



# *PCS in Latin America* 1979-2018

Promoting Peace with Justice



PROJECT COUNSELLING SERVICE



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## Index of acronyms and abbreviations

ACPD	Consultative Assembly of Uprooted Populations (Guatemala)	FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front (Nicaragua)
ADFADAH	Departmental Association of Families of Detainees and Persons Disappeared and Assassinated by Subversive Violence in Huancavelica (Peru)	HEKS	<i>Hilfswerk der evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz</i> (Swiss Interchurch Aid) (Switzerland)
ANFASEP	Association of Families of the Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared of Peru	IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (OAS)
ANUC	National Association of Farmworkers (Colombia)	ICCO	Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (Netherlands)
APRODEH	Association for Human Rights (Peru)	ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
ARMIF	Regional Association on Forced Migration	IDL	Legal Defence Institute (Peru)
ASCODAS	Colombian Association for Social Assistance	IEP	Institute of Peruvian Studies
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (United Kingdom)	ILSA	Latin American Institute for Alternative Legal Services (Colombia)
CAMEX	Central America and Mexico Office (PCS)	INSSBI	(formerly) Nicaraguan Institute for Social Security and Welfare (Nicaragua)
CD	<i>Consejo Directivo</i> (Board of Directors) (PCS, from 2007)	INTA	National Institute for Agrarian Transformation (Guatemala)
CEAS	Episcopal Commission for Social Action (Peru)	IOM	International Organization for Migration
CEPAD	Council of Evangelical Churches for Denominational Alliance (Nicaragua)	IPC	Popular Training Institute (Colombia)
CIDCA	Centre for Information and Documentation on the Atlantic Coast (Nicaragua)	LACC	Latin American Consultative Committee
CIMADE	(formerly) <i>Comité inter-mouvements auprès des évacués</i> (France)	M-19	19th of April Movement (Colombia)
CINEP	Centre for Research and Popular Education (Colombia)	MIDINRA	Ministry for Agrarian Reform (Nicaragua)
CIREFCA	International Conference on Central American Refugees	MOVEICE	Movement of Victims of State Crimes (Colombia)
CNR	Guatemala National Reconciliation Commission	MRQL	Quintín Lame Revolutionary Movement (Colombia)
CODAIF	Diocesan Committee for Aid to Cross-border Immigrants	MRTA	Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Peru)
CODHES	Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (Colombia)	NGO	Non-governmental organization
COFADER	National Committee of Families of Detainees, Missing Persons and Refugees (Peru)	NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
CONDECOREP	National Coordination of Displaced People and Communities in Reconstruction of Peru	OAS	Organization of American States
CONDEG	National Council of Displaced People of Guatemala	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CONGCOOP	Coordination of Cooperatives and NGOs of Guatemala	OFF	Popular Women's Organization (Colombia)
CPR	Communities of Population in Resistance (Guatemala)	PAC	Civil Self-Defence Patrol (Guatemala)
CRIPDES	(formerly) Christian Committee for Displaced Persons of El Salvador	PARinAC	Partnership in Action
CUSO	(formerly) Canadian University Service Overseas	PBI	Peace Brigades International
CVR	Truth and Reconciliation Commission	PCS	Project Counselling Service
DIAL	Interagency Dialogue in Colombia	PRODERE	Development Program for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	PWRDF	Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (Canada)
ELN	National Liberation Army (Colombia)	RAAN	Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region (Nicaragua)
EPL	Popular Liberation Army (Colombia)	REMHI	Recovery of Historical Memory Project (Guatemala)
ESCR	Human, economic, social and cultural human rights (UN)	SEDEPAC	Service, Development and Peace (Mexico)
EU	European Union	SG	Sponsorship Group (Board)
FACS	Augusto César Sandino Foundation (Nicaragua)	SL	Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) (Peru)
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	TASC	Triple Agency Sub-Committee
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (El Salvador)	UK	United Kingdom
FOREFEM	Regional Forum on Refugee and Repatriated Women	UN	United Nations
		UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
		UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
		URNG	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity
		USAID	United States Agency for International Development





Salvadoran refugees in Colomoncagua, Honduras, 1987





# Introduction

**After** nearly forty years, the Project Counselling Service (PCS) has decided to cease operations and close its head office in Colombia and its office for Central America and Mexico in Guatemala. The decision reflects the need to acknowledge that PCS has fulfilled its role as a partnership organization working in solidarity throughout the stages of transition towards peace in the region.

This document recounts PCS's main contributions, at various levels, to political and social processes during times of war and transition to peace and democracy in Latin America. PCS worked regionally and at the country level in Mexico, Central and South America, in contexts of repression and political violence that generated massive flows of internally displaced people, refugees and exiles.

These pages attempt to capture PCS's most significant contributions through the voices of those involved, directly or indirectly, in the processes and mechanisms that arose and were accompanied by PCS. It is not a comprehensive systematization nor an historical account of the work of PCS over its forty years of existence. The aim is to highlight the role of PCS in the major political and social developments that led to and characterized the various periods of violence, armed conflict, transition and peace-building in the countries and regions of Latin America.

The sources included interviews with people who were members of PCS or collaborated as part of the advisory team, as well as partners involved in the programs in each country. Some of the interviews were conducted by telephone and electronically, while others occurred in meetings and conversations held during visits to Guatemala (Guatemala City and the Ixcán region), Peru (Lima and Ayacucho) and in Bogotá, Colombia. The consultation included a review of institutional documents, contributions to the text by the Board of Directors and people who were part of PCS's staff team, academic and news articles, official documents and reports from international organizations that allude to the organization's contribution to various processes.

The job of reviewing and analyzing the sources was not easy, not only because the work was undertaken amid office closures (which made searching through the archive more complicated) but also because of the death of the person who should have guided and accompanied the gathering of these recollections: Diana Ávila, chair of the Board of Directors of PCS, who fostered the work of the organization over the course of three decades with dedication, charisma and total commitment. These words are dedicated to her life and work, to her memory.

The document is divided into four parts, corresponding to periods of political change and transformation in Central America, Colombia and Peru and the Southern Cone, during which PCS began and carried out its work, adapting to the circumstances of the times and endeavouring always to uphold its principles and objectives. The first chapter deals with the emergence of PCS at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, and identifies how PCS sought to address numerous challenges at a time when state repression and parastatal violence were at their height, under authoritarian governments and in contexts of internal armed conflict. The second chapter covers the 1980s and highlights the innovative aspects of PCS's counselling strategy, during a period that saw the demise of dictatorships in the Southern Cone, human rights crises in Colombia, Peru and Central America and the dawn of peace talks in El Salvador and Guatemala. The third chapter spans the 1990s and focuses on the role of PCS in the peace accords of Central America and the first stage of their implementation, the contributions of PCS to the transition

process in Peru and the beginning of the talks between the government and the FARC guerrilla group in Colombia. The fourth and final chapter encompasses the last phase of PCS, including contributions to peace negotiations in Colombia and transition in Peru. It also covers the shift in PCS from a consortium of international agencies to becoming a Latin American NGO, right up to the decision on the definitive closure of its offices.



Diana Ávila, Chair of the PCS Board of Directors until 2017





Displaced people in Lima, 1989

# A DREAM IS BORN IN THE MIDST OF A NIGHTMARE

## 1. The eighties: vibrancy and repression

From the 1970s until the mid 1990s, military dictatorship, mostly imposed through coups d'état, became the common denominator of the battle against the spectre of revolution or social transformation in fourteen of the twenty countries of Latin America. Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Haiti, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia were all governed by violent and repressive military regimes that defended the establishment.<sup>1</sup>

In Colombia and Peru, paramilitary groups linked to the State and the armed forces were formed and became the mainstay of state terror and repression, for which the fight against guerrilla groups served as a pretext, unleashing internal armed conflicts that spread throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 emboldened armed revolutionary struggles in Central and South America, encouraging the emergence of guerrilla movements that were inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology<sup>3</sup>. The Sandinista People's Revolution in 1979, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (named after Augusto César Sandino) put an end to the dictatorship of the Somoza family and established a democratic government which was left-wing and progressive in character.

Along with processes of armed organization, various forms of social organization and collective action began to develop. Through social movements and mobilization, specific demands for justice, social equality and participation began to take centre stage. The struggle for land was central to indigenous and rural movements, the leadership of women in the struggle for gender equality influenced the demand for social and political rights, the unions and the workers' movement took up the rallying

cry for labour rights and the student movement expanded the fight for participation and freedom of expression. *Liberation theology*<sup>4</sup>, which arose in the sixties in Latin America, became more widespread and grew stronger as a Christian movement that brought together various branches of the Catholic and protestant churches. This sector of the church contributed to, and was enriched by, the main social struggles of the time, forming a vital alliance. The Jesuit community played a key role in liberation processes through their grassroots work in various countries, particularly Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, as many of these recollections bear witness..

## 2. Refuge and the NGOs

The political environment was distinctly polarized. The authoritarian regimes of the time divided society into "good" and "bad" people, depending on whether they supported the regime or not. Civil society organizations committed to defending human rights were considered to be allies of the enemy and were persecuted because of the complaints they made about abuses and violations of fundamental rights committed by agents of the state. In this context of violence, a large number of refugees, exiles and displaced people left their homes and countries to safeguard their lives. These groups were regarded with suspicion, accused of being allies of the guerrillas and responsible for supplying weapons to the organizations that had taken up arms against the regime, among other accusations. In Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, refugees and displaced people were persecuted, kept under surveillance and, in many instances, massacred.

By the end of the decade, figures for refugees and internally displaced people in Central America varied between 1.8 and 2.8 million (ten per cent of Central Americans were either displaced or refugees). State terrorism in El



**Figure 1. Countries of origin and reception of internally displaced persons, refugees, and exiles where PCS worked**







Internally displaced family in Guatemala, 1990

Salvador and Guatemala, and Nicaragua in the 1970s, meant the geography of refuge was quite complicated. Thousands of people were constantly arriving in Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua. There were around 300,000 Central American refugees in Mexico alone, most of them – around 100,000 – on an irregular basis (without documentation authorising them to enter and remain in other countries).<sup>5</sup> Around 46,000 Guatemalans from rural areas reached Chiapas, where social organizations that were independent of the Mexican government were located. This was a key factor in the emergence of solidarity NGOs.

A large number of Uruguayan, Chilean and Argentinian exiles, driven out and banished by the respective dictatorships, sought refuge in Europe, North America and other Latin American countries but there is no definitive estimate for the vast numbers who had to flee during this period. The aid agencies that worked with these groups on a voluntary basis, providing food, shelter and medicines, were also the targets of political persecution.

The 1980s saw a proliferation of non-governmental organizations on the international stage, whose actions were independent of government and political parties and which focused on accompanying and providing services to conflict-affected populations in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> By this time, Latin America had a history of social struggle and collective action to address poverty and marginalization.<sup>7</sup> PCS helped these seeds to grow.

### 3. A dream is born

In the midst of this political turbulence, a group of people engaged with Latin America, who were working for Canadian and European aid and development agencies, decided to set up an independent organization in 1979. PCS was founded as a consortium of agencies with experience in assisting political exiles and involved in the anti-colonial struggles of the 1970s in southern Africa (South Africa, Angola and Mozambique). They included the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the University Assistance Fund (Netherlands), Cimade (France) and the Canadian agency Inter Pares.<sup>8</sup> The agencies who formed PCS served as its Sponsorship Group, which functioned as a Board of Directors and met twice a year. It was led by a Monitoring Agency, a role carried out by the Danish Refugee Council.

The aim was to find long-lasting, decent solutions for Latin American refugees within the Latin American continent. PCS's member agencies were convinced that resettlement in Europe and North America was not the solution. In the words of Herman van Aken:

*The main purpose was to find ways of being more effective, providing assistance to refugee groups and strengthening their voice in international platforms. The founders were not operational agencies with their own offices in the field but rather worked through local partners. We thought it would be more effective if*



Internally displaced people in Guatemala, 1990

*together, as PCS, we were to set up a field office through which we could combine forces and support local agencies.* (Interview with Herman van Aken, member of the PCS Sponsorship Group [SG] and currently of the Board of Directors, June 27, 2017.)

The initiative was founded on the deep conviction that refugees and displaced people were the lead players of their own lives and that any strategies must go beyond the welfare-oriented approach which was the order of the day in humanitarian work at the time. PCS's plan was to operate in fourteen Latin American countries, from Mexico to Chile.<sup>9</sup> The focus was initially on refugees from the Southern Cone because such a large number of refugees from that region had arrived in Europe and North America, where PCS's founding agencies were headquartered, seeking international protection. Later on the work extended to Central America and eventually, at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, to the Andean region (Colombia and Peru). The work during this decade included programs for refugees, integration initiatives for internally displaced people and programs to assist returnees in changing contexts (Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, then later in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua).

PCS reacted to the political context in ways which were in many ways innovative as well as timely. According to Gordon Hutchison, former Executive Director of PCS, the location of the head office in San José, Costa Rica was "the right place at the right time" (Costa Rica did not face the same security problems as other countries). It was established just as internal armed conflict burgeoned in Central America. It also started working just when the government of the United States became politically and militarily more involved in those conflicts. PCS had great potential to operate in Central America at a time when few international NGOs had a physical presence in the region, with the exception of Oxfam UK, Diakonia (Sweden), Catholic Relief Services (USA) and Lutheran World Relief (USA). The International Mission status granted to PCS in Costa Rica enabled PCS to travel and work throughout the Central America region.

Herman van Aken and Brian Murphy agree that the focus of PCS's work was their counselling methodology, which was based on the conviction that the objective was to help strengthen local partners and agencies and build their effectiveness as political actors rather than emergency material aid. International NGOs needed to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs to include refugees in their work and in development programs.



This meant contributing funding and accompaniment to build their capacity to pursue their own agendas with international agencies, improve their capacity to plan and manage projects and to engage in dialogue with multilateral agencies, governments, NGOs and others.

In the words of Laura Hurtado, Advisor with the Consultative Assembly of Uprooted Populations (ACPD) in Guatemala:

*At this stage of cooperation, despite the difference between local actors and international partner agencies, there was real policy dialogue with PCS about building processes on a large scale rather than discussions about one-off projects, which is what usually happened with aid agencies (...) PCS, based in Costa Rica, had a regional vision and contacts throughout Central America. They fostered the sharing of experiences. Many agencies donated large amounts of funding but without the kind of policy discussions that we always had with PCS. (Meeting with NGOs and social organizations in Guatemala City, August 22, 2017.)*

The SG created a small project Discretionary Fund, which could be used by staff teams in each country with the approval of the SG agencies. Some of the agencies started to channel all their work in Latin America through PCS, while others continued to support projects directly. The Fund served to respond to emergency situations when uprooted populations, social leaders and human rights advocates were particularly at risk.

*We received the first lot of support in early 1982-1983. Gordon (Hutchison) supported us in submitting complaints and seeking solidarity when Guatemalan refugees in Mexico were constantly being arrested and he helped to establish links with European protestant church solidarity groups and agencies (...) PCS was notable for their ability to respond immediately when needed, at a difficult time when urgent help was required. At a meeting with Gordon in Mexico we agreed to set up an emergency fund, which functioned very well, to get people in danger out of the country. Groups of Guatemalan refugees were the first to receive support. After that figures such as Alfonso Bauer supported missions to visit the areas to which*



Mapuche Authority, PCS, Chile, 1989

*the refugees would return. (Meeting with CONGCOOP in Guatemala City, August 22, 2017.)*

It is true to say that PCS was innovative in many ways. First of all, because PCS made a commitment to helping populations that they understood to be social actors. The aim, according to Brian Murphy, was to provide a policy alternative that would enable those communities to maintain links with their organizational structures and forms of production.

This approach meant understanding displacement and refuge as the product of social and economic reality, not just as a humanitarian problem. It also meant relating to these people in a more horizontal way, recognising their role as agents of political change, capable of contributing to rebuilding their own lives and their countries once the peacebuilding process got underway. This was a key feature of the counselling strategy.

The innovative features of PCS in the field of aid agencies and humanitarian action were many: geographic location in Latin America rather than in refugee reception countries in Europe and North America; concern to support projects focused on self-help, social integration and lasting solutions; insistence on communicating what was going on in Latin America to Europe and North America (an aspect of the strategy that PCS maintained throughout); commitment to remaining small in order

to avoid turning into a bureaucratic machine; flexibility and openness to new areas of work; great sensitivity to the needs of refugees and displaced people; insistence on involving Latin American activists and leaders through an advisory body (Latin American Consultative Committee, LACC);<sup>10</sup> and a conviction that PCS should not turn into an NGO focused on implementing projects and resources in the field.<sup>11</sup> The variety of opinions and debate that took place within the Sponsorship Group on the nature of humanitarian organizations in situations of armed conflict were reflected in PCS's conversations and relationships with partner organisations across Latin America.

