Twelve Dutch NGOs
- Colombian Embassy
- Dutch Parliament
- Dutch Federation of Municipalities

Berlin and Hannover

- German Parliament
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Municipality of Hannover

Paris

- French Senate
- Municipality of Paris
- French NGOs
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Colombian Embassy
- Institut de Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique Latine

