

**Capacity Building for Peace and Development
A Potential Role for the Colombian Diaspora**

Hispanic Development Council

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Overview

There was a moment of discomfort among the team due to the fact that participation in the community was not immediate. We did make an extra effort initially in order to attract participants. However, as the media and other organizations in the community got involved and more people knew about these work things evolved quickly. And this is a perfect moment to thank all the media, web pages and community sources that helped us.

After re-scheduling a couple of dates, seven workshops took place among all the focus group previously defined. Besides the activity of filling the surveys, a special dialogue took place at the end of each meeting. From those conversations, we can extract that: a) Colombians love their country enormously, but this emotional expression does not always translate into action, b) There is a common feeling of lack of unity, c) Many Colombians have not settled themselves yet in Canada due to the fact that they are constantly thinking of returning; d) Many are in the process of learning about the Canadian system and do not understand that some actions may impact that process, for example intra-familiar violence, e) The first years are dedicated to settlement and adaptation, that is why it is difficult for them to participate in community activities, here and in support of Colombia, f) The main difficulties faced by most is the language barrier, the learning process, the cold weather, job search and previous academic credentials recognition; this final point being the major cause of emotional distress g) A large number of participants believe that it is necessary to work together in a common project; nevertheless, there are no venues or projects that place incentive on such action. Thus, they believe that to be able to join any initiative, understandable and clear conditions must be part of it. h) Another important point made again and again is that Colombians do not trust others easily and they need to see credible actions after fifty years of promises. And most believe that the corruption is a common life style back in their country, which must be eradicated totally in order to participate in a project with the potential for success. i) Almost unanimously, participants believe that the main task that every Colombian in the Diaspora must perform is to create a positive image about Colombia; telling a different story than the one shown by the mass media.

A final thought by one of the participant was: “We did not leave Colombia...we brought Colombia with us”.

Colombian Diaspora in Canada

Theories of Immigration

The Colombian community in Toronto has grown considerably since the late 1980's to the present. It is important to place into framework what are the main reasons why people choose to migrate; thus the importance of theoretical foundations of immigration.

Since within this current there are many contending theories, this report will concentrate on the theoretical framework that has been posited by Castles and Miller (1993). The main reason for this decision is that in their work, the authors surround the issue of international immigration with a specific focus on ethnic migration, thus creating a direct relation between Colombians as an ethnic minority and Canada as a nation, nation-state, and spatial representation.

International immigration, although not a recent phenomenon, has become a topic of contention both in sending and receiving countries; and although the situations in sending countries are noteworthy, this area of the debate will be discussed within the context of international immigration, and specifically contemporary Colombian immigration to Canada.

According to Castles and Miller, international immigration can be identified within four general tendencies:

- 1. Globalization of Migration**

This tendency works on the idea that more and more countries at the same time are continuing to be affected by migratory movements. Moreover, the areas where people are emigrating from have expanded, meaning that immigration countries have to contend with diverse populations with different cultures, languages, and economic backgrounds.

2. Acceleration of Migration

Migration levels are rising in volume in all major regions of the world.

3. Differentiation of Migration

Most countries of immigration differ in how immigrants are categorized. For example, labour migration, refugee, or permanent resident. This category posits a chain of migration, where one type of immigrant begins to arrive in a given country, after to be followed by a different type of immigrant from the same country and/or region.

4. Feminization of Migration

In contemporary migration patterns, women are continuously playing an increasing role. This is opposed to traditional migration, where men seen as sole breadwinners were the first, or sometimes the only one to migrate (Castles and Miller, 1993).

This report, in its reference between immigration and identity, will place emphasis on the third migratory tendency (differentiation of migration). The reason for this is that many Colombian immigrants decide to migrate and remain in Canada for an undetermined length of time since many arrived either as refugees or within the skilled worker class (Citizenship and Immigration Canada policy) creating a new beginning, thus making the decision to remain for an undetermined amount of time. Moreover, settlement is also occurring where families are united and/or re-united, an idea that will be further analyzed.