To sum up, PCS's contributions in the early years of the 1980s consisted in promoting a different type of cooperation which endorsed the refugee populations' collective projects rather than providing aid for individual survival needs, bolstered their political capacity to steer international aid and development cooperation and insisted on their right to participate in negotiations and peacebuilding processes. All of this entailed a personal commitment on the part of each and every member, people who were prepared to risk their lives in pursuit of autonomy, horizontal relationships and dignity for refugees, in areas where the relentless harassment of the population, stigmatized for being associated with guerrilla groups, meant constant danger. It also implied a deep conviction that peace and freedom were possible. Thus began the collective dream.

## NOTES

1. Augusto Pinochet's 1973 coup d'état in Chile ushered in a dictatorship that remained in place until 1990. The 1976 military coup in Argentina marked the beginning of a civil-military dictatorship known as the "National Reorganization Process" which lasted until 1983. In Brazil, the dictatorship that followed the coup d'état of 1964 remained until 1985. In El Salvador, a group of the military took power in 1979 and set up the provisional Revolutionary Government Junta, with control later passing to the Ministry of Defence and subsequent changes up to the Peace Accords of 1992. In Guatemala, the 1983 coup d'état led by Efraín Ríos Montt prolonged the dictatorial regime until 1996, one of the most violently repressive governments in all Latin America with its "scorched earth" policy. In Honduras, a long tradition of military dictatorship ended with a handover to civilian government in 1981. In Nicaragua, "somocismo" consolidated the Somoza family dictatorship until 1979, when it was curbed by the Nicaraguan Revolution. In Panama, the 1968 coup d'état led by General Omar Torrijos resulted in a military dictatorship that lasted until 1989 when the United States, paradoxically, invaded the country to oust and apprehend Manuel Antonio Noriega, who had been one of their main allies in their counter insurgency efforts in the region. In Cuba, the 1959 revolution led by the 26th of July Movement toppled the coup d'état of 1952, organised by Fulgencio Batista.
2. The emergence of Liberal guerrilla groups in Colombia in the 1950s heralded the emergence of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the 1960s, following the government of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957) and a power-sharing deal to alternate power between the major parties (Liberal and Conservative). The two-party system kept third political forces out of the electoral race and led to a series of armed struggles which spread throughout the country. Armed conflict formed the backdrop in Peru with the emergence of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrilla movement and the military offensive of Alberto Fujimori's government (1990-1995 y 1995-2000).
3. The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador; the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in Guatemala; "The Family" in Costa Rica; the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement in Uruguay; the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September Communist League in Mexico; the Lautaro Youth Movement, the Organized Vanguard of the People, the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front and the Revolutionary Left Movement in Chile; the Montoneros group, the People's Revolutionary Army, the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Peronist Armed Forces in Argentina; the Nancáhuazú Guerrilla and the Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army in Bolivia; the Revolutionary Left Movement, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and Sendero Luminoso (SL) in Peru; the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement (M-19) and the Quintín Lame Movement in Colombia, among others.
4. Liberation theology maintained that a preferential option for the poor is a requirement of Christianity and drew on political reflection in the social sciences and humanities to define how this option should be put into practice. Living faith in practice required a struggle for freedom from various forms of social oppression, which translated into members of the Church accompanying and participating directly in civil and armed resistance (for instance, the participation of Domingo Laín, Camilo Torres and Manuel Pérez in the National Liberation Army in Colombia).
5. Between 1980 and 1984, 87% of refugees had travelled to Mexico and the United States, with most Central Americans scattered throughout Mexico. See AGUAYO, Sergio (1992). "Del Anonimato al Protagonismo: Los organismos no gubernamentales y el éxodo centroamericano" ("From Anonymity to Leadership: Non-governmental organizations and the Central American exodus"), in *Revista Foro Internacional* Vol. XXXII, 1 (127) January-March 1992, pp. 323-341.



6. The growth of these NGOs paralleled the growth in bureaucracy and the need to make up for the shortcomings of UNHCR, UNDP and official aid agencies which focused on poverty alleviation and ignored the deepest roots and impact of the humanitarian crisis, reducing their actions to installing refugee camps in order to deliver emergency aid. In 1986 northern NGOs from OECD countries raised over three million dollars. In Central America, ten international NGOs were in operation and hundreds of local organizations, managing around 250 million dollars per year. See Sergio Aguayo, *ibíd.*, p. 324.
7. PEARCE, Jenny (1996). *Critical Appreciation of the work and experience of the Project Counselling Service for Latin American Refugees in Central America*
8. Later members were Dutch Inter-Church Aid (replacing UAF), Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS), War on Want (UK) and the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR).
9. MURPHY, Brian (1989). *Conceptual History of the Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos/PCS*. Ottawa: Inter Pares. Unpublished.
10. The first meeting of the LACC was held in Costa Rica in September 1982. According to Herman van Aken, although the outlook of the SG agencies dominated policy in the early years, gradually the use of Spanish increased within the Board and the Latin American perspective became a stronger focus.
11. Jenny Pearce, *op. cit.*



Square where the FMLN demobilized, 1992

## 1980-1990. THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

**PCS's** work style was innovative in several senses. Neither the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) nor the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had much experience in Central America. They were working with an agency mentality and lacked experience with displaced persons and organized refugees who were aware of their own leading role.<sup>12</sup> The nature of Central American conflicts meant there had to be trust between humanitarian agencies and the affected populations. With the United States helping the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala as well as the counterinsurgency in Nicaragua (in an ongoing attempt to destabilize the FSLN government after the 1979 Sandinista revolution), the world of multilateral agencies was under suspicion.

NGOs played a major role in disassociating humanitarian aid from the governments, and PCS's role was crucial at that time of crisis. Although the SG had made the decision to work closely with UNHCR in Central America (with regional offices in Mexico City and Costa Rica), its purpose was to do the kind of work UN agencies were unable to do because of their restricted mandates. PCS's efforts at this stage focused on making the problem of refugee and forced internal displacement more **visible** and **recognition** of these populations as civil society and political actors. This implied, of course, that **protection of life and integrity** for these people was constantly the priority in a context of hostility against refugees and displaced persons as well as against non-governmental organizations working in defence of human rights.

PCS's Sponsorship Group (SG) found itself in a situation with, on the one hand, a humanitarian view of aid, and on the other, tensions faced by the team on the ground, with the certainty that trust had to be built through political organizations recognized by the refugees and displaced persons. The tensions and dilemmas were then brought

before the agencies comprising the PCS consortium, and internal debates reflected this:

*The PCS member agencies cooperated regarding the refugees, but each organization had its own policies and preferences in relation to specific populations. Deciding whether to continue working solely with refugees (in line with the mandate of the UNHCR and the Norwegian and Danish Refugee Councils) or also to include internally displaced persons was the subject of lengthy debate within the SG. Other agencies focused much more on the field of human rights and the role of women as victims of violence and central actors (which was an important emphasis from the start). (Interview with Herman van Aken, PCS board member, June 27, 2017)*

### 1. Counselling: advice on solidarity and horizontal relationships

During this period, PCS set up offices in various countries, although it continued to centralize its work in San José (Costa Rica). From those headquarters, PCS established offices in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and Ecuador (in association with the Danish Refugee Council). The priority was no longer Costa Rica as a receiving country for refugees but rather the focus of the work was on other countries with internally displaced people, refugees and returnees. Later, after 1989, PCS explored work with internally displaced people in Colombia and Peru and Colombian and Peruvian refugees in Ecuador.

From 1988 to 1990, with the return of democratic governments in the Southern Cone countries, PCS supported social and employment reintegration ("reinserción laboral") programs for returned exiles in Chile, Argentina





Mayan women (photo provided by Cristina Chiquin)

and Uruguay. New staff members were hired in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. One of the problems that arose at that time for PCS concerned the different mandates and *modus operandi* of the agencies comprising the Sponsorship Group: how and where to act as PCS. The history of PCS and its offices on the ground (Santiago, Lima, Bogotá, Quito, San José, Guatemala City, San Salvador and Managua) was a response not only to the places with the largest flow of refugees, but also the different interests of the SG agencies.

*At times it became difficult to continue working jointly as a single organization. The Refugee Councils grew with time and became quite operational, while other SG agencies continued to support the development of local organizations in Latin America. (Interview with Herman van Aken, PCS Board member, June 27, 2017)*

Despite the differences, there was a consensus within the SG as to how to behave and the principles behind PCS's relationships, which translated into the concept of counselling as a strategy. The word *counselling* in the organization's name reflects the central axis of its action: offering accompaniment to local organizations. PCS defined counselling as a special form of solidarity that involved providing organizations not only with material support but also accompaniment that helped to confer

the legitimacy and credibility needed to raise funds from other agencies and speak with other political actors.

Flexibility and trust in their local partners were required of the SG agencies if they were to support high-risk and occasionally clandestine work (political polarization, stigmatization and persecution of uprooted peoples and human rights organizations were the order of the day).<sup>13</sup> Their conviction that agencies from the North could not work directly on the ground meant they had to form horizontal partnerships with local organizations.<sup>14</sup> Characterized by ongoing dialogue with partners to decide the types of projects to carry out, PCS went ahead with these partnerships in the conviction that victims and local actors had the inalienable right to play a leading role in the historical processes in which they were involved.

Executive Director Diana Ávila and SG member Brian Murphy (Inter Pares, Canada) later refined the counselling concept, defining it as "an integrated activity that fosters empowerment of local actors in the processes in which they are immersed. It is a combination of critical assistance and local capacity building, in an ongoing pursuit for more horizontal partnerships."<sup>15</sup>

These actions translated into different types of accompaniment or counselling. The first, a **political** or strategic



type, sought to position local actors through support for political dialogue and debate with other groups and sectors to influence decisions that directly involved social groups in the process of organization. A second **technical** type consisted in providing local organizations with advice and accompaniment for raising and directly implementing funds for their projects. It included management strengthening and training. A third **organizational** type was based on accompaniment for local organizations, vulnerable populations (such as refugees and internally displaced persons), social leaders opposing authoritarian regimes and defenders of human rights. It included support for networking and partnering with other civil society actors and international and national organizations for the purpose of building solidarity and fostering collective actions aimed at achieving their goals. A fourth **programming** type consisted of providing advice on project design, implementation and evaluation. This line of work was essential in the Central American post-conflict period, since the reconstruction phase entailed the implementation of international funds through national and local NGOs, as described in the following pages. The next section gives some examples of counselling.

## 2. Political counselling: with the voice and face of displaced people and refugees

The political component of PCS advice involved, primarily, a **seeking out of political spaces** where civil society actors could position their points of view and defend their stakes.

### 2.1. Opening political space in pursuit of peace

During the 1980s, PCS encouraged and participated in many meetings, forums, consultations and regional conferences. PCS had initiated work in Mexico and Costa Rica with local NGOs who worked with refugees (focusing their partnerships on churches and grassroots organizations) and pioneered the positioning of refugee organizations as agents capable of influencing political decisions. Without a doubt, the primary contribution in the 1980s was the positioning of national NGOs and organizations of refugees and displaced persons in the **International Conference on Central American Refugees** (CIREFCA), which preceded the signing of peace accords in Guatemala and El Salvador. A few historical events illustrate PCS's role at key junctures.

In 1982, in San José, Costa Rica, together with several regionally and locally-based NGOs, PCS spearheaded the **Central American Consultation on Refugees** to "set up a permanent coordinating body in the region and take on a "belligerent" role in relation to UNHCR and the governments."<sup>16</sup> This initiative, in which Church World Service and the American Friends Service Committee participated, was essential for underlining the role of Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil society organizations in refuge and displacement solutions and in pursuit of peace. In 1984, PCS helped organize a **consultation in Nyon**, Switzerland on refugees and displaced persons in Central America and Mexico, sponsored by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), which held consultative status at the UN, and of which several SG agencies were members.

This power relationship helped highlight internal displacement and contributed to transition processes. In December of that same year, Latin American governments and UNHCR met in Cartagena, Colombia to discuss the situation of forced displacement in the region and move forward on an expanded definition of refugee that would acknowledge flows within countries as part of the same phenomenon. In 1984, UNHCR approved the **Cartagena Declaration on Refugees**, recognizing factors such as internal armed conflict, violations of international humanitarian law, and massive and systematic violations of human rights as causes of refugee situations. This was an achievement for PCS, since the Declaration was partially a response to pressure from ICVA and PCS.<sup>17</sup>

In May 1986, the so-called **Esquipulas I** meeting took place, attended by five Central American presidents, in a move to solve armed conflicts in the region. In May 1987, UNHCR called together an advisory group to identify solutions for the problems of Central American refugees. The group recommended holding a regional conference in 1988 – postponed until 1989 – known as **CIREFCA** (International Conference on Central American Refugees). Meanwhile, that same year, Guatemalan refugees created Permanent Commissions (assisted by PCS and other international agencies): delegations that represented them nationally and internationally on all aspects of their refugee situation and their anticipated return to their country. This facilitated their participation in regional conferences and meetings.

On July 5, 1987, the **First Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations for Aid to Central American Refugees**, convened by SEDEPAC (Service, Development and Peace) was held in Mexico City. At this meeting, recognition and participation was expanded to 50 national and international organizations, including refugee representation appearing in public for the first time. The participating organizations decided to promote a regional position and joint viewpoint – of the refugee populations and the organizations working to help refugees – at CIREFCA. In August of that same year, the **Esquipulas II** meeting was held in Guatemala City, at which Central American heads of state<sup>18</sup> reached an agreement on economic cooperation and a basic structure for peaceful resolution of the conflicts.

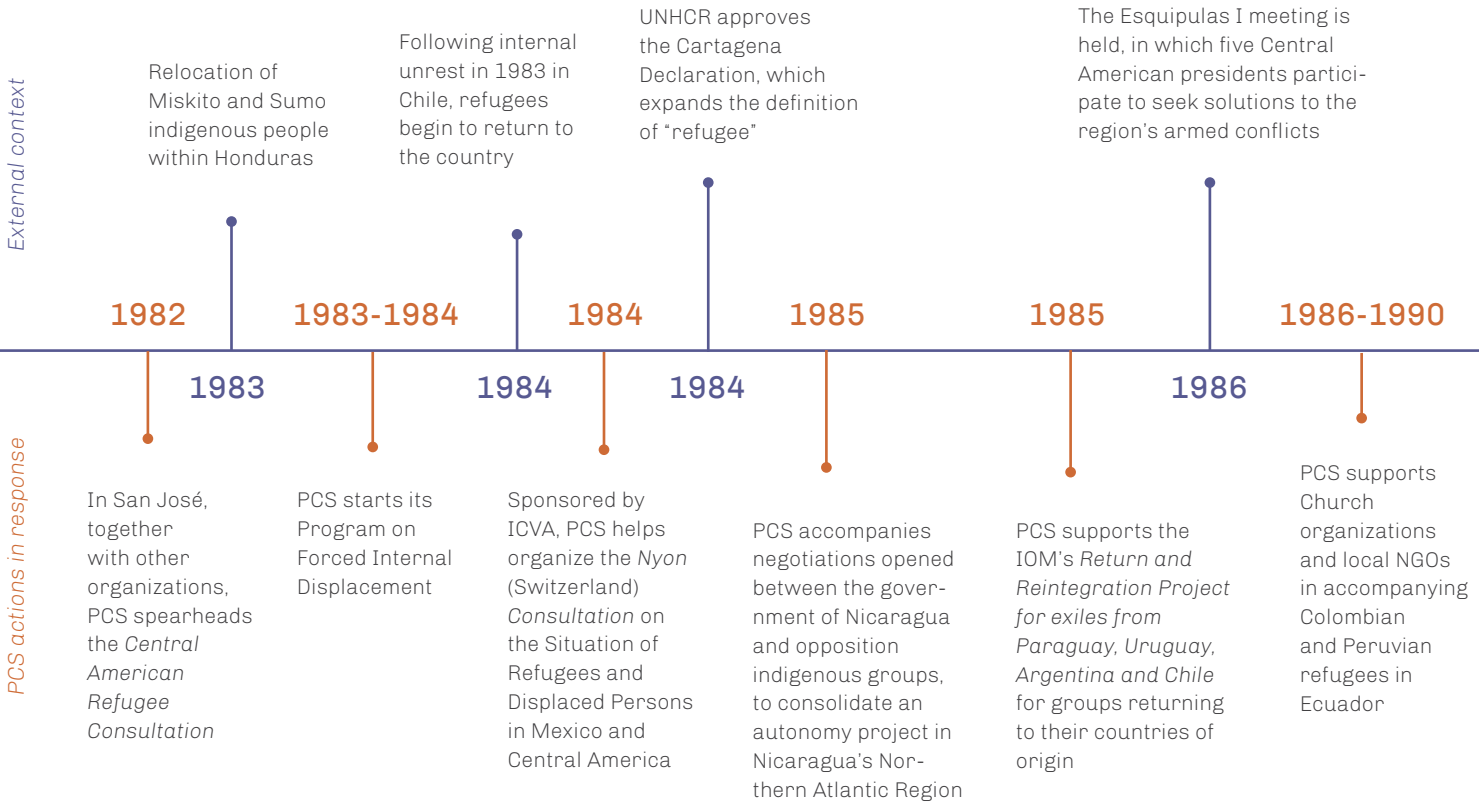
An agreement was signed - "Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America"<sup>19</sup> – which recognized the connection between peacebuilding and development, drew attention to the situation of

internally displaced persons and appealed to the international community for assistance to help care for them and facilitate the repatriation of refugees.

In 1988, the **Second Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations for Aid to Central American Refugees** was held, at which the Informal Follow-up Group to CIREFCA was formed with Oxfam UK, PCS and three Mexican national NGOs as members: CODIAF, Comité del Distrito Federal (DF Committee) and Comunidad Interdisciplinaria de Estudios Migratorios (Interdisciplinary Community on Migration Studies). The purpose of this group was to achieve NGO participation in CIREFCA from all countries where there were refugees and displaced persons.

In 1989, the **First International NGO Conference on Central American Refugees, Displaced Persons and Returnees** was held in Mexico City with the participation of UNHCR. The participating organizations approved a document, created a follow-up committee headed by

Timeline 1. Historic context in which PCS operated during the 1980s



Diakonia (Sweden) in El Salvador and came to a decision to fight for space in CIREFCA. A strategic partnership between UNHCR and the NGOs began to take shape.

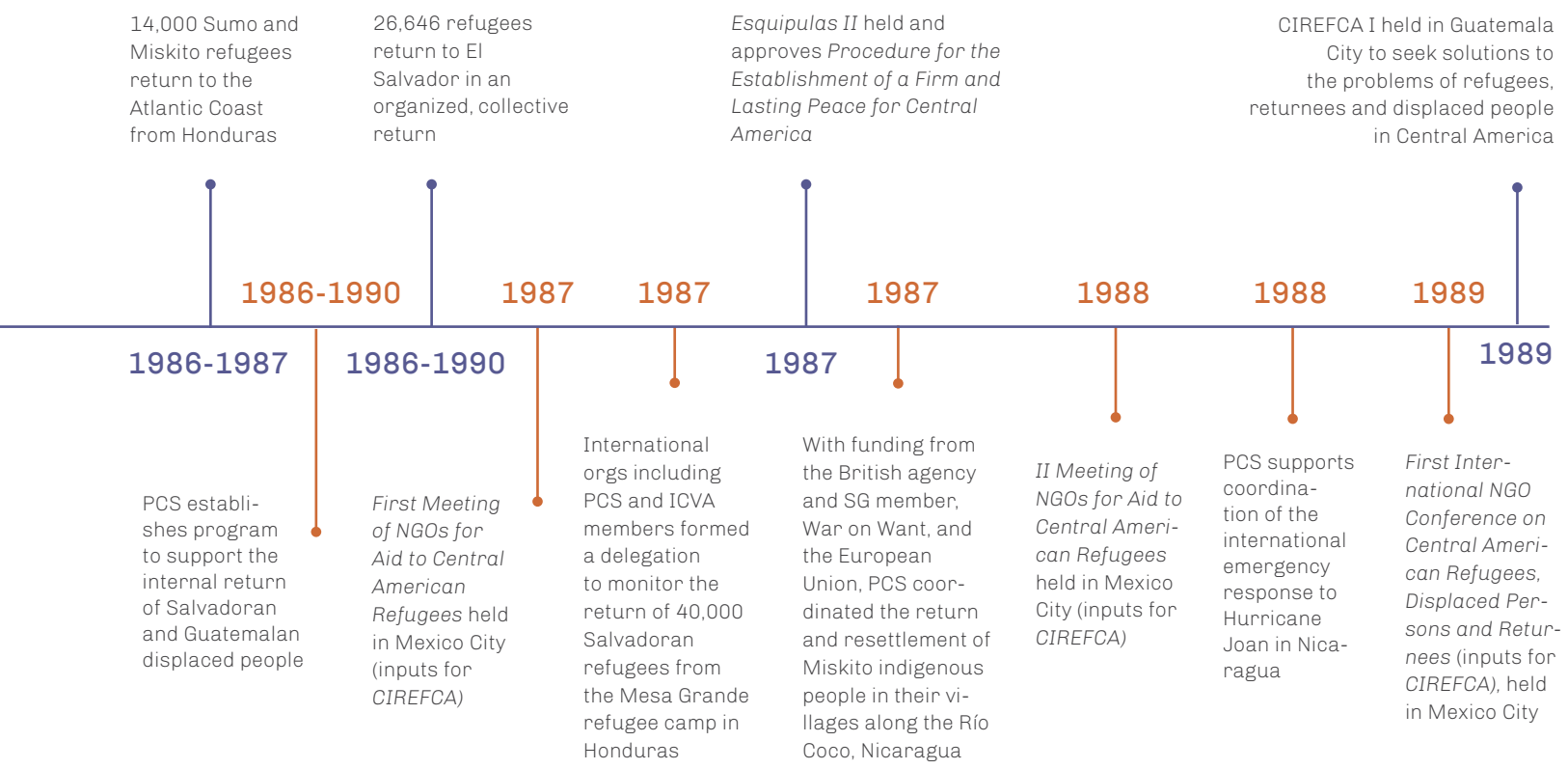
Meanwhile, other complementary processes were moving forward, with PCS support, within civil society in Guatemala and El Salvador. Regionally, support for the Regional Association on Forced Migration (ARMIF) – an NGO platform created for the region – advanced simultaneously with the organization of CIREFCA, the idea being to achieve a voice for NGOs in those platforms.

The result of all this effort was an agreement for the participation of these organizations in CIREFCA. Local NGOs did not participate as regional actors with a voice in the entire debate process, but UNHCR invited each country's most representative NGOs, who had a spot on the plenary agenda to deliver a message.

In May 1989, **CIREFCA I** (First International Conference

on Central American Refugees) was held in Guatemala City. Seven affected countries, more than 55 countries from different parts of the world, 22 intergovernmental agencies, and 63 non-governmental organizations, the Secretary General of the United Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees attended. The willingness of the governments of Mexico and Belize was crucial in seeking solutions to the many problems of refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons.

Each country had prepared an assessment, identifying causes, magnitude and perceptions of the government, UNHCR and UNDP.<sup>20</sup> They also came prepared with proposed solutions, including commitments from the affected government and petitions to the international community for help in implementing the solutions. The result was a declaration and a three-year action plan that proposed seeking long-term solutions for refugees, focusing on return under decent conditions (camps were no longer a solution), efforts to restore lands to retur-





nees, recognition of the rights of internally displaced persons, and seeking aid to help create the conditions for development that would also benefit the host communities. The governments reached a consensus that NGOs would channel and implement funds for reconstruction and the refugee populations. Monitoring bodies and mechanisms were established – with PCS's active participation – to assess progress on the implementation of concrete solutions.

With ongoing advocacy by PCS and other organizations, by the end of CIREFCA the social organizations had made a great impact and been well-received by governments in the European Union and the Nordic countries. The agreements gave impetus to the creation of national NGOs and helped them expand their experience in diplomatic work. They had positioned themselves as protagonists in regional decision-making on displaced persons and refugees, and the process had also enabled organizations of displaced persons and refugees to mature. As later evaluations and documents would show, however, several external factors would contribute to their political weakening, such as their strong financial dependence on international cooperation, with its excessive focus on resource delivery.

### 3. Organizational counselling: accompaniment in the midst of terror and repression

Organizationally, PCS focused its efforts on three strategies: first, the **dissemination of first hand information** – to Europe and Canada, primarily – on what was happening in the most conflictive regions of Central and South America; secondly, by way of complement, **support for setting up NGO platforms** and solidarity networks among civil society actors in Latin America and Europe; and thirdly, **accompaniment** for populations of refugees and displaced persons besieged and persecuted by state and parastatal terror, **as a protection mechanism**.

PCS organized "tours" of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees and displaced persons to Europe and brought international organizations into the refugee camps to show them first-hand what was happening. In Guatemala it also supported tours by members of the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR), family groups who had settled in the remote jungle areas of Guatemala in resistance to army attacks and who were hunted for

twelve years, accused of being guerrilla collaborators. They came out "into the open" in 1993, prior to the signing of the Oslo agreement for "resettlement of populations uprooted by the armed confrontation between the government and the URNG," which gave them the right to obtain land upon signing of the peace accord. A lot of time was to pass, however, before they were able to achieve political dialogue with the government, make their situation visible, and position themselves as a civilian rather than guerrilla population.

This strategy had a tremendous impact on refugee programs and the recognition of displacement by the international community, at a time when the UNHCR mandate, established by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, recognized only forced international migration. Persistence in bringing in international governments and coordinating with ICVA was shared with Oxfam UK, Jesuit Refugee Service, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service (USA), Diakonia (Sweden) and CUSO (Canada).

PCS provided accompaniment and solidarity throughout the different stages of the refugees' return, from organization of the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico (the first meeting was held in 1987 in Campeche) to their reception in their communities of origin. Efforts to provide assistance to Central American refugees began in 1982, at a time when migration was viewed as a problem of national security by the government. Most of the refugees were receiving no services. In Chiapas, only the Catholic Church, working through the CODAIF (Diocesan Committee for Aid to Cross-Border Immigrants) was active in Tapachula and its Social Pastoral Ministry in San Cristóbal de las Casas

*We left in October 1982 after the massacres by the Army of more than 350 people in Huehuetenango,<sup>21</sup> and since we couldn't live in the jungle we went to Mexico. The Mexican government relocated 7,000 of us Guatemalan refugees in Campeche and 5,000 in Quintana Roo. Most stayed in Chiapas. We went back to Guatemala in 1993. Project Counselling Service accompanied us and helped with the entire process. I met Frances Arbour. She accompanied us to meetings in Mexico (in Campeche and San Cristóbal). We were also able to travel to Europe to carry out outreach work about our struggle. PCS supported the Perma-*

*ment Commissions in this, making it possible for people to leave so they could go to Europe.*<sup>22</sup> (Interview with Juan Juárez, leader of Permanent Committees of Refugees in Guatemala, August 24, at Playa Grande, Ixcán, Guatemala)

In 1982, PCS worked together with local NGOs to pressure the Mexican government to change its initial deportation-centred reaction to Guatemalans.<sup>23</sup> The most important endeavour was a committee created by the San Cristóbal Diocese for developing a pastoral program of solidarity with poor Mexicans, with whom PCS worked together providing accompaniment to refugees.<sup>24</sup>

From 1983 to 1984, PCS initiated its Program on Forced Internal Displacement, even though most of the agencies' mandates gave priority to refugees. Other donors therefore became necessary. The situation in El Salvador followed a similar path to that of Guatemalan refugees and displaced persons.

In 1985, the Salvadoran army carried out Operation Phoenix to vacate areas where the guerrilla was concentrated, moving out the civil population and repopulating the land with groups that could be controlled by the military or that supported the civil-military patrols as part of the control strategy. Some of the inhabitants were captured, delivered to the Red Cross and taken to the churches. Others went to Honduras and set up refugee camps under UNHCR protection. The total number of Salvadorans who were internally displaced or given refuge in neighbouring countries is calculated at some 500,000 in 1985.

One year prior to this, in 1984, the Christian Committee for Displaced Persons in El Salvador (CRIPDES) had been created as a social organization with authority to help with mass repatriations of Salvadoran refugees and internally displaced returnees. PCS accompanied this initiative by carrying out training programs in both internal shelters for displaced persons (Catholic and evangelical church sanctuaries) and refugee camps in Honduras. In 1986 the return process began for internally displaced communities and refugees outside the country. PCS joined the international delegation for protecting these returnees and helped them financially to speed up the negotiations for agreeing on the conditions for return.

**Figure 2. Types of Counselling**



**1. Political** (create avenues for dialogue for refugees and displaced people)



**2. Organizational** (establish support networks, provide accompaniment and protection)



**3. Technical and program** (achieve community autonomy and sustainability)

According to CRIPDES, the return of internally displaced persons and exiles (from 1986 to 1989) required efforts by the government to achieve peace and defend their rights so that they could once again live in their places of origin. The first repopulations in the northern part of the country were unquestionably a triumph, not just for the organization but also the entire country (*Informe Institucional*, CRIPDES, 1995-1997).

*The repopulations – or repatriations – very quickly became model communities in terms of organization and capacities. Despite the military harassment suffered by the more than 20,000 refugees settled in camps in Honduras, and their isolation due to their remote location, the Salvadoran refugee population took advantage of their time to build capacities and empower themselves to take the lead in their return. In partnership with other international organizations, PCS provided technical and financial support for production training and leadership schools for women and young people. The population, almost entirely rural and illiterate, completed basic education and very quickly became artisans specializing in tinwork, shoemaking, carpentry, and other trades. This was possible because of their level of organization. The return was a shared political project with social organizations such as CRIPDES, etc. (Interview with Johanna Aberle, PCS team member for Central America, September 20, 2017)*

The returns of internally displaced persons or mass repatriations in El Salvador were carried out amidst armed confrontation, prior to the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, making for difficult conditions. For Salvadorans

deported from Mexico the situation was also complex. There were no international agencies that could protect and follow up on individual returnees, particularly those coming from Mexico and other countries.

In the four-year period from 1986 to 1990, approximately 26,646 refugees returned to El Salvador in organised groups in an environment of confrontation with local authorities. PCS's relationship with ICVA was crucial here. Several international organizations, including PCS and ICVA members, formed a delegation providing an institutional umbrella for the first return in 1987 of 4,500 refugees from the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras. PCS assured funds for returnees in former conflict areas: the departments of Chalatenango, Morazán and San Vicente.

The situation of Salvadoran refugees in Honduras was much more complex than in other countries due to the presence of a multitude of actors: the Honduran government, the Honduran National Refugee Commission, the Catholic Church, the US Embassy, volunteer agencies, UNHCR, Honduran counterinsurgency organizations with military ties and US support, groups of human rights intellectuals and religious groups.<sup>25</sup> Honduras had refugees from the three embattled Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. It had not signed the United Nations' 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. It did not recognize refugee legal status, just *prima facie* acknowledgement of those registered with UNHCR, as long as they remained in closed camps.

As in Mexico, refugees caught outside the camps were considered illegal and subject to deportation. From the mid-1980s, 20,000 Salvadorans, 500 Guatemalans, 20,000 Nicaraguan Indigenous peoples from the Miskito and Sumo groups on Nicaragua's north Atlantic coast, and 6,000 non-Indigenous peoples were registered. The violent confrontations between the Nicaraguan Sandinista army and Indigenous Atlantic coast Miskitos were rooted in historic tensions between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, accentuated by the counterinsurgency and blunders made by the Sandinista government in managing the crisis. Because of the Sandinistas' evacuation of Miskito villages, approximately 10,000 people fled to Honduras as refugees, while another 10,000 were received in the rural settlement of Tasba Pri.

At that time the Sandinista government was intensifying the pressure against opposition groups and their followers in the church and the press. Fleeing from Sandinista repression (1981-1983) and the indoctrination of its leaders, Indigenous Miskitos and Sumos were ideologically manipulated and forcefully recruited, in alliance with the contras, along the Río Coco on the border between Honduras and Nicaragua.

In 1983, with the support of UNHCR, Indigenous Miskitos and Sumos were relocated in different sites within Honduras. Their situation improved, but the problem of security in Nicaragua persisted. This became evident when Indigenous members of the Misura political-military organization attacked Miskito villages in Nicaragua, causing many to leave as refugees.<sup>26</sup> As in Mexico, PCS lobbied the Honduran government and the United Nations to prevent the relocation of Nicaraguan Indigenous refugees in the country's interior, but this time its advocacy was more successful. The Nicaraguan government later approved several amnesties for the Indigenous rebels to bring them back into the country.

In 1985, PCS accompanied talks between the Nicaraguan government and armed Indigenous groups to consolidate regional autonomy in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region. These talks encouraged the indigenous refugees in Honduras to plan their return to Nicaragua. At first they could not be flown directly to the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast but had to go into temporary camps and then enter by land. It was not until 1986 that the Honduran government authorized direct flights.<sup>27</sup> Other firsthand sources report that some 14,000 Indigenous Sumo and Miskito refugees returned to the Atlantic coast from Honduras between mid-1986 and 1987, many with the help of UNHCR and others returning on their own.

That same year, with funding from the European Union and the British agency and SG member, War on Want, PCS coordinated the return and resettlement of Indigenous Miskitos in their villages along the Río Coco. This far-reaching project was conceived as part of efforts to build peace on the Atlantic coast and strengthen the region's autonomy. PCS's Nicaraguan programs also included significant support for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees and internally displaced Nicaraguan small farmers (especially in the Nueva Guinea area of Region V).