Historical Background

Beginning in the late 19th Century, Colombia has gone through a prolonged period of instability, beginning with the conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004: 41), the main political parties of the time. The contemporary conflict is said to have its roots beginning in 1948, specifically with the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan on April 9, 1948 (Sanchez, 2001), a popular leader that challenged the Colombian government of the time. The violence that erupted has since invaded all aspects of private and public spheres. This violence has become an

integral part of Colombian life both at the political and civil society levels (Sanchez, 2001: 1) during the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Centuries.

Within the past twenty years Colombia has gone through the attempt at transforming itself. Within this attempt, the dynamics that interplay can be said to be twofold. Firstly, the attempt to stabilize and thrust what Sanchez refers to as the “relegitimation and strengthening of the state under the ethos of participation, citizenship, and ethnic and cultural pluralism delineated in the 1991 Constitution” (2001: 2). Secondly, the growing predominance in the logic of war, where different social, military, and private actors within Colombian society invoke the ‘idea’ of what Colombia as a nation-state should be. Within this second dynamic, Sanchez puts forth the idea of the “multiplicity of violence” (2001: 3), where the violent struggle in Colombia is multi-faceted, where government, organized crime, guerrillas, self-defence groups (also referred to as paramilitaries), and street gangs and common criminals to a lesser extent all contribute to the increasing violence. At the same time, the violence can be said to be multi-layered since within each category aforementioned there exists several groups vying for, be it legitimate (e.g. political parties) or illegitimate (e.g. organized crime, self-defence groups, and guerrillas) power.

Within Colombian history, two principal processes of colonization have greatly affected the country. The first half of the 20th Century saw the Antioqueño coffee colonization, which acted as a transforming and integrating force that facilitated the growth of a middle peasantry (i.e. small land owners) and made possible the link between the Colombian economy and the international markets. The second half of the 20th Century is referred to be as the ‘colonization of the contemporary era’ permeated by

guerrilla and paramilitary activity combined with drug cultivation and processing (Sanchez, 2001: 3) has destabilized Colombia since the late 1970's.

Since the 1980's the guerrillas' such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN), Quintin Lame, and the Ejercito Popular de Liberacion (EPL), as well as self-defence groups as its main actors (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004: 42) have polarized and terrorized communities within large regions of the country such as the *Uraba* and *Magdalena Medio* regions (close to the border with Panama) where both actors have forced union leaders to take sides. At the same time the oil rich regions of *Santander*, *Arauca*, and *Casamare* (all close to the border with Venezuela) have been turned into sources of financing by the aforementioned self-defence groups (Sanchez, 2001: 4).

From the late 1980's the violence that was once for the most part relegated to rural areas began to be felt in major urban areas such as *Bogota*, *Cali*, and *Medellin*. This phenomenon added a new dimension to the violence in Colombia, where:

- i. 'Narcoterrorism' and *Sicarios* (hired killers) roam in such cities as *Medellin* and *Cali*;
- ii. Implantation of 'popular militias' in poor neighbourhoods of big cities, for example, *Ciudad Bolivar* in *Bogota*, where these groups frequently, though not necessarily linked with guerrillas initially operate (with the complacency of the inhabitants) to eliminate the gangs that exist in such neighbourhoods; and
- iii. The practicing of 'social cleansing' that have for the most part been allegedly performed by police or ex-police agents against beggars, prostitutes, and street delinquents in *Cali*, *Medellin*, *Pereira*, or *Barranquilla* (Sanchez, 2001: 10).