At that time, there were numerous pressures and political sensitivities to contend with in working directly with the Sandinista government. However, after an intense debate with the Sponsorship Group (SG), PCS decided to go ahead with the coordination. Its members believed the programs (primarily resettlement in agricultural cooperatives of displaced farmers and Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees) were solid initiatives that were worthwhile supporting.

PCS's main counterparts in the Nicaraguan government during this period were the refugee office of the National Social Security Institute (INSSBI) and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA), and later, the government of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) in Puerto Cabezas.

The faith-based development agencies in the Sponsorship Group, HEKS (Switzerland) and DIA (Netherlands), expressed their concern that PCS should work – and indeed did work – with its protestant church counterpart, CEPAD, in Nicaragua. With the help of PCS, CEPAD played a significant role in the displaced Miskito and Sumo communities in the North Atlantic region. PCS also supported the Catholic Church (Instituto Juan XXIII), research and information NGOs such as the Centre for Information and Documentation on the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA), the Central American Historical Institute (Jesuit Universidad Centroamericana, UCA), the Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES), and a Sandinista government-supported NGO, the Augusto Cesar Sandino Foundation (FACS).

PCS did not work with Nicaraguan refugees in Honduras and Costa Rica because it understood that some of these camps had become centres of counterrevolutionary action aimed at overthrowing the Sandinista government. It did, however, create opportunities for humanitarian dialogue to facilitate return.

#### **4. Technical and program counselling: moving towards sustainable peace**

PCS's advice in this field aimed at consolidating the capacity of local actors to manage and channel resources in pursuit of peace. It supported self-sufficiency projects to keep refugees and displaced returnees from becoming financially dependent. To do so, it supported organizations

set up by fellow citizens, exiles, refugees and churches to carry out work with refugees, as a complement to the work of UNHCR.<sup>28</sup> PCS provided accompaniment for self-help, community, technical, health and educational projects, in terms of project implementation and coordination with other local organizations. Country representatives and project officers, locally hired, were usually native-born and highly focused on overcoming the donor-recipient dilemma.

The existence of an organized local response (organized, basically, by churches) had made it possible for PCS and other Central American NGOs to intervene with focused humanitarian programs. Between 1983 and 1986 work was mainly defined by the need to highlight the problem of displacement in order to secure humanitarian aid for this population, but later, with the return process, aid efforts focused more on self-sufficiency projects.

With substantial funding from the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Norwegian government and other consortium member agencies, PCS financed a large-scale support program for various educational workshops and productive projects in Guatemalan refugee camps in Mexico. Together with the Jesuit Refugee Service and Oxfam UK, it established very close coordination to help refugee organizations in their return to Guatemala. Working for PCS, Frances Arbour played a key role in this coordination, and other actors such as the Catholic Church Diocese of Chiapas (Bishop Samuel Ruiz), Canadian NGOs, the Canadian Embassy, and the Canadian media also helped in the process.

A key aspect of this assistance was the strengthening of women as subjects of rights and active participants in decision-making for the return. In an interview on February 20, 2018, former PCS Associate Director Frances Arbour emphasized PCS's efforts to help women in the camps study and train in technical fields and human rights. The creation of political spaces for discussing the problems of sexual and other types of violence received UNHCR support and led to significant changes in the role women played upon their return to Guatemala and throughout the return process.

The situation in the Southern Cone was different, though it shared with Central America a scenario in which the

return of exiles to their countries of origin became increasingly significant from 1984, after the 1983 domestic unrest in Chile. Exiles were also returning, though in smaller numbers, to Uruguay and Argentina. Though few, there were also cases of returns to Paraguay. This gave rise to pressures by political parties and exile organizations, in conjunction with the extensive network of European institutional and political support, for foreign-assisted return programs.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) took on the challenge of requesting support from the international community to create and implement in 1985 the *Return and Reintegration Project for Paraguayan, Uruguayan, Argentinian and Chilean Exiles Returning to their Countries of Origin*. The Project Counselling Service was one of those who supported and financed that project. According to Felipe Tomic, former member of the Latin American Consultative Committee (LACC) of the PCS Sponsorship Group, in a February 2018 interview, of more importance than the funding (most of which was contributed by the governments of the countries where the returnees had resided) was the fact that PCS served as a reference when defining a method for integrating returnees into the grassroots organizations that were struggling for economic, social and political survival in a harsh environment, given the prevailing conditions in the four countries. The experience PCS had accumulated in Mexico and Central America was an essential contribution. UNHCR also made moves in this direction, though with greater limitations, since it had to be careful of the project's political content.<sup>29</sup>

*PCS helped establish strong ties between the returnees and the local grassroots organizations they would be partnering with in project development. In Chile this meant the generation of projects where returnees, together with local unemployed people, committed themselves to productive or community service initiatives. In Uruguay, former political prisoners were grouped with returnees in agricultural production or service projects, along lines which reflected the local situation. With initial support from PCS, many fellow citizens driven out by the dictatorships were reintegrated in both countries. The countries that had taken them in earlier as exiles viewed this process with relief, as it released "negative energies" in the conservative sectors of their respective societies. (Contribution*

of Roberto Vial, former Director of the PCS Southern Cone Office in Santiago)

Peru and Ecuador were different cases. Towards the end of the 1980s in Peru, PCS (from its Santiago office) provided strong support to religious organizations that were broader in scope, with an impact on poverty. Ecuador was a special case because of the war in Colombia with its thousands of refugees. PCS maintained a presence in the northern coastal town of Esmeraldas through projects that supported fishing cooperatives, opening up job opportunities for an impoverished population and hundreds of Colombian refugees.

## 5. To sum up...

During the decade of the 1980s, against a backdrop of repression and political persecution of popular grassroots organizations, PCS gained strength as a successful project that supported refugees, internally displaced persons and returning exiles. It provided accompaniment by working closely with local organizations, leaving them, as a group, to take the lead and determine the direction of their projects, within a PCS-approved framework.

PCS served as a bridge and link between governments, NGOs, organizations of internally displaced persons and refugees, international aid organizations, and UN agencies. It helped drive the social reintegration of these populations, strengthening what already existed without overshadowing local actors or seeking to direct their efforts. It had significant influence as a model for managing aid, transcending a welfare-focused approach, and strengthening the political and social impact of solidarity-focused aid defined as "counselling".

*Much of this work was achieved thanks to the creation of the Latin American Consultative Committee (LACC), made up of people with different political viewpoints but who all shared the desire for results, for which the talents and capacities of the beneficiaries were the starting point, and which were achieved hand in hand with local organizations. This committee served as a sort of consulting team for the executives of the consortium's agencies and at the same time a counterweight to the natural tendency of teams on the ground (local PCS offices) to go too far in taking on commitments and risks. (Interview with Felipe Tomic,*

former member of the Latin American Advisory Committee, LACC, of the PCS Sponsorship Group, February 2018)



## NOTES

12. PEARCE, Jenny. Op. cit.
13. PEARCE, Jenny. Op. cit., p. 51.
14. MURPHY, Brian (1989), Op. cit.
15. AVILA, Diana and MURPHY, Brian (2000). Working Document. *Counselling: Axis of the Project Counselling Service Intervention Strategy*. Lima: PCS.
16. AGUAYO, Sergio "Del Anonimato al protagonismo: los organismos no gubernamentales y el éxodo centroamericano ("From Anonymity to Leadership: Non-governmental organizations and the Central American exodus") in Revista Foro Internacional Vol. XXXII, 1 (127) Jan-Mar 1992 (pages 323-341), p. 329.
17. ICVA had supported two NGO meetings to discuss the situation of displaced persons, one prior to the Cartagena meeting and one afterwards, in 1986.
18. The president of Guatemala, Vinicio Cerezo; the president of El Salvador, José Napoleón Duarte; the president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega; the president of Honduras, José Azcona Hoyo; and the president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias.
19. The Esquipulas II agreement defined a number of measures to promote national reconciliation, an end to hostilities, democratization, free elections, an end to all aid for irregular military forces, arms control negotiations and refugee aid. It also laid the foundations for international verification procedures and provided an agenda for their implementation. The US government refused to recognize this agreement because of its *de facto* recognition of the democratically elected government of Nicaragua (the Sandinista regime), openly declaring it illegitimate and undemocratic. The Esquipulas II agreement set the groundwork for the 1990 Oslo agreement between the Guatemalan National Reconciliation Commission (CNR) and the National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), ending more than three decades of armed conflict in Guatemala. It also laid the foundations for the 1992 El Salvador peace accords.
20. Prior to CIREFCA, in 1989, the Central American governments had quantified the impact of the refugee phenomenon and estimated the number of uprooted persons at two million. Of these, only 150,000 were recognized as refugees, who received UNHCR protection and international assistance. The governments identified four categories in their assessment: 1) *refugees* (who had crossed the international border to seek protection in other countries); 2) voluntary or returned *repatriates* (persons who had returned to their country of origin, estimated at 61,500 people); c) *internally displaced persons* (who remained in their country but had been driven from their homes away from the borders and into the interior, without a means of subsistence); 4) *at-risk persons* (who could no longer survive or conduct a normal life within their country because of violence). The number of people in these last two categories was calculated at 1.8 million.
21. The revelation of the *Sofía Plan*, the military plan hatched in 1982 by the Guatemalan Army's High Command to exterminate the rural Indigenous population as part of the counterinsurgency strategy of President Efraín Ríos Montt, contains the orders for extermination through massacres planned and executed during that year. In July 1982 alone, as part of this plan, the army committed three massacres in the Huehuetenango area of more than 350 people. On July 7, 1982, the army arrived at the Puente Alto hamlet in the village of El Quetzal, Barillas, Huehuetenango. They separated out the men, raped some of the women and killed some 360 people. On July 17, 1982, the army arrived at the village of San Francisco, Nentón, Huehuetenango, where it called the population to a meeting in the centre of town and killed 350 people. On July 17, 1982, the army also arrived at the community of Plan de Sánchez, blocked off the entrances and exits, hauled people from their homes, raped the women, killed 368 people and ordered the survivors to bury the bodies. They left on July 19.
22. Organized into committees abroad, the Guatemalan refugees prepared for their return from exile, addressing the various issues through these Permanent Committees, which were created for negotiating and preparing the conditions in which they would return to their country of origin, although the government did not keep its commitments.
23. LOESCHER, Gil "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America" in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (Summer, 1988), pp. 295-320. Deportations in 1985 averaged 12 people per day, rising to 49 in 1988 and 197 in 1990. In northern Mexico, at the US border, the Mexican government collaborated with the US government to capture Central American immigrants hoping to cross the border, some in search of shelter, as part of the US patrolling policy.
24. The NGOs working with Central Americans set up the Coordination Committee for Aid to Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico (Diocese of San Cristobal, Tapachula and Tehuantepec). This quickly dissolved because it failed to receive the expected flow of displaced persons.
25. LOESCHER, Gil. Op. cit.
26. In mid 1985, the Misura militant group was officially dissolved and replaced by an organization called Kisan. Pressures to recruit refugees for combat, financed by the United States, continued.
27. Until 1985, UNHCR had no office in the Honduran Mosquitia region, and its World Relief agency sent inexperienced North Americans to the refugee settlements. Many returned to the border, while the US Congress approved \$7.5 million in humanitarian aid for the Indigenous Misura, executed through the US government agency (USAID) and several evangelical churches.
28. PCS Annual Report (1982-83).
29. This project had many similarities to the TASC (Triple Agency Sub-Committee) joint action in Chile to support the social fabric and popular organizations during several years of the Pinochet dictatorship (funded by CAFOD, Christian Aid and Oxfam UK). The TASC was a novel joint work experience for these agencies, with funding from the UK Ministry of Overseas Development.

## 1990-2000. THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION

**The** transition to peace in Central America shaped the 1990s. It encompassed the signing of agreements between guerrillas and the governments of Guatemala (1996, with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) and El Salvador (1992, with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and conversations about a peace process in Nicaragua which culminated in the February 1990 elections which resulted in the victory of Violeta Chamorro and the defeat of the Sandinista National Liberation Front.<sup>30</sup> It also enabled the collective return of refugee and displaced populations,<sup>31</sup> as well as the implementation of development aid projects and self-sufficiency initiatives for returnee communities, following CIREFCA.

In Colombia and Peru the internal armed conflicts intensified, along with repression, persecution of rural communities in areas of strategic interest and guerrilla influence, and the murder and elimination of social leaders and human rights activists. In these circumstances, the expansion of paramilitary action heightened the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Colombia.

Despite this situation, important progress was made in Colombia on demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of guerrilla groups, which then participated in the National Constituent Assembly. The process culminated in a new Political Constitution (1991) that was more democratic and focused on guaranteeing rights. The arrest and trial of Sendero Luminoso leaders in Peru was emblematic of a decade dominated by security policies led by the military and the centralization of government functions on the matter.

Internal forced displacement in these two countries was one of the most visible manifestations of the humanitarian crisis. By the end of this period, important progress had been made in terms of recognition of the rights of

displaced people. One of the most significant events internationally was the publication of the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (1998). At the national level, these achievements translated into the approval of laws, programs and projects that focused on reparations for the victims of internal armed conflict, especially displaced populations (for instance, in Colombia Law 387 on forced displacement was passed in 1997).

In response to this context, PCS focused its actions on: a) following up on the peace accords in El Salvador and Guatemala by supporting programs for refugees returning to their communities; b) applying a gender-based approach to all work in all countries; c) setting up programs to support displaced people in Colombia and Peru; d) support to Colombian and Peruvian refugees in Ecuador, with the collaboration of the Danish Refugee Council; e) starting the process to close PCS's headquarters in San José, Costa Rica and opening a new head office in Lima; and f) supporting the efforts of organizations to demand truth, justice and reparations, with a particular focus on highlighting sexual violence against women as an intrinsic feature of genocide, scorched earth strategies and state repression. The combination of various kinds of counselling during program development strengthened the methodology in practice, by applying a holistic approach with local actors. The main contributions are outlined below.

### 1. Consolidating political space for peace

PCS continued to support efforts to open up political opportunities for refugees, displaced people, communities in resistance and non-governmental organizations to engage in direct dialogue with the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador as well as with the United Nations, other governments and donor organizations.

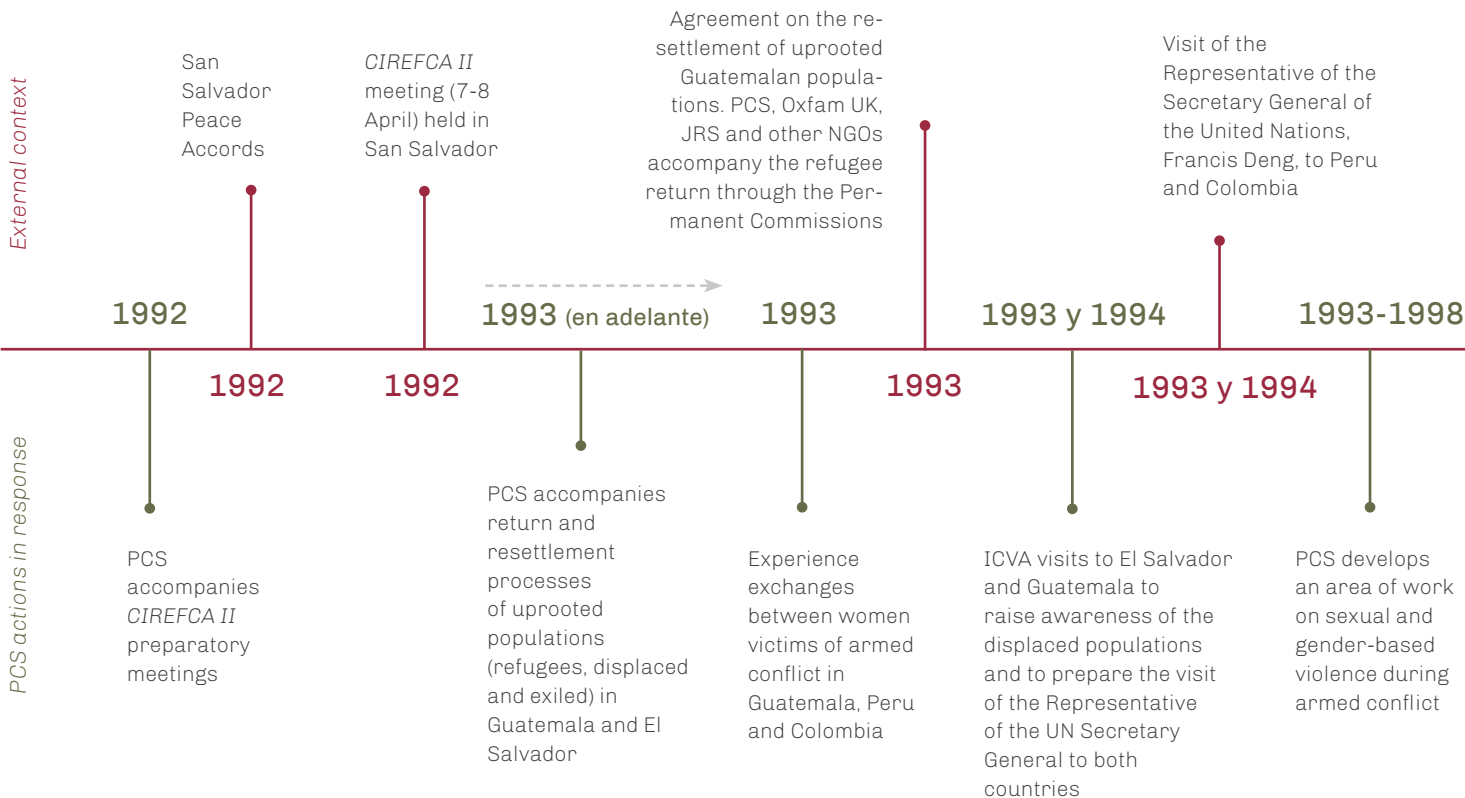
Supporting preparations for return entailed strengthening the organizational structures of the refugee populations in their destination countries and their links to the places to which they would be returning, building their capacity to demand decent and secure conditions for the return process. Even while these conversations were underway, the army and senior officers in the military continued to commit abuses and harass rural and indigenous communities in an attempt to discredit them as social and political actors, separate from the guerrilla movements (FMLN in El Salvador and URNG in Guatemala).

Various events marked milestones in the history of the transition in Central America. On the organizational front, PCS supported networking among actors as a strategy to strengthen dialogue and participation in key decision-making processes relating to the postaccord phase. Regionally, the Regional Association of National NGO Coordination Bodies was set up in 1990 to present perspectives to

the CIREFCA II meeting. A preparatory meeting was held in New York with the support of PCS.

Similarly, at the national level PCS supported the National Coordination of Salvadoran NGOs, which came together around the Regional Association on Forced Migration (ARMIF), to strengthen their ability to engage in dialogue in CIREFCA I and CIREFCA II. Funding was provided for preparatory ARMIF and ICVA meetings to ensure good coordination for CIREFCA. PCS supported the founding of the Federation of NGOs in Nicaragua to study displacement in Nueva Guinea (Region V) and in other regions, in order to identify scenarios and areas where support might be required for strengthening sustainable solutions focused on long-term development. PCS enabled opportunities for dialogue to identify how best to ensure that post-conflict rehabilitation efforts were linked to development. The initiative did not thrive but with the Federation the first steps were taken towards using research as an input for participatory social action.

*Timeline 2. Historic context in which PCS operated during the 1990s*



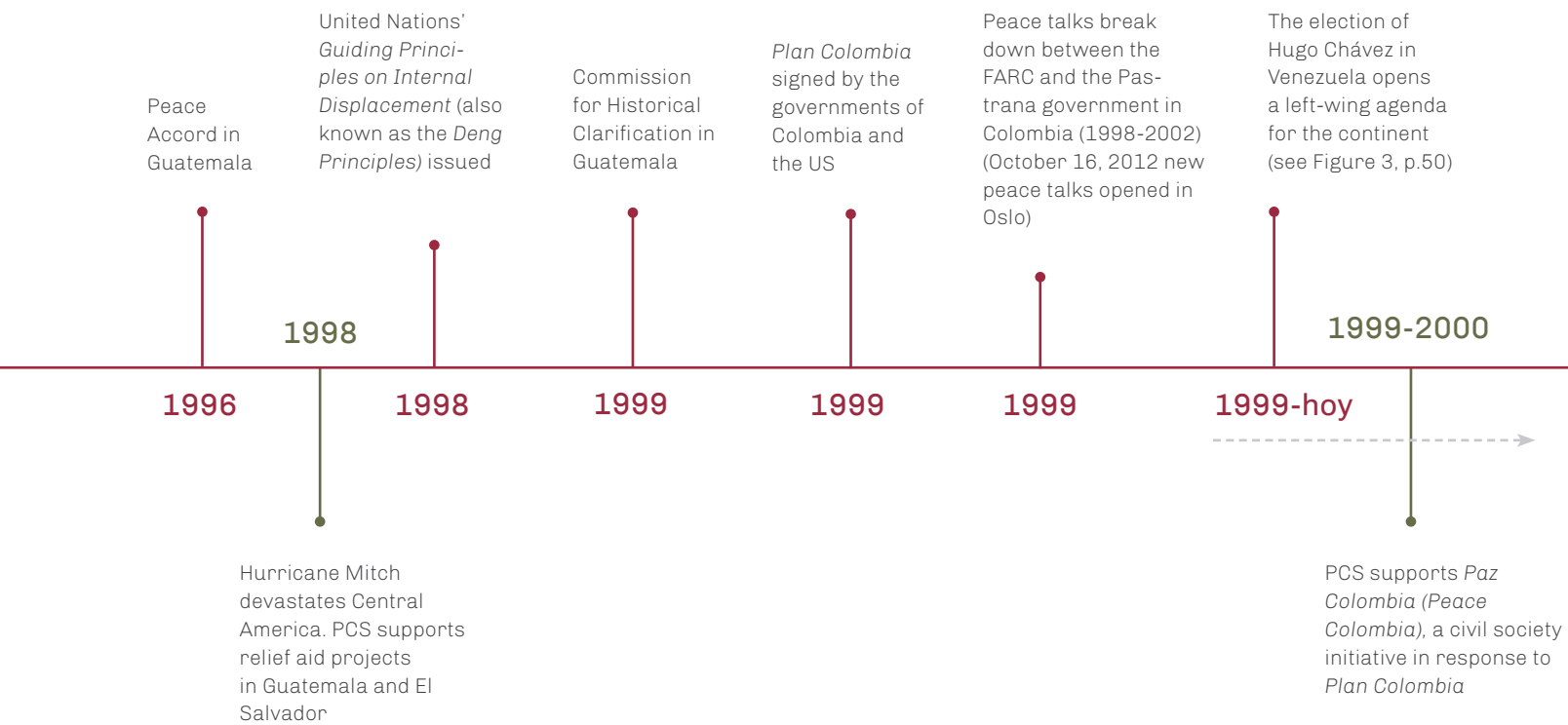


As a contribution to policy debate, PCS funded reports, research and seminars through which a critical perspective on the situation was put forward for the dialogue among various actors: the European Union, NGOs, civil society organizations and grassroots movements. Support for social organizations began to highlight the contributions of sectors such as indigenous groups and women to which the traditional left had not paid much attention.

In the political arena, considerable local and regional NGO participation – supported by PCS – in the International Conference on Central American Refugees follow-up meeting (CIREFCA II) in San Salvador on April 7 and 8, 1992, showed how much better able they were to lobby and negotiate with public officials.<sup>33</sup> They had put key issues on the agenda in relation to refugees and assistance to other groups of vulnerable people, as well as significant initiatives for women, returnees and their communities.<sup>34</sup> Quick Impact Projects (QIPs/PIR) were designed

and implemented in returnee communities in Nicaragua, intended to be the first phase in a medium- and long-term development process.

On the legal front, as a result of CIREFCA II, PCS insisted on an expanded definition of “refugee” and on recognition of the displaced. By the end of the process, Belize had passed the Refugees Act of 1991 to translate international instruments into national legislation and the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua had taken actions to provide documentation in order to facilitate the voluntary resettlement and reintegration of returnees. The Honduran government acceded to the United Nations 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Previously, as a result of numerous fora and discussions with the Mexican government, the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) had reformed the General Population Act in 1990 to include a definition of refugee based on the Cartagena Declaration of 1984.





Headquarters of Radio Farabundo Martí, 1992

In this way PCS helped Central American NGOs to improve their ability to engage in dialogue and to have a role in implementing the CIREFCA action plan (valid until 1994). Regional NGO coordination, as well as support provided by the international community and the United Nations system, also facilitated their participation. PCS helped strengthen CIREFCA as a process of dialogue and coordination at various levels and with a variety of stakeholders: beneficiaries, governments across the region, the United Nations system, donor governments and NGOs. Its combined a political and legal approach with an operational project-based and fundraising perspective.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. “Levelling the field” for peace

During the 1990s, through its commitment to empowering social processes, PCS sought to find a common thread to guide it forward. This phase saw changes to the team and the mechanisms for formulating internal policy. The guiding thread was its conviction that international aid during transition processes needed to support long-term projects in order for peace to be sustainable. This raised debate within PCS about its identity. As a result of the discussions, PCS found ways to accompany broader processes of regional autonomy, as in the case of the Northern Atlantic Region in Nicaragua, where the aim was to build a model for reconstruction in areas of refugee return based on a form of autonomous government.

*It was clear to PCS that local NGOs needed to build their capacity to manage projects. However, in the mid 1990s some of the member agencies of the PCS such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Danish*

*Refugee Council, because of their specific mandates, expressed the need and their intention to focus their funding on aid programs for refugees and internally displaced people. Other members of the SG (HEKS) wanted more independence to define the focus and priorities for the programs they funded through PCS, although they remained committed to PCS's post-conflict work, especially in Central America. (Interview with Brian Murphy, founder member of PCS, March 17, 2018).*

The discussion, which started in 1994, led to a review of the Board's Memorandum of Understanding in 1996 and PCS was registered as an Independent Association in Denmark under the auspices of the Danish Refugee Council. Inter Pares, HEKS and Dutch Interchurch Aid (DIA), with more flexible mandates, maintained their longer-term commitment to funding development. Their efforts focused on helping new non-governmental and community organizations to manage reconstruction funding with a more policy-based approach and technical capacity.<sup>36</sup>

In El Salvador, in partnership with DIA from the Netherlands, PCS developed various reconstruction projects for returnee and displaced communities. This meant long days working to prepare proposals that could compete with those from larger bodies and the government and so secure significant funding from the European Union. Five of the Salvadoran organizations obtained large-scale funding that enabled them to work on production, training and infrastructure initiatives. PCS accompanied them throughout the project cycle.

CRIPDES, originally the Christian Committee for Displaced Persons of El Salvador, one of the main Salvadoran organizations to accompany the repatriations and internally displaced communities, highlighted the need to reorganize collective action in the light of these changes:

*Once the armed conflict was over and peace accords signed in 1992, El Salvador embarked on a new stage of democratic life. It ushered in a whole new national state of affairs (...) the democratic process opened up and new rules [of engagement] were established between the State and civil society. Changes which led all organizations to review the future of their work. For CRIPDES, this new environment marked a transition from a time when we typically provided mainly emergency aid and assistance to being remodelled as an institution that, from 1995, became the Association of Rural Communities for the Development of El Salvador, with a strategic vision to foster organization in rural communities. (CRIPDES Institutional Report to PCS, 1997.)*

In 1992 an agreement was signed between the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan refugee representatives and the Guatemalan government. The agreement recognised the fundamental rights of the refugees in relation to their return and specified that organized groups of refugees with the support of UNHCR could visit Guatemala, with officials, to verify that local conditions met their needs.

In 1993, a year before the Agreement for the resettlement of populations uprooted by the armed conflict was signed, internally displaced populations began to return (between 1993 and 1995 around 18,000 refugees returned as part of collective processes, most of them to the departments of El Quiché, Huehuetenango, Alta Verapaz and El Petén). They were accompanied by PCS and focused on the involvement of women and their participation in collective decision-making within these organizations. The Jesuit Refugee Service and Oxfam UK were also key actors in the refugee return, through their support for the Permanent Commissions. The final agreement that put an end to armed conflict was signed in 1996 and thereafter most of PCS's effort was aimed at reconstruction, clarifying the truth about what had happened and demanding justice and reparations for the victims of the armed conflict.

PCS carried out actions in support of return processes on two levels: setting up an international group to accompany the Guatemalan returnees, with the involvement of ICVA, whose presence was crucial for lobbying governments and agencies; secondly, continuing to support and strengthen the returnees' capacity for political dialogue, through lobbying on the part of the refugees' Permanent Commissions, the associations of displaced people (mainly through CONDEG) and the Communities of the Population in Resistance.<sup>37</sup>

Other problems arose in the field. The returnee population was not homogeneous and the different characteristics of the various groups and the different ways in which they were organized raised challenges for providing support to the return process. Marcos Ramírez, leader of the Communities in Resistance, representative of the uprooted population on the technical commission that drew up the peace accords, and former Mayor of Ixcán (Quiché) in Guatemala, provides a clear illustration of the problem:

*We were four groups: refugees, Communities of Populations in Resistance (those of us who went up into the mountains and then came out again), displaced people (who returned and were organized as CONDEG), others who remained under army control and were moved to strategic villages or "model villages". We were all organized under the Consultative Committee for Uprooted Populations (CCPD). Then there was the Consultative Assembly of Uprooted Communities when the agreements were signed. Then we had an office with delegates from each organization and some disappeared. The Permanent Commissions remained active until the last return. The CPRs still exist. (Interview with Marcos Ramírez, August 25 in Ixcán.)*

The challenges to the sustainability of the return and the accords were numerous. They were political, with military harassment by the army of the returned communities, now organized into cooperatives. This harassment took the form of Civilian Self-Defence Patrols (PACs), with a presence of patrols within areas of return. Furthermore, the refugees returned to areas where they encountered internally displaced people who had not left. This meant that many communities had to be relocated and land purchased by international agencies and the national government.<sup>38</sup>



Between 2004 and 2005, the Social Ministry of the Catholic Church and PCS accompanied processes to demand the right to legalization of land for returning communities of repatriates and displaced people. PCS combined this strategy with organizational support and actions aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence during the return process.

*In 1990 PCS started to support CONDEG: they supported the recuperation of our land, which had been occupied by other poor families, but they had been directed by the army to take it over. Also with personal documentation for displaced people who had lost their documents. PCS supported demilitarization, the removal the Civilian Self-Defence Patrols (PACs) and military commissioners from the area. And the withdrawal of military detachments in Xalbal. (Lorenzo Pérez Mendoza, legal representative and General Coordinator of CONDEG. Interview in Guatemala City, August 22, 2017.)*

Another problem that the returning refugees encountered was infrastructural. There were no roads or tracks to gain access to the communities.<sup>39</sup> PCS took steps to help organized communities acquire land, through mobilization and collective action.

*With the support of PCS, we were able to organize 160 families who were in the capital and each family got a plot. Through struggle, social pressure. They didn't return to their places of origin. They settled in Zone 3 of Villanueva, an area within the municipality of the capital. (Santos Chic, CONDEG, interviewed on August 22, 2017.)*

*The PCS supported the return of displaced families to Huehuetenango, to their place of origin. We managed to acquire fourteen farms on the southern coast. We managed to negotiate with the National Institute for Agricultural Transformation (INTA). After that, there was the Land Fund. There were two successful processes. The 9th of January Mayan community on the Costa Azul which now has a road, electricity and schools; they have cattle and agricultural projects and market their produce externally. They organized an association, ASOGRIME, which has legal status. The second process was in 1993 on the San Román estate in the Petén. We acquired 112,500 hectares. It was registered to the Army. One of the ways PCS helped*

*was to request the expropriation of the estate. The displaced people stayed 22 days and 22 nights within the park, until they managed to get it registered to the State. There were 34 displaced communities there. They kept part of the land and handed over another part of it to the state National Council for Protected Areas (but they sell timber to businesses). (Interview with Lorenzo Pérez Mendoza, CONDEG General Coordinator and legal representative, and Fabiana Reinoso, member of CONDEG, in Guatemala City on August 22, 2017.)*

The role of the Church and international organizations (Oxfam UK, Bread for the World and PCS, among them) was crucial for this organizational strengthening upon return.

The support that PCS provided in Nicaragua during this period focused on the social integration of resettled populations that included people from both sides (Sandinistas and counterinsurgents). Marta Cecilia Roustán, former Director of the PCS office in Nicaragua, points out that this accompaniment helped to reduce polarization, and revealed that unsatisfied basic needs were the same for everyone. Women and young people were the priority. The concept of refugees was not highlighted so much at that time. "I remember very well the first project that I accompanied was in Nueva Guinea, an area with the greatest presence of the Contra and to where some Sandinista families had returned. Of course, at the beginning it was difficult for them to live together but we gradually worked on that." (Interview carried out on March 8, 2018.)

One of the strategies that PCS used in contexts like this was to foster coordination between the various agencies that worked in the area with the aim of encouraging municipal development based on strategic and operational plans in each municipality. The goal was for the population to be taken into account in the drafting of the plans.

### **3. Women at the centre of truth, justice and reparations**

Policy efforts in the second half of the decade began to focus on the demand for truth, justice and reparations in Guatemala through participation in bodies such as the Commission for Historical Clarification and the Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) led by the Church.