The different self-defence groups cannot be equated with 'death squads' in major urban centres, whose major concerns are the 'socially excluded' such as prostitutes and beggars. The *raison d'être* for paramilitary groups is the struggle against the guerrillas (Cubides, 2001: 130), where many of these groups adopt methods and organizational

techniques favoured by guerrillas'. These self-defence groups began as groups throughout rural Colombia, and were initially protected under law 48 passed in 1968, which enabled their existence, however, these actors lost all protection by the subsequent revoking of law 48 in 1979 (Cubides, 2001: 131). The revoking of law 48 however did not stop nor prevent new self-defence groups from forming. One of the main points that Cubides posits is the interchangeability between self-defence groups and guerrilla fighters and in some cases, its own leaders. For example, *Marcelino Panesso* deserter from the FARC became the right hand man of Jose Carlos Rodriguez Gacha (one of the co-founders of the *Medellin* cartel and its leader in *Bogota*)(Cubides, 2001: 108), where he also played a role in the creating of self-defence groups tied to the drug cartels.

Colombia: A Recent History

Luis Alberto Restrepo (2001), the founder of the journal *Sintesis: Anuario Social, Politica y Economico* makes an important distinction between the culture of violence that Colombia is said to comprise and a culture of "social indifference" towards violence (Restrepo, 2001: 98), where external actors (i.e. guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and drug cartels) have appropriated the public sphere. This sphere is referent when delineating how Colombia is viewed not only by its citizens, but by the outside world. One of the main reasons for this social indifference is that:

"The majority of Colombians are not conscious of being part of a single people, called upon to share a common, inescapable destiny. Rather, in Colombia there have co-existed many parallel societies that, until recently survived side by side, attempting not to come into contact with one another" (Restrepo, 2001: 98).

This view restricts a culture of violence since violence is a result of what may be regarded as xenophobia, whereby external violence has created an aura of tension between Colombians that are not involved in or take part in any aspect of violence. Within this area, the idea of human rights has also become, to many extents irrelevant.

Restrepo posits that human rights, along with kidnappings, disappearances, and assassination have become a natural means of resolving conflict in Colombia; it is viewed as restoring the social balance (Restrepo, 2001: 99).

By the 1980's, Latin America had shifted from dictatorships to highly unstable and debt ridden democracies (Castles and Miller, 1993: 3). Colombia, regarded as Latin America's most stable democracy (as alluded to earlier), began to enter a period of further instability with violence penetrating medium and large urban centres. Due to the growing instability and insecurity many Colombians began to immigrate.

Immigrants that decide to settle in a country oftentimes are distinct from the majority population in a number of ways; for example, traditions, customs, ideas, and sometimes language and religion. Distinctions between immigrants and the host population are at many times socio-economic. Many migrant groups often become concentrated in certain types of work, which are generally in the low socio-economic status, and live in low income areas, segregated from the rest of the population. On the other hand, many immigrants that are well trained professionals following years of settlement and adaptation tend to integrate into society and gain employment in their fields of specialization (survey developed for the International Conference for Peace and Development at Toronto). This isolation can, at times, lead to the appearance that immigrant minorities are threatening to the established society, because when conditions change and people have to adjust to different and unpredictable situations, those newly arrived are often seen as the cause of instability and/or insecurity (Castles and Miller, 1993: 13).

Cases of insecurity and/or instability can lead to a more serious concern - that of the changing culture and identity of a given society. Castles and Miller concur with

Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1990) that the nation-state, as it has developed since the eighteenth century exists on the premise that the nation-state is represented on the idea that it is both a cultural and political unit (Castles and Miller, 1993: 14). Therefore, insecurity and/or instability on the idea of a changing nation-state, can instil a fear (xenophobia) in the general population about how immigrants can or will alter (usually, altering is seen through a negative lens) the nation-state. Ethnic (nation) homogeneity is usually defined in terms of a common language, culture, traditions; in other words a common genealogical history that binds a group of people together, all placed under a political unit (nation-state) is oftentimes a fictitious construction (Castles and Miller, 1993: 14) of the those in power in order to create the cohesion a nation-state 'needs'. Immigration and ethnic diversity directly challenge and threaten the idea of the nation and nation-state since immigrants are not part of what are perceived to be common beginnings. A paradox becomes evident when analysing classical countries of immigration such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, which have been able to cope with a large influx of immigrants, since the incorporation of immigrants, have been part of their myth of nation building (Castles and Miller, 1993).