*Sponsorship Group. Otavalo, Ecuador, 1990. From left to right, back row: Gordon Hutchison (PCS), Roch Tasse (Inter Pares), Brian Murphy (Inter Pares), Herman van Aken (DIA). Middle row: Frances Arbour (PCS), Ana Eugenia Marín (PCS), Nana Thue (Norwegian Refugee Council), Juana Camposeco (PCS), Johanna Aberle (PCS), Paul Brandrup (Danish Refugee Council). Front row: Trygbe Nordby (Norwegian Refugee Council), Angela Jeria de Bachelet (LACC), Ricardo Stein (LACC), Alfredo Fritchi (HEKS).*

The role of women during the organizational stage of the return had been critical throughout the process. They had managed to take on leadership roles, guiding project implementation, coordinating actions to channel resources to collective community needs and they were establishing links between various organizations with which they had made contact during their time as refugees, among them Mama Maquín, Madre Tierra and Ixmucané.<sup>40</sup>

The signing of the peace accords brought the Commission for Historical Clarification in 1996 and the delivery of resources and programs for victim reparations. Against this backdrop, PCS supported women to organize around their participation in collective decision-making and to demand truth, justice and reparations. Sexual violence as a systematic practice of State terror, repression and the scorched earth strategy, gained more attention as the individual and collective effects of violence against women were revealed.

From the mid 1990s, PCS developed an area of work and reflection that resulted in innovative action. Sexual violence mainly affected indigenous women, which meant that any attempt to discuss a gender-based approach needed to incorporate the cultural perspective and cosmovision of the affected communities. In this debate, PCS addressed the work on sexual violence from the perspective of healing, as part of the grieving and remediation

processes, understood from the point of view of indigenous culture and identity. This entailed going beyond the human rights discourse as a framework for understanding and building an account of violence.

Francisca Álvarez, indigenous leader of the Healing Awareness Centre (Centro de Sanar Conciencia, Kaqla), who headed PCS's sexual violence project from 1997, highlights the contribution of this approach:

*For me it was important for PCS to consider this other part of the healing process. They were theorizing about human rights and oppression but I came in encouraging us to look at what we should do with emotional trauma. For me, PCS's contribution allowed us to develop our own process from our own perspective. We worked on historic trauma. Several publications were the fruit of this experience-based research work.<sup>41</sup> (Interview in Guatemala City, August 23, 2017.)*

PCS's contribution to these processes is linked to the way in which these women ventured into the political sphere. This they did by regaining their dignity during the healing process, by recovering their self-esteem and by finding a way to empower themselves as agents able to influence the course of the collective to which they belonged. This approach and methodology enabled them to break their silence on an issue that had become taboo within indigenous communities because of the connotations of sexual

violence against women and the stigma with which they were burdened.

As part of a comprehensive process for addressing impunity from various perspectives (legal, political, cultural, personal), PCS provided advice on several cases that were important for clarifying the facts about violence against women and seeking justice and reparations. One of the most emblematic cases in Guatemala during this time involved counselling women in the Sepur Zarco case (Izabal).<sup>42</sup>

Sharing experiences as a way to build capacity was fundamental for processes that were getting underway in Colombia and Peru. Alison Crosby, formerly with PCS in Guatemala, points out that one of the benefits of this approach was to help build a framework for understanding truth as a relational process, and the conviction that recovery and reparation can only occur in a context of relationships with others, never in isolation.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Counselling as a strategy for strengthening and protection in the Andean region

PCS began work in Peru and Colombia in the 1990s, with a wealth of political experience of dialogue with governments and agencies which complemented experience in accompanying different kinds of organizational processes.

PCS's work over the decade focused on three areas: a) the protection of sectors of organized civil society in areas of intense armed conflict; b) support for the organizational processes of displaced people and c) monitoring and denunciation of human rights violations. A gender-based approach, along with a focus on human rights and comprehensive reparations, enabled PCS to support processes to assert rights, clarify what had happened and to denounce violations with special attention to the situation of women in the remotest areas.

Peru was undergoing a transition that was characterized by an intense counterinsurgent battle, an expansion of the government's repressive approach on the part of the armed forces, corruption, the decline of Sendero Luminoso and the disgrace of Fujimori's government.<sup>44</sup> With the left as a political option weakened, the national government discredited, and the Fujimori government under pressure from human rights organizations, PCS took a

stand that enabled the organization to open up political and humanitarian space in what might have been considered a minefield. Counselling translated into advocacy, strengthening human rights organizations and platforms and support for the demand for truth, justice and reparations, in which women played a central role.

The first strategy focused on drawing attention to the plight of displaced people by promoting international observation visits. ICVA, with PCS participation, sent a delegation to Peru in 1993 that was fundamental in raising the profile of internally displaced people and drawing attention to the displaced populations. The visit occurred a year after the arrest of Abimael Guzmán, leader of Sendero Luminoso, and helped design the resettlement program for the areas affected by armed conflict. It also prepared the way for the creation of a national working group of displaced people that lobbied government and arranged for a visit by the United Nations Secretary-General's Representative, Francis Deng, in 1993. Subsequently – in 1994 – the government launched its resettlement policy.

An outcome of support for this networking process was the establishment of the National Coordination of Displaced People and Communities in Reconstruction of Peru (CONDECOREP) in 1998 to work with displaced people who had settled in the cities and did not wish to return. PCS complemented support for their work with attention to returnees and returnee organizations. PCS also provided support for CONDECOREP's efforts to increase women's political engagement.

Although various NGOs contributed to what would eventually be the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (1998 *Deng Principles*), forced displacement was not acknowledged in the human rights discourse and practice of the time, since the scope of actions in defence of human rights by organizations such as the Episcopal Commission for Social Action, IDL and APRODEH did not include working with displaced people. When the United Nations' *Cartagena Declaration* of 1984 – which included an expanded definition of "refugee" – and the CIREFCA discussion on the importance of acknowledging internal displacement were being rolled out, PCS made an important contribution to debate at the time by promoting a human rights based approach with a focus on truth, justice and comprehensive reparations



at a time when the approach of NGOs working with the displaced was predominantly economic, social and cultural in focus.<sup>45</sup>

The second strategy explains the role that PCS played in protecting civil society groups and sectors that were threatened by the army, persecuted by the government and harassed by Sendero Luminoso. Through open and active defence of human rights, PCS helped to create opportunities for defending personal integrity and the right to life at time of political polarization and militarization of many aspects of civilian life and territories.

*The 1990s in Peru saw the end of the armed conflict, since from 1996 on the number of military operations decreased and there was an end to the armed confrontation between the military and guerrilla groups. In that context, PCS was one of the few NGOs to begin to play a more political role. Because, in contrast to Colombia, NGOs in Peru were aligned with a supposedly neutral position, because the counterinsurgency operations were very tough. They were supposed to denounce support for Sendero and so they didn't defend militants, only those who were known to be innocent or "clean". They needed to distance themselves from armed players in order for their actions to be considered legitimate. PCS made a different decision and that marked them out as different from other NGOs in their active defence and denunciation of critical human rights situations. The social organizations have great respect for them. Diana Ávila played an essential role as she was a well-known and respected figure in the human rights world and she took the risk of playing a different role. (Interview with Javier Alarcón, former member of PCS, July 28, 2017.)*

The displaced population continued to be the priority, along with support to the families of victims of forced disappearance in the department of Huancavelica. A psychosocial assistance program was established that played a crucial role in victim protection at a difficult time for human rights.

As in Guatemala, sexual violence against women was systematically practised by members of the army and mainly



Salvadoran Network of Women's Rights Defenders, 2012

affected the areas in which a state of emergency had been declared and where impunity reigned. PCS played an important role in collecting testimonies from women which were later supplied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR 2002-2005). Understanding the role of indigenous women in the community, to do this PCS designed a mental health program with a multicultural approach, just as in Guatemala.

The counselling methodology used during this process translated into exchanges between women from Guatemala, Peru and Colombia to share experiences. Some women went to Nairobi and the publications of the exchanges enriched their organizations' reflections and actions. The methodology also bolstered support for legal processes before the courts in the Manta and Vilca regions (where the largest military bases in Peru were located), which were equivalent to the Sepur Zarco case in Guatemala. PCS supported the struggle for the victims of sexual violence to be acknowledged, provided accompaniment during the trials and contributed information and testimonies to the CVR for the drafting of the chapter "Violencia sexual en Huancavelica: las bases de Manta y Vilca" (Sexual Violence in Huancavelica: the Manta and Vilca bases), which examined 24 cases.<sup>46</sup>

*When the Truth Commission was created, we feminist organizations were included in the CVR's mandate; we didn't know if the report would include violence*



Above: women victims with covered faces during the trial for crimes of sexual violence in the Sepur Zarco military base. Guatemala (photo provided by Cristina Chquin). Right: campaign for worldwide solidarity with the women



against women. All that we managed to get included in its charter was a reference to crimes against sexual freedom. PCS supported us throughout the work in Huancavelica, carrying out training in the communities, dealing with a context in which there were taboo subjects. We collected 527 testimonies about sexual violence against women during the internal armed conflict. Currently the Register of Victims identifies 5,048 women who were victims of sexual violence. The CVR's mandate only covered rape. Thanks to advocacy carried out via the platform provided by PCS and APRODEH, we lobbied the State to document other types of sexual violence.<sup>47</sup> (Interview with Isabel Rodríguez, Director of DEMUS, September 4, 2017).

Carlos Rivera, Director of the Legal Defence Institute (IDL), the NGO that brought a significant number of sexual violence cases against the military and was a PCS partner, also highlights PCS's contribution:

*PCS contributed to documenting cases of sexual violence. They helped us to understand that these cases were different from the rest and that addressing them required a completely different strategy. They were rural women, Quechua speakers, who lived a long way from any city. This made them different from other types of victim. They were also victims of stigmatization and frowned upon by the men in their communities. As a result, they hadn't even told their families. PCS supported efforts to convince the women to go and make a statement to the public prosecutor's office. They were pivotal, helping to*

*raise funds and getting involved in the project. That's working collectively.* (Interview on September 4, 2017 in Lima, Peru.)

Towards the end of the 1990s, the work entailed engaging with development processes in areas that had been abandoned by the State. In this context, the distinction between the concepts of development and reparations was important, though it also meant linking actions relating to socio-economic conditions in the areas affected by violence in order to make progress on comprehensive reparations.

PCS's support and participation in the Huancavelica Round Table encouraged indigenous women to participate in reconstructing historic truth in Peru. To this end, PCS supported the documentation of cases so that human rights violations could be tried in the courts, and accompanied the process of organizing and searching for missing persons, through the Association of Families of the Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared of Peru (ANFASEP).

The process of capacity-building with women in rural areas so that they could be involved in decision-making to advance equality within diversity, is a good example of PCS's support. Diana Ávila also played a crucial role in this process. In her critical review of the process, Diana points out that working with men across all discussion, training and awareness-raising processes was an important contribution to the gender-based approach. The participation of women in the two National Meetings of Women Affected by Violence revealed local capacity to build consensus and put forward proposals that were national in scope.<sup>48</sup>





Pilgrimage to the monument in memory of the victims, Huancavelica, Peru

PCS sought to link humanitarian work with local development initiatives. Projects with Sisay, a rural organization in Ayacucho, included initiatives with women such as family kitchen gardens and human rights training for women and local authorities.

*PCS's work has been to try to link the issue of human rights with women in their productive activities: handicrafts and kitchen gardens. Women who had migrated to the cities and forgot their traditions, their weaving. The Chainmaqui Women's Association was set up. Our other work was with organizations representing victims of political violence. We started in 2000 and then we realized that it was urgent to work on making the truth commission report known. (Interview with Félix Rojas, Élide Ramírez and José Quispe de Sisay in Ayacucho, Peru, September 6, 2017.)*

Work was begun on opening a program in Colombia along similar lines. Throughout the decade various attempts were made to negotiate with the guerrilla groups, building on experiences from the 1980s.<sup>49</sup> President César Gaviria (1990-1994) invited the groups to participate in the National Constituent Assembly, in which the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and the Quintín Lame Revolutionary Movement (MRQL) took part and began the process of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration. However, the two largest groups with the greatest presence across the country – the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – did not take up the offer.<sup>50</sup> Armed confrontation continued, along with a human rights crisis that was exacerbated by the use of paramilitaries, imposing more widespread terror, with the support of the armed forces and funding from groups of cattle farmers, the political élite and drug traffickers.<sup>51</sup>

The magnitude of forced displacement was invisible to and unacknowledged by institutions in Colombia. At the end of the decade, the signing of Plan Colombia between the governments of Colombia and the United States as part of the continental fight against drugs, marked the beginning of aerial spraying with glyphosate to eradicate coca crops. The sprayings led to increased forced displacement and worsened living conditions in areas already battered by violence. Roadblocks, kidnappings, the exaction of taxes from traders, armed stoppages on the part of the guerrilla groups, formed a complicated backdrop for human rights and democracy.

This is the setting in which PCS launched operations in Colombia in 1990, insisting that forced displacement required both a humanitarian and a political response (it was estimated that at the end of the decade that a total of three million people had been internally displaced and a large number of Colombian refugees had left the country).

Activities in Colombia came out of an exploratory visit by Gordon Hutchison in 1989, organized and accompanied by the NGO Justice and Peace and the National Association of Farmworkers (ANUC). The visit focused on the municipality of Barrancabermeja in the Magdalena Medio region, with a view to researching large-scale forced displacement of rural people by paramilitary groups.

During this period PCS used its Discretionary Fund to support a series of small projects with local NGOs and grassroots groups, including the Popular Women's Organization (OFP), ANUC (Barrancabermeja), the Colombian Association for Social Assistance (ASCODAS, Meta) and the Popular Training Institute (IPC, Medellín), Justice and Peace, the Latin American Institute for Alternative Legal Services (ILSA), Peace Brigades International (PBI, Bogotá) and Revive (*Revivir*, department of Montería), among others. The Sponsorship Group allowed the Discretionary Fund to be used in Colombia during this period as part of what they called "pre-program" activities.



This phase enabled PCS to secure funding from the European Union for a program of support to the internally displaced population in the north-western region of Colombia, through MINGA, an NGO. With support from the Norwegian Refugee Council, PCS helped to strengthen the San José de Apartadó Community in Urabá, one of the regions most affected by land grabs, terror, and violence stemming from paramilitary control.

To this end, PCS worked with human rights NGOs based in Bogotá: CINEP, the Colombian Commission of Jurists and ILSA, helping to disseminate information nationally and internationally, exposing the drama of internally displaced people, raising funds and producing reports and findings from visits to the conflict zone (for example, to the departments of Putumayo, Meta and Norte de Santander). With support from ICVA, and accompanied by member agencies (the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Refugee Council), PCS helped to organize an observation mission to Colombia in 1991 and sponsored experience exchanges with Central America.

*Father Javier Giraldo travelled to El Salvador between 1990 and 1991 to visit rural shelters for displaced people and to replicate the experience. That's how the process in Colombia started out in the municipality of Barrancabermeja (under paramilitary control). At that time there was a shelter for the displaced run by the National Association of Farmworkers (ANUC) with support from the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission. That was what first shed light on the plight of the internally displaced in Colombia. (Interview with Gordon Hutchison, September 28, 2017.)*

PCS set up an office in Bogotá in 1994 and hired a project officer who reported directly to the Andean Regional Office in Lima, headed by Diana Ávila. That same year, PCS coordinated the visit of Francis Deng, the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Colombia, to several communities affected by internal displacement. The mission report noted that international presence in areas where the displaced population had settled was minimal and mentions only two organizations in the field: the International Committee of the Red Cross and PCS.

*There is also an international NGO consortium, the Project Counselling Service for Latin American Refugees (PCS), which operates in the region and has*

*recently established an office in Colombia, and which acted as the NGO coordinator for the visit of the Representative. This organization works on four fronts, namely, emergency response and protection of internally displaced persons, social development and organization projects, coordination and international awareness-raising. International Brigades will also establish a presence within the next few months in Barrancabermeja and in Bogotá.<sup>52</sup>*

During this process PCS contacted social organizations that were working in the most affected areas: the borders with Venezuela and with Ecuador, Llanos Orientales and the focal points for paramilitary activity in the Magdalena Medio region and the Norte de Santander department. This is how PCS made contact with MINGA, an NGO that was accompanying rural leaders in these areas. Support that included field visits, when not even public officials from their headquarters in Bogotá were familiar with the humanitarian situation at first hand, was crucial.

The sharing of experiences with Central America also helped to strengthen the work and capacity of the organizations in Colombia.