Many immigrants, consciously or unconsciously, settle in a receiving country. The decision to remain is one that plays itself out in a long process. The reason for this process is that it is not only the first generation that is affected, but also subsequent generations are also affected by the migratory process (Castles and Miller, 1993: 18). Later generations begin to define themselves in different forms. For example, identification with the host country, country of parental origin, or a combination of both affects the socialization process in a number of ways; the most significant factor being

the adaptation and/or integration of second, third, and so on generations into greater society.

Factors of Immigration

The above explanation has its roots in traditional theories of immigration. These theories are often referred to as ‘push-pull’ theories (Castles and Miller, 1993), where there are ‘push factors’ such as demographic growth, low living standards, and lack of economic opportunities that entice a group of people to emigrate from their areas of origin. They are attracted by ‘pull factors’ such as demand for labour, availability of land, and good economic opportunities. These (traditional) theories tend to be individualistic and ahistorical, since they place emphasis on the immigrant’s decision to be based on a rational comparison between costs and benefits of remaining in their area of origin or to take a look at various alternative decisions (Castles and Miller, 1993: 20). This has been mostly dismissed, since as it has been discussed earlier; decisions to migrate are mostly related to links between immigrants and segments of the population in their country of origin. At the same time, there is also a gap in this theory, specifically when speaking about refugees and migrants from war torn countries such as Colombia, where people decide where to go most of the time depending on the country that has opened its doors.

From Migration to Transnationalism

An important aspect of immigration is spatial availability. Increased immigration raises the question of urban diversity and how relationships between receiving societies and specific immigrants groups interact not only with each other, but also with the dominant population (Veronis, 2006: 11). With an increased diversity, the concept of transnationalism begins to play an important role. Transnationalism in effect concerns

itself with the web of relationships that are built between immigrants and their ‘national homeland’ (Brubaker, 1996). It is the study of networks over two nation-states (Veronis, 2006: 11), where a new fluidity between citizens of one country, their practices, and influence on and in their country of origin.

The question of national identity, as outlined above raises important topics when relating a nation-state to the way it attracts (or not) immigrants, as well as its laws and policies on the integration (or not) of immigrants. The formation of ethnic groups (a group can only be considered to be ‘ethnic’ outside of what Brubaker refers to as their ‘national homeland’) can take different forms; again this depends also on the attitudes of the receiving country. At one extreme, a country can be open, or actually entice immigration, grant naturalization, and a gradual acceptance and integration (not the same as tolerance) of cultural diversity, which foments the creation, and development of ethnic communities. At the other extreme, there is the denial that immigration is a fact of life, which at times leads to the refusal of granting citizenship and rights to immigrant settlers; all this combined with the rejection of cultural diversity may lead to the creation of ethnic minorities who are regarded as undesirable and/or divisive (Castles and Miller, 1993: 26), and as explained earlier creating an sense of instability and/or security.

The question of citizenship is also at the heart of the discussion between immigration and its impact on national identity. Membership in any group is qualified by a certain status. In the nation-state, citizenship serves as an important status within society; it provides rights and duties, which at the same time are withheld from non-citizens, in turn defining an important form of exclusion. Hence, citizenship is an essential link between nation and state, a connection that is of central importance (Castles and Miller, 1993: 26) for immigrants in a nation-state.

Citizenship as a form of membership raises a second point that is both particular and multi-faceted, that of older minorities. The existence of older minorities, for example, East and South Asians, helped to mould and develop current social structures and values that both hindered and facilitated the determination of how new immigrants groups would integrate.

The decision to migrate is directly related to the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) that is accumulated by people residing in a specific socio-cultural space, thus the decision to migrate to one country over another. Within this context, Canada as a classical country of immigration has received four waves of Latin American immigrants beginning in the late 1950's:

Table 1.1: Waves of Latin American Immigration to Toronto

Waves of Immigration	Time Period	Demographic Characteristics
'Lead' Wave	1956-1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Americans of European decent: urban intelligentsia from major Latin American cities.
	1965-1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venezuelans, Argentines, and Peruvians: mostly blue-collar groups.
Andean wave	1973-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians (economic refugees) were admitted in higher proportions. • High estimates of illegals from Peru and Guatemala. • Mostly blue-collar groups; skilled and unskilled labourers.
Coup wave	1973/74-1978/79	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chileans, Argentines, and Uruguayans. • Chilean intelligentsia,

		professionals, and skilled labourers.
Central American wave	1983-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvadorians and Guatemalans: mostly urban poor, rural middle class and peasantry. • Lower average educational levels than the Lead or Coup waves, and perhaps little less specialization than the Andean wave.
New wave of professional immigrants	1990's-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals (“skilled workers” and “business class” immigrants from throughout Latin America.

Source: Data from Fernando Mata in Veronis (2006)

As a result, Colombians (and many Latin Americans) have created an atmosphere in Toronto where both the social and cultural capital necessary to have the capabilities to integrate has opened a gateway for new Colombian immigrants to choose Canada, and specifically Toronto. This is supported by our survey and can be further proven by the numbers of Colombians choosing Toronto as a place of residence. The 2001 Canadian census shows that out of 15865 Colombians, 7780 live in Ontario, with 5615 of those choosing Toronto as their place of residence (Statistics Canada in Veronis, 2006).

Transnational connections between Colombians in Canada and their social and cultural networks in their country of origin have developed for more than thirty years. These connections have created the atmosphere for many Colombians to migrate following the wave of violence that began affecting major urban areas in Colombian beginning in the late 1980's. There is the need to continue and fully study the causes of violence, how it affects Colombians in Canada (and other countries), how these external

causes play out within a Canadian context since after all social and cultural capital is developed through reciprocity between different actors.

The Field Work

Methodology

The research methodology for this report is based on different sources and techniques: secondary sources (e.g. scholarly literature, journals, and the internet), interviews, focus groups all performed in Toronto. In total, forty people participated in the focus groups of this preliminary study. Participants were contacted via email, Internet groups, telephone, personal, and institutional contacts throughout the Colombian community in Toronto, while at the same time, the snowball method of research was also employed. Both qualitative and quantitative sources are essential to the work. The qualitative aspect is considered more profoundly, though statistical sources did play an important role in the research process. Finally, all translations from texts and interviews were performed in concert by the authors of this study.

In total:

- 153 email contacts were addressed
- Internet groups or Web host:
- Yahoo Groups: Total Membership: 1800. Approximate number of Colombians: 450
- Factor Hispano: Total Membership: 650. Approximate number of Colombians: 280
- Consulate General of Colombia: Total membership: 18000
- Hispanic Development Council: Total organizational membership: 65
- Citizenship committee of Colombia: Total organizational membership: 22
- Colombians in london.com Total membership: 400
- Romero House Refugee Centre: Total membership: 40
- www.colombiaencanada.ca
- www.colombianosinlondon.com
- Radio: Voces Latinas
- RCI-Radio Canada International: Interviews about preliminary study
- Print media article on El Correo Canadiense