*PCS helped a lot to share the experience of armed conflicts in Central America, enabling us to learn from it. They were committed to strengthening social processes, the social fabric, in areas that were affected by forced displacement. They opened up development aid work and assistance to organizations working at the territorial level. The Cartagena Declaration did not have as much impact in Colombia as the ICVA mission. A consequence was the emergence of the most important NGO engaged in monitoring and advocacy on forced displacement in Colombia: the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES). (Interview with Gloria Flórez, former Director of MINGA, PCS NGO partner, August 28, 2017.)*

*I approached PCS in Ecuador during the first meetings on refugee held in Quito in 1989. PCS helped to fund my trip to CIREFCA II in New York. Gordon was there and there was discussion about refugees and the Contadura Process.<sup>53</sup> I went to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of the Jesuits and [came across] the books on displacement. In 1990 PCS had funded an exchange visit to El Salvador to share experiences. I*



In Peru PCS strengthened the women's organization Femucay (photo from 2000, Doug Ward)

met Ana Eugenia and the Jesuits there and I bought a book on how to carry out research and set up information systems on forced internal displacement. As a result, in early 1991, we put together the first report on forced displacement in Colombia. In 1997 we received our first support from PCS for CODHES' information system, which had launched in 1995 and included work located in the regions. (Interview with Jorge Rojas, former Director of CODHES, PCS NGO partner, September 22, 2017.)

Another landmark of the ICVA visit to Colombia was the official acknowledgement of forced displacement as a large-scale humanitarian problem:

*Although the United Nations' Cartagena Declaration already existed, the Colombian government did not acknowledge that there was forced displacement. After the ICVA visit, bodies such as the European Union, UNDP, UNHCR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights started working on the issue of displacement. (Interview with Gordon Hutchison, September 28, 2017.)*

A second field of activity was support for the "Paz Colombia" process, a civil society alternative to the Plan Colombia. The process helped to reshape the initial intention of the military aid package, calling upon the European Union to fund social and economic development projects in the most affected regions.

The peace process with the FARC came to an end in 1999 and along with it the ceasefire zone in the municipality of Caguán, in the department of Caquetá. The military assault ensued. We worked in the area with CODHES, Minga and PCS. The idea was to get the government to sit down with the ELN and the FARC to sign a humanitarian accord. Between 1999 and 2000 we put forward "Paz Colombia" (Peace Colombia) as a civil society coalition to challenge Plan Colombia, requesting support from the European Union to fund proposals from civil society sectors rather than the military.<sup>54</sup> PCS was the driving force behind the NGOs going beyond and thinking in terms of peace. (Interview with Jorge Rojas, former Director of CODHES, September 22 2017).

Work on gender gave focus to the accompaniment on the ground of organizations of women affected by violence during the armed internal conflict and by the effects of forced internal displacement. The accompaniment of women's organizational processes, such as the María Cano Corporation in Montería (Córdoba), the Popular Women's Organization in Barrancabermeja (Santander) and Workshop for Life (Taller de Vida) in Bogotá was crucial in the context of military harassment on the part of all the warring parties.

To provide it, PCS developed two kinds of program that were interlinked: a) support for the consequences of domestic violence affecting displaced families, and b) assistance to people who were victims of armed conflict and sought refuge in urban areas with their families. This area of work entailed addressing various situations: the redefinition of the roles of men and women who were the victims of forced displacement, the reduction in income as a consequence of displacement, the housing situation of displaced families. The objectives of PCS's programs can be summarized as: a) to assist recovery from trauma with the support of specialized teams; b) to accompany interactions within displaced homes in order to identify sustainable solutions, with a focus on women heads of household; c) to seek political solutions to the problem of displacement by supporting dialogue in which women participated.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the decade, PCS had consolidated its political, conceptual and methodological assets, contributing to transition processes that were getting underway in



Colombian women leaders engaged in a productive project in the Chocó Department, Colombia

Peru and which were being attempted in Colombia. With significant financial support for its programs from the European Union and other donor agencies, the hurdles were far from few: the complexity of the armed conflict in Colombia and Peru imposed new challenges on the social movements and human rights activists divided by ideological differences and scarred by decades of repression; the influence of the drugs trade in areas abandoned by the State; and the need for the humanitarian aid agenda to connect with the economic development agenda. These were the issues that PCS had to address in order to remain relevant in the decade of the 2000s.



## NOTES

30. The new government had to deal with 70,000 returning refugees under the UNHCR program (between 1989 and 1992) and another 110,000 through the program supported by the Organization of American States (OAS). UNHCR provided services to the population during 1991 and that same year saw the voluntary repatriation of Nicaraguans who did not have refugee status and were not organized from Costa Rica and Honduras.
31. By the end of 1992 there were more returnees than refugees. More than 100,000 refugees had returned to their countries. The most important flow was to Nicaragua (60,000), to El Salvador (almost 30,000) and to Guatemala (over 12,000).
32. The organizational process in El Salvador was at its peak. Between January 1988 and October 1989 alone, 40 new grassroots and community organizations had emerged, many of them supporting processes of return to the conflict zones. The military offensive of 1989, with bombings in civilian areas, assassination, torture, arrests and destruction of organizations' offices had generated an atmosphere of terror.
33. The countries that convened CIREFCA presented 59 priority projects that required 161 million dollars in external funding. Of these, 34 were fully funded with 65 million dollars. It is estimated that 60 million dollars for projects that were directly linked to the goals of CIREFCA were raised through NGOs. UNDP carried out a technical assessment of 50 projects, most of which aimed to support productive activities through technical training and credit (72%). The rest focused on building or repairing infrastructure, basic social services and institutional support. Forty per cent of them involved government institutions and the rest were managed by NGOs. See AMUNATEGUI, Juan. "El proceso de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Refugiados Centroamericanos (CIREFCA)" (The process of the International Conference on Central American Refugees, CIREFCA). In *Revista Relaciones Internacionales* 40. School of International Relations of the National University, Heredia, Costa Rica, third quarter of 1992. pp. 65-71.
34. The first regional forum "Enfoque de género en el trabajo con mujeres refugiadas, repatriadas y desplazadas en Centroamérica" (Gender approach in work with refugee, returnee and displaced women in Central America), FOREFEM, February 19-21, 1992 Guatemala City, aimed to draw attention to the situation of uprooted women.
35. Although CIREFCA and PRODERE (a UNDP program) opened up opportunities, the NGOs did not make use of them to maintain policy discussions and propose a different approach for the reconstruction phase. In her critical review of PCS, Jenny Pearce notes various opportunities that could have been better exploited: GRUCAN (a space for beneficiaries with UE and UN support) and PARinAC, set up by UNHCR for open dialogue with the NGOs.
36. Ana Eugenia Marín, chair of the Board of PCS, asserts that PCS supported between five and ten EU-funded reconstruction projects in El Salvador during this period. She points out these projects also provided political support because of the protection that a donor of this kind could provide in a context of constant military harassment of the refugee camps.
37. In 1993 the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR) began to emerge or "come out into the open" from the mountains to towns and cities. In total there were 23,000 people in Ixcán and the Sierra Ixil, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR). Numerous national and international observers visited the CPRs between 1992 and 1993 and noted that "the inhabitants are unarmed civilians living in severe poverty, barely eking out a living by growing maize and beans, and by breeding farm animals". In January 1994, the CPRs publicly announced their intention to resettle peacefully, as of February 2, in the areas they had originally come from between the Ixcán and Xalbal Rivers, on land belonging to the Ixcán Grande Cooperative, most of whose members also belonged to the CPRs, and they invited the IACHR to verify their situation in terms of observance of human rights. On March 9 and 10, 1994, the Quiché CPRs were visited by a delegation of the IAHCR. INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, Organization of American States (1994). *Special Report on the Human Rights Situation in the so-called "Communities of Peoples in Resistance" in Guatemala*.
38. "As for the land occupied by the highland CPRs, the Commission was told that ethnic rivalry with neighboring villages was one of the most pressing socio-economic problems and that it had to do with the lack of land-titling. Given the nature of the terrain, the lack of land registers, and the "de facto" possession of much of the land, neither the CPRs nor neighboring communities and owners have adequate legal safeguards with which to exercise dominion. This could make it even more difficult to solve the mistrust created during the armed conflict." See INTERAMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, Organization of American States (1994). *Special Report on the Human Rights Situation in the so-called "Communities of Peoples in Resistance" in Guatemala*. Chapter III, Major recently denounced significant problems and the Government's response.
39. Between 1980 and 1987 there was no highway in Cobán – even today none exists – and some communities had to walk for five or six hours.
40. Organization representing refugee women who had returned from Quintana Roo and Chiapas to Guatemala with the initial aim of securing some land in their country of origin. The name honours Adelina Caal, killed during the Panzós massacre under the scorched earth policy of the government of Efraín Ríos Montt between 1982 and 1983. Their head office is in the community of Nueva Libertad, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Alta Verapaz.
41. *Las palabras y el sentir de las mujeres mayas de Kaqla* (Words and feelings from the Mayan women of Kaqla), Kaqla Mayan women's Group; *Sanando la trama histórica de la victimización de las mujeres mayas* (Healing Mayan women's history of victimization), Kaqla Mayan women, published in August 2012; *Mujeres Mayas: Universo y Vida* (Mayan Women: Universe and Life), published in December 2009; *Tramas y trascendencias. Reconstruyendo historias con nuestras abuelas y madres* (Tales and Transcendence: Reconstructing stories from our mothers and grandmothers), published in 2011; *Caminos para la*

*plenitud de las mujeres mayas y nuestros pueblos. Propuesta metodológica a partir de la experiencia de las mujeres mayas kaqla* (Paths to plenitude for Mayan women and our peoples. A methodological proposal based on the experiences of Kaqla Mayan women), published in 2010.

42. The Sepur Zarco case is the first in which, on February 26, 2016, a Guatemala court was to pass sentence for slavery and sexual violence as a war crime, committed during the period of armed conflict (1960-1996). 'The suffering of the women of Sepur Zarco dates back to their communities' struggle for land rights in in El Estor Izabal, a Maya Q'eqch'í area where land grabs by large plantation landowners and mining interests have prevailed. From its establishment in 1982 until 1986, the military base in Sepur Zarco operated as a 'recreational centre'. Members of the army repeatedly raped the women and forced them to clean, do their laundry and cook for them. As well as every kind of human rights abuse, the women suffered specific forms of gender-based violence. The most common form of violence used against women during the armed conflict was rape, which was systematically practised as part of strategies that violated the Guatemalan population's human rights. Indigenous women and girls in rural areas suffered the worst assaults. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification, 88.7% of rape victims belonged to Mayan groups; 62% of them were between the ages of 18 and 60, 35% were girls and 3% were elderly. Mayan women had to face ethnic discrimination on top of armed and gender-based violence." See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Mujeres Maya Q'eqch'í de Sepur Zarco marcan hito histórico contra la esclavitud sexual como acto de guerra* (Sepur Zarco Maya Q'eqch'í Women achieve historic milestone against sexual slavery as an act of war). Available at: [http://www.gt.undp.org/content/guatemala/es/home/ourwork/crisispreventionandrecovery/successstories/Sepur\\_Zarco.html](http://www.gt.undp.org/content/guatemala/es/home/ourwork/crisispreventionandrecovery/successstories/Sepur_Zarco.html)
43. CROSBY, Alison "Anatomy of a workshop: women's struggles for transformative participation in Latin America". In *Journal of Feminism and Psychology*, Volume 19, August 2009. pp. 283-297.
44. Around the mid 1990s, a state of emergency was declared in 65 provinces and one district, with restrictions on freedom and broad powers granted to the military. The 1990 presidential elections marked a turning point in Peru's political situation.
45. Interview with Iván Zapata, anthropologist with experience in research on forced displacement, in Lima, Peru on September 5, 2017.
46. The CVR decided to put forward two cases of women who were sexually abused by the military, documenting cases between 1984 and 1995 in the Manta and Vilca military bases (35 women) and a second case in Lima. The CVR holds 334 individual records of women who presented evidence. The Criminal Prosecutor's Office in Huancaavelica presented charges in 2007 and on July 8, 2007 the National Criminal Court commenced hearings for the trial of 11 members of the military. It was the first time that any of the military faced trial for crimes against humanity in the framework of internal armed conflict.
47. The CVR notes that sexual violence includes human rights violations such as rape, forced nudity, forced prostitution, forced marriage, sexual slavery and forced abortion. In these terms they reported 527 cases involving women and 11 men. However, drawing on data from the Register of Victims of the Ministry of Justice's Reparations Council, DEMUS reports that there were 4,567 victims just of rape during the internal armed conflict and that there are more than 1,500 victims of other forms of sexual violence. In reference to the perpetrators, the CVR reports that the State was responsible for 83% of acts of sexual violence and Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA for around 11%. In the case of the State, it is noted that abuse on the part of the military and the police occurred during raids in villages and communities and also in retaliation against people suspected of having links – forced or voluntary – with terrorist groups. In the same vein, victims of sexual violence are reported as being mostly illiterate, Quechua speaking, from rural areas and young people between the age of 10 and 29 in at least 15 departments of Peru, with most cases registered in Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac, in the southern mountains of the country.
48. ÁVILA, Diana (2004) *Lecciones aprendidas. Revisión de nuestra práctica*. (Lessons learned. A review of our practice.) PCS: Lima.
49. From 1982 onwards, several presidents had initiated peace processes, seeking solutions to decades of internal armed conflict. The processes were launched without the leadership of international mediators and with different approaches according to what each government understood by negotiated settlement. President Belisario Betancour (1982-1986), for instance, focused on the objective and subjective causes of violence and proposed "democratic openness" in negotiations with the guerrilla groups and acknowledging them as political actors. His successor, Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) restricted negotiations to the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. At the end of his administration only the 19th of April Movement (M-19) had taken up the offer under this policy.
50. At the end of the decade, the election of President Andrés Barrantes (1998-2002) again opened up the agenda for negotiations with the FARC and approaches were also made to the ELN. The breakdown in talks between the national government and the FARC heralded a counterinsurgency policy that represented a step backwards in the consolidation of democracy, with the election of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006 and 2006-2010) and the implications of the policy of "democratic security" of his government.
51. As in Peru and Central America, the human rights movement in Colombia was influenced by the Communist Party, other left-wing and progressive organizations and the Catholic Church (especially the Jesuits). The persecution and assassination of social leaders, even those who defended reforms envisaged in the political Constitution such as the election of mayors by the people, were commonplace. The stigmatization of human rights discourse as supporting guerrilla policy had led to the assassination of several leaders, among them Josué Giraldo and, in 1997, researchers Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado of the NGO Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP).
52. UN (1994). *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/95. Addendum. Profiles in*

*displacement: Colombia*. E/CN.4/1995/50/Add.1. October 3, 1994. Paragraph 101.

53. The Contadura group was a multilateral body proposed in 1983 by the Mexican government to the government of Colombia, to which the governments of Panama and Venezuela were also invited, with the aim of jointly promoting peace in Central America.
54. The human rights and social organizations, peace initiatives and some political sectors launched a process to come together

to persuade the national and international community that the serious risks inherent in Plan Colombia were real. They believed that it was possible to encourage the countries of the European Union not to support a plan concocted by Colombia and the United States. To this end they spurred the human rights networks in the United States and Europe into action.

55. ACOSTA, Gladys (1995) *Gender perspective in programmes for the displaced*. Bogotá: PCS.





Women in a boat, San Juan River, Chocó Department, Colombia



Plantain trading on the docks at Quibdó (Chocó Department, Colombia)



## THE TRANSITION: FROM THE END OF CONFLICT TO DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

*The* last phase of PCS consists of two moments. The first is the period prior to institutional transition in 2007, when PCS ceased to be an international consortium of agencies and became a Latin American organization. The second is the later period (2007-2016), during which the team focused most of its efforts on fundraising and consolidating an agenda for work on the ground – an agenda that translates the Board's idea of promoting **Latin American integration** as an alternative to the model based on bilateral trade agreements with the US and EU, in contrast to the security agenda imposed by US military aid programs in the region.

PCS's position was aimed at "strengthening institutions, organizations, networks and social movements from the standpoint that they should build capacities for participatory local development and for proposing effective decentralization strategies, paying special attention to the decentralization of political power" (PCS Annual Institutional Report, 2001). To do this, PCS would gear its efforts toward "advocacy and support for social processes involving such issues as the migration problem, the fight against impunity (the right to truth, justice and reparation), organization for risk prevention and management in conflicts and natural disasters, and social organization capacity to fight for the respect of economic, social and cultural human rights (ESCR)" (PCS Annual Institutional Report, 2001). (Informe Institucional Anual de PCS, 2001).

This focus on the strengthening of local democratization had three emphases: a) **a regional approach** in the counselling strategy; b) **an ESCR-based perspective** (which would guide actions in the reconstruction phase); and c) **the fight against impunity** during the transition phase (which would guide the work with victims of sociopolitical violence). In their search for new counselling strategies, the PCS teams focused on projects that would reinforce

the sharing of program experiences in the different countries where it had a presence, the idea being to bolster the work of previous decades and possibly consolidate a regional approach to the challenges it hoped to tackle. Continued support for peace initiatives was one of the features of its work in this final phase.