Conclusions of the field Work

Life in Canada

One of the most important aspects of the Colombian Diaspora relates to the diversity of the Community in Canada. To a great extent this has to do with Colombia itself in terms of its history and spatial geographical characteristics as a county of origin. Nevertheless, following the results of our research, we could observe and confirm a significant element which has to do with the high numbers of Colombians in Canada who come from the Central region of the country which includes the cities of Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín 47.5%. The implications of this number is that considering that Colombia is a large country, the numbers of Colombians in Canada comes significantly from the above mentioned population triangle. One important element of this population is that in general includes urban sectors generally considered part of the Colombian middle class, and as a group in recent years has had increasingly to deal with the impact of the war, particularly so as the conflict has become a greater urban phenomenon. Incidentally, among these newcomers to Canada, becomes interesting to notice the fact that once here, a significant number have had, at least in the professional field, some continuing in areas of employment and type of work. For example, 36 % have indicated they have professional activities related to those they had back in Colombia, while 25% have mentioned they are homeowners here in the Toronto region. In general this presents an outlook fairly positive; however in the actual employment side 44 % of the community is currently unemployed while a significant number of the community in their average of 4.5 years of residence in Canada have received social assistance. Indeed, 58% of community members indicated they had received social assistance.

In terms of challenges of adaptation to life in Canada by the Colombian community, this particular research indicates that a significant number of people have had difficulties with learning the language. Indeed, for most Colombians their feeling is that the language issue has been the most difficult in terms of adaptation to life in Canada although today more than 70% of the community indicate their capacity to communicate with comfort in English. The other two key problems identified as barriers to adaptation include finding appropriate employment, and the issue common to many recent immigrants to Canada, the recognition of academic credentials which is regularly considered the largest obstacle among what Fernando Mata has called the “professional immigrant wave” or known in the community as well as the “IT wave”. Significantly, 65% of the respondents indicated having university education prior to coming to Canada.

As we mentioned earlier, the new Colombian Community (referent to the professional wave) is a new community here having an average of 4.5 years in the country. Largely, the community feels optimistic about the future despite current levels of unemployment in Canada or problems in the home country. A feeling emerging from consultations regarding this research, and public discussions was a strong sense that Canadian institutions are responsive to the general population and therefore they have high levels of recognition and credibility among the Colombian community here. This is a very key element as it creates an emerging feeling of safety and invites people to feel individually confident not only in the future but also in the potentialities of the Canadian arrangement as it reflects recognition towards the civil society and may empower replication of “Canadian values” abroad. Interestingly, a commentary of project participants include elements of their location in Canada as one reason that would facilitate the development of joint community initiatives, strategies or the formulation of

ideas in the public sphere aiming at conflict resolution elsewhere. Equally significant, it is possible to suggest that to some extent in other countries it may not be as conducive for the Diaspora to connect in such public space because environmental support may not be as conducive. Social environment in itself is a factor to consider in looking at the development and, or creation of problem solving mechanisms. Another interesting idea, which appeared in the public discussions about Colombia, had to do with the possible timing of any initiative developed or presented. For example, there could be more opportune or better times to work together and, or produce collective work. In other words, an assessment of the context for such work it is also a fundamental consideration. This thinking points out in the direction of the creation of some sort of “atmosphere” or “right” conditions to work or think about Colombian matters which would also help in providing a positive and probably a more safe environment for public discussions.

Participants in the research process expressed strong interest in responding, but also there was a clear attitude towards responding objectively the questions presented by the research team. In essence, this simple act, in occasions was considered a significant piece already to the contribution towards “helping” Colombia in its turmoil. As mentioned elsewhere, aside from the fact that people in the Diaspora were generous in the reception to this research, clearly in some circumstances this was also a challenge as there are wounds caused by the conflict and there are persons who see its impact as a present and ongoing cause for personal anguish. Yet, as the research progressed, and considering that the length of time for this work was rather reduced, many individuals offered their interest, support, and assistance in a way that was very positive towards the possibility of searching for ways to contribute. A potential good explanation for the latter might be the fact that more than 80% of respondents indicated that they still had strong

ties to the country because of family relations, and they keep themselves informed as to the developments in the country in about 80% of the times.

Among Colombians, the discussion about the Diaspora itself is an important fact. Publicly and in private there are many ideas about this important topic. As it has been expressed, Colombians are happy to express their opinions and are generally open to conversation, yet at times there is a sense of strong frustration for more than fifty years of conflict about which many in the community felt they had to endure and to a great extent survive. Hence, at this particular juncture it is important to examine information regarding public attitudes and political culture among the community, and for starters perhaps mention that there has been some sort of sustained internal solidarity despite regular statements of scepticism and lack of confidence in fellow Colombians and Colombian institutions. For example the large majority of respondents in our research expressed interest in participating in electoral processes while an even larger number expressed their view that actually Colombia is in the middle of a war, 82.5%. From the researchers perspective this was a very important question and answer since one of the most often heard comments is that in Colombia “not much happens” and that the political questions are not often addressed, living external community observers with the impression of having a community that is rather content with the “status quo”. The responses of the participants clearly demonstrated the opposite.

The Problematique

Colombian Canadians have expressed clearly their understanding regarding the problems of Colombia in the direction of failing institutions and stemming therefore the problems of violence and war. In terms of definition of the problem, the number one

response from Colombian Canadians is systemic corruption among leading institutions of the country. As it was explained in the first part of this research, multi-layered violence connected to an array of groups vying for power and attempting to build legitimacy among the national institutions, have left large segments of the population excluded from participating in properly channelled social and political processes having to do with the national issues of building institutions responsive to the citizenry of the country. Within this context for Colombians in Canada, the ensuing military strife is the outcome of such struggle for power, while individual citizens attempt to cope with the logic of becoming spectators of the conflict. Migration for some has been some sort of solution, at least in the area of personal security for those who felt the only way to survive was migrating to a safe place like Canada and here they attempt to build some sense of normality. For many Colombians another element of this conflict is provided also by a degree of social imbalance and social stratification resulting from a class structure in the old country that is traditional and unable to find new alternatives to deal with a fifty-year-old problem. In other words, there is a sense that traditional elites have stagnated and have not responded to the contemporary challenges raised by the more mobile middle professional class. Many respondents and participants of focus groups clearly identified the “government” and the current governance system as incapable to respond to the outlined challenge and to a great extent expressed grief and frustration for the seemingly locked conflict. An expression of the frustration and a sense of hopelessness is the fact that many responded that they would not consider to go back to Colombia. In effect, 75% responded that they would not return to Colombia because of uncertainty, lack of safety and the collapse of the rule of law in the country. Another important element of this seemingly lack of interest had to do with the degree of retention by Canada of the Colombian population

here. As a matter of fact, a significant number of respondents indicated that they were feeling already settled here, and therefore moving back would be a difficult decision.

But yet, even if there is a strong sense of discontent, is there a role for the Colombian Diaspora to contribute to the problem solving and peace building in that country? In general the answer is yes and goes from moderate to high interest 80% of the cases. Given that there are many elements that hampered the current relationship with the country of origin such as lack of organizations, resources, specific opportunities to contribute, information or relatively small experience in the matter, still there is a sense of interest to participate if the conditions and motivation were right. For instance, from appropriate institutional support and the evolution of a trustworthy leadership, including resources such as time, logistics and information would provide incentives for the participation of the community here in Canada. In addition, this potential could increase if in Colombia itself there were some changes or measures that would contribute to the provision of an atmosphere of change. Among the elements identified in the latter we may include a potential cease fire, meaningful negotiations, government led by political figures with better perception in regards to corruption ties or independence, and ultimately, related to all of the above is an improvement of quality of life for the families of those residing here in Canada.

The role of the Colombian Canadian Diaspora in Building for Peace in the Homeland

As it was written in our proposal to undertake this study, this research team was committed to presenting a conclusion that would form the baseline for possible initiatives within a transnational framework regarding Colombia and the Canadian Colombian

communities and will assist the dialogue on capacity building for peace and development, the roles of the diaspora and its potential for participation on processes of engagement in peacebuilding and development. In the research process while we initially found some quite scepticism as to the task we were undertaking we were provided with great support from many of our institutional partners as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Undoubtedly, as the process moved quickly as to the deadlines for the provision of this report, the interest and response grew quickly, and most significantly with the interest it emerged a vision as to how this work of Diaspora engagement could grow and contribute to the process of building peace and development in Colombia. As the focus groups took place and dialogue ensued, there was an emergent view that in spite “of the community being hearing about peace for half a century and no credible conclusions”, there were still opportunities to achieve progress in this field.

The research undertaken did not focus on a prescriptive paper, but rather in the exploration as to the possibilities of the community in providing some elements for building some sort of idea in the field of potential actions regarding the process in Colombia. The community response was actually decisive and clear as to the provision of how initiatives may take place and highlighted some fundamental pieces for constructing work in this area.

The first elements mentioned many times and expressed in different forms is **absence of a legitimate project or program to confront the historic conflict of Colombia.** As expressed by many of the members of the community in Toronto, the conflict has lasted already for more than fifty years and the solution seems to be further away. The Colombian institutions have not being able to respond and we have a situation now that seems to produce more frustration and resentment. The corruption in the system

is one of the largest barriers to progress and governments are falling under this circumstance while violence continues to be ever present and the amount of disruption to life and the economy of the country has continued to undermine the development of individual Colombians in the cities while we are talking about three million of displaced Colombians in the countryside. So, for many, one of the desired elements for change is the **designing of a project and a vision for the country**. However, this particular project or initiative must take place in accordance with certain framework that will facilitate first its creation and design, and then its implementation if to succeed.

The first element for the building of this project requires a fundamental resource, which is the participation of **community stakeholders that are credible and legitimate in the eyes of the community**. In other words, the framework regarding community leaders implies that they have to some extent be recognized by the Colombian community itself so that they are able to engage and represent the community at all levels. Although, there is no descriptive definition of what leadership in this context actually entails, the cautionary note here is that of independent leadership distant from the “corruption” and interests in Colombia. In addition, it can be inferred that such leaders will have to be able to engage international institutions at all levels so as to facilitate conversations leading to the promotion of changes in the political culture and institution building within Colombia.

The third element of this initiative has to do with the actual **institution and/or organization to carry out such project**. As mentioned in the area of leadership regarding individuals, there is also a parallel element in the institutional side. More specifically, one area that also received an important degree of recognition within this consultation had to do so far with the absence of an organization in the community able

to bring together the community around a vision or project. When community members were asked if they had participated in initiatives regarding Colombian issues, a significant number expressed that they had not done so because there were no Colombians' institutions able to bring together the larger community. Hence, it is clear that in the area of community organization and engagement there is still a significant element missing from an overarching perspective. Still, there is an element of caution to be presented here regarding Colombian organizations in Canada. In the Colombian community there are a series of organizations which have done work in the community for a significant number of years and have mastered authority among its members, yet the Colombian community is suggesting very specifically that in regards to the actual issues of civic engagement, and from a more "transnational perspective" there are no organizations yet able to carry the day in representing the larger interests of the Diaspora. Among the characteristics which this "transnational organization" should have include the capacities to connect with educational institutions, churches, Foreign Affairs Colombia, Foreign Affairs Canada, the United Nations, the International Red Cross, be recognized by the private and public sector, be able to do research or connect to research institutions. In addition, one important comment that was strongly suggested is that the United Nations as an institution involved in peace and conflict resolution could make a very important contribution to the process from the perspective of Colombians abroad as a legitimate body whose support should be sought in the process. Yet, there is the perception that within Colombia itself this issue would be more contested, as the traditional structures are more resistant to entertain international proposals regarding the issues of conflict in the country.

Hence, there is clarity that Colombians feel there are possibilities for a “transnational approach” in dealing with the issues of peace building and conflict resolution in the home country, yet the actual workings of the project or initiative need to be defined in accordance with some of the conditions established above and clearly through the establishment of some sort of community process called very likely by the diversity of leaders of institutions in the Diaspora. But most important, it is clear that contrary to some of the initial scepticism there is room for the community to come together in such overarching community project.

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