### 1. The connection between transition and local development: 2000-2007

The first decade of the 2000s began with major changes in each of the countries where PCS operated. Some factors were common in post-conflict Central America: expansion of a development model based on foreign investment and natural resource exploitation, the power of the military in the exercise of government, and the consolidation of a political model in which private actors – primarily multinational enterprises and domestic elites – dominated decision making. The strategies that helped consolidate this model continued to be land grabbing (now based on natural resource megaprojects) and violence against ethnic groups and rural organizations located in strategic areas. The processes of truth, justice and reparation had no effect on the model, and often, as in Colombia and Peru, fostered returns under conditions of social exclusion similar to those existing during the most intense phases of internal armed conflict.

Having made no progress in its peace negotiations, Colombia was headed towards consolidation of this model. Its context was more complex than that of the other countries, because talks with the guerrillas were stalled in 2000 and, with the election of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006), the paramilitary groups began to be demobilized.<sup>56</sup> This led to paramilitary restructuring and a process of rearmament that intensified impunity.

Figure 2. Progressive governments in South America



In several of the South American countries, however, left-wing political forces had reached power and were proposing a different agenda characterized by nationalization of large enterprises, Latin American integration, stronger social policy, and increased democratization that broadened participation of popular sectors in political decision making. The proposals gained momentum with the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1999-2013), Ignacio Lula Da Silva (2003-2010) and his successor Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) in Brazil, Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) in Argentina, Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006 to the present), Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007-2017), Fernando Lugo in Paraguay (2008-2012), Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2006-2010 and 2014-2018), and José Mujica in Uruguay (2010-2015). The new political scenario in Latin America would pose new challenges and new purposes for PCS.

In Central America, international aid agencies were withdrawing in response to a relative political and economic "stabilization" as the so-called "reconstruction" period of the post-conflict phase came to a close. This had repercussions in PCS's internal debates. Some agencies – particularly the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils – had already proposed in 2000 that PCS should wrap up its work in the post-conflict areas (specifically Mexico and Central America) and refocus its efforts on working with refugees and displaced persons in countries still experiencing armed conflict. At that time the European Union agencies were limiting their priorities in Latin America.

In Peru, Fujimori's departure in 2000 and Peru's classification as a middle-income country brought a shift in the focus of international aid packages and the political context in which human rights organizations had been mobilizing. In Colombia, the failed peace talks between the Andrés Pastrana government (1998-2002) and the FARC in 1999, followed by Alvaro Uribe Vélez's subsequent election and re-election to the presidency (2002-2006 and 2006-2010), resulted in a hardening of military and political counterinsurgency policy. A climate of politi-



Families of the disappeared pose together after mass in the cathedral, Huancavelica, Peru

cal polarization led to the closing of humanitarian space, controlled at that time by the Colombian government. This, in part, drove the transitioning of the Guatemala office into a regional office and the closing of the offices in El Salvador and Nicaragua (2002-2003).

In this period, with the closing of the offices in El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Guatemala office transitioned into PCS's regional office for Central America and Mexico.

### *1.1. The fight against impunity and the ongoing pursuit of peace*

During this period, PCS continued its approach of **accompaniment as a protection mechanism**, though with a more elaborate strategy that required, in practice, developing protocols and shaping organizational networks to consolidate a mechanism for monitoring and following up on the human rights situation. This strategy was put into practice in Colombia through the Protecting Defenders and Social Leaders project (supported by the Ford Foundation) in the regions hardest hit by political violence (Magdalena Medio, Chocó and Urabá, on the border with Panama). In Peru, the strategy was implemented through reconstruction of the Huancavelica Human Rights Committee, comprised of human rights organizations and families of the disappeared, as well as through support for member organizations of the National Human Rights Coordinating Committee. This accompaniment meant a reopening of political space in a setting of continued polarization.



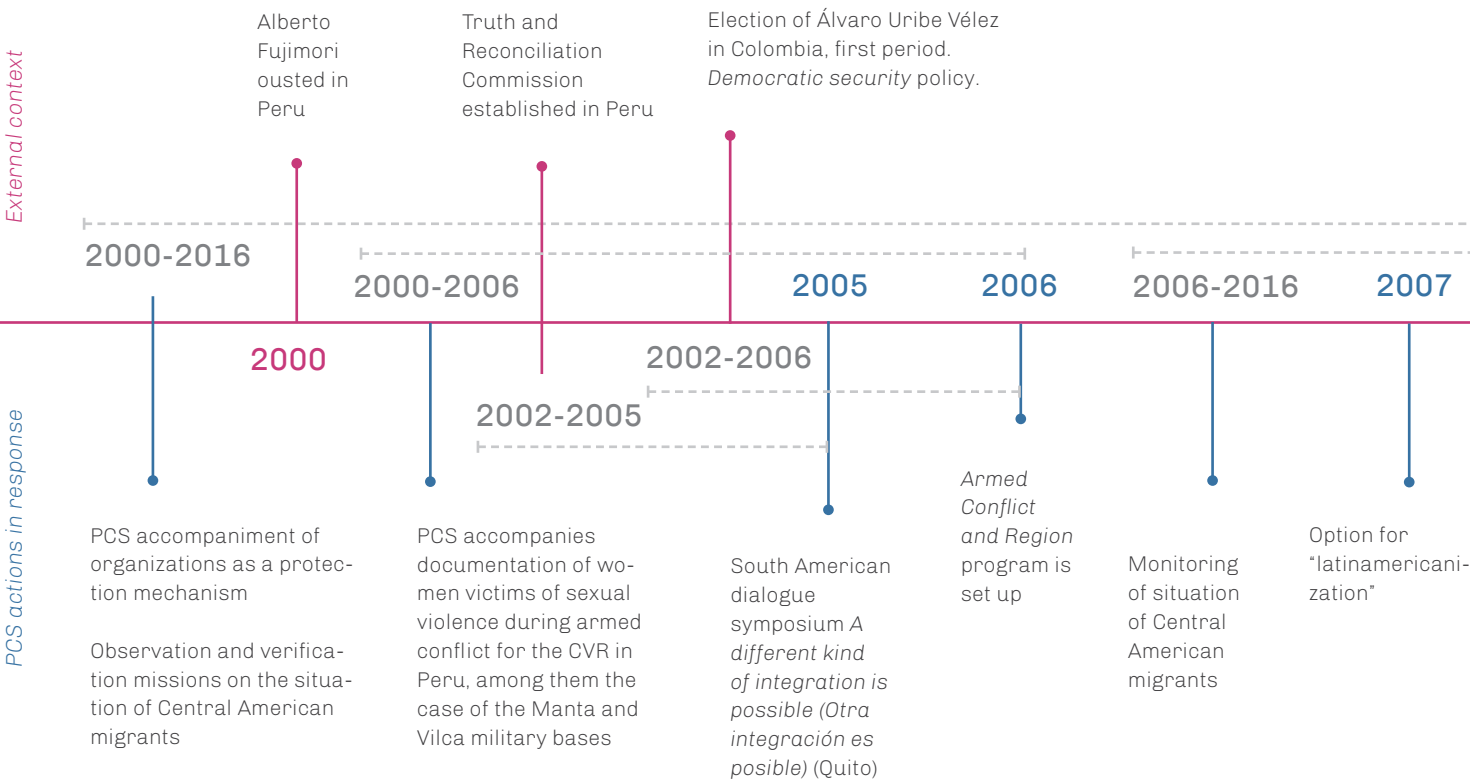


First Board of PCS during the "Latinamericanization" stage, 2007, Lima, Peru. Front row, left to right: Mónica Chuji from Ecuador, Guillermo Paysses from Uruguay. Middle row: María Eugenia Vásquez from Colombia, Jesús Tecu from Guatemala, Sergio Aguayo from Mexico, Gladys Acosta from Peru and Esperanza Moreno from Canada. Back row: Javier Gómez from Bolivia, Herman van Aken from the Netherlands, Ana Eugenia Marín from El Salvador and Pilar del Barrio from Spain.

The protection strategy also involved a strong **legal component** that focused, in Colombia, on defending social and community leaders and members of the opposition against arbitrary political persecution. Indigenous authorities and Afrodescendant community councils located on the borders with Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela were being harassed by the army and paramilitary incursions. The defense of their lands was considered a threat to large oil palm producers and often classified as part of a guerrilla strategy to maintain control of the land. Given this scenario, as part of its counselling PCS provided legal advice for protection against abuse by authorities and for documentation of refugees in Panama.

In Peru, PCS took steps towards training the families of victims to provide them with legal knowledge and tools to enable them to participate in the ongoing monitoring, exhumations

### Timeline 3. Historic context in which PCS operated from 2000 onwards





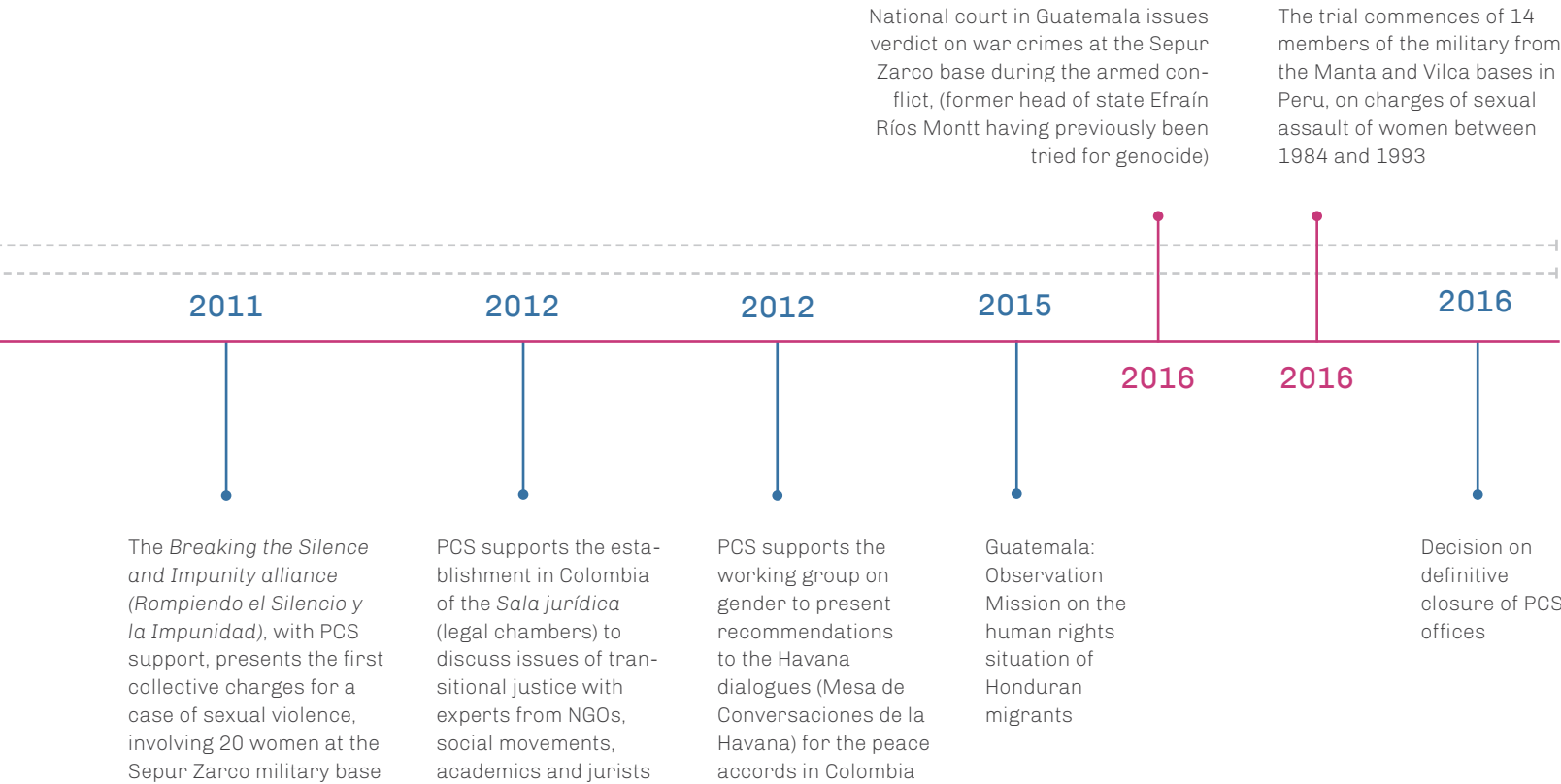
and investigations into cases of forced disappearance. The legal defence of human rights continued in the department of Huánuco and the Alto Huallaga region, where Sendero Luminoso still had a presence and the government was hardening its policy of forcible eradication of coca plantations.

For its part, the **organizational component** had two features. The first involved continuing to enable spaces for communication and dialogue between civil society organizations and the state, with support for peace and reconciliation initiatives. The second supported collective actions for demanding rights and the participation of grassroots organizations in public policymaking and implementation.

The first type of support was given in the case of Colombia with a platform comprising aid agencies – of which PCS was a part (Inter-Agency Dialogue, or DIAL). DIAL made the positioning of human rights issues possible in a context where humanitarian work was stigmatized. Moreover, the establishment of humanitarian spaces such

as civilian territories that were declared neutral for all parties in the armed conflict, were essential, primarily for Indigenous communities. Support for the Catatumbo Round Table on the border with Venezuela, the creation of the Municipal Peace Council and for the Women Against the War movement in Barrancabermeja were examples of this type of accompaniment. In Central America, this type of accompaniment was consolidated with the participation of 15 aid agencies in the Norwegian Forum, where common positions regarding civil society were discussed.

A key step in the transition was PCS's support for the processes of truth, justice and reparation, which required building the advocacy capacity of victim organizations. In Peru, PCS's work focused on lobbying for the participatory formation of a truth commission. Its strengthening efforts were concentrated in the department of Huancavelica, where one of the most important results was the creation of the *Memory House in Huancavelica*. The product of a cooperation agreement between PCS, the provincial government of Huancavelica and the





Anfasep Memorial House, Ayacucho, Peru, 2007.

Departmental Association of Families of Detainees and Persons Disappeared and Assassinated by Subversive Violence in Huancavelica (ADFADAH), the Memory House was conceived as a centre for information and awareness-raising on human rights violations.

In this context, PCS also provided support for a pilot study by the Memory Group of the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) in Huamanga-Ayacucho aimed at finding out how memories had been transferred among the generation of youths who had been born or were still very young after the end of the conflict. One example of how PCS fostered historical memory processes for the victims was the "Never Forget You" (*Olvidarte Nunca*) project developed in Apurímac, which was able to provide the Reconciliation and Truth Committee (CVR) with 400 testimonies and directly impact the transition phase. PCS directly contributed to the transition process by monitoring the recommendations of the CVR report; drawing up, with the participation of victim organizations, a proposal for implementing the CVR's Comprehensive Reparations Plan with the displaced population in urban settings; and accompanying victim organizations in Lima, Apurímac, Huánuco and Junín.

The collective actions of victims accompanied and supported by PCS enabled significant public demonstrations to take place, and heightened public awareness in general. Huancavelica women and victim organizations; representatives of those affected by regional violence;

internally displaced persons settled in Lima and their representatives from the country's interior; families of the disappeared grouped under ANFASEP and COFADER; and victim delegations from Junín, Pasco, Huánuco, Apurímac, San Martín, Ayacucho and other areas all actively participated in the National March for Justice and Reparation held in Lima on October 25, 2007, a demonstration that marked an important milestone.

In the struggle against impunity, PCS helped spotlight the persecution of human rights defenders and leaders in Colombia and created a space for debating civil society peacebuilding proposals. PCS's accompaniment of national meetings of victims of State crimes helped to highlight State violence at a time when media and public opinion were focused on FARC guerrilla violence. The National Victims of State Crimes Movement (MOVICE), with PCS support, led public demands on the Alvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006) administration to initiate a process of truth, justice and reparation. PCS's inclusion in the International Sites of Conscience Network helped advance the issue of historical memory, even before the transition had started.

In Central America, the processes of truth, justice and reparation progressed while reconstruction was still underway. The emphasis was on reconciliation and the pursuit of conditions for political stability. In Guatemala, PCS concentrated its support on human rights organizations that were focusing on reconciliation, the dignifying of survivors and the pursuit of truth and justice. Through a coordination mechanism set up with civil society stakeholders, an indirect relationship was formed with the State, specifically the Human Rights Office of the Public Prosecutor, creating a space for advocacy. In El Salvador, PCS consolidated its line of action by following up on the CIREFCA programs and peace accords.

**Psychological and social work with women victims of sexual violence and other types of violence** found in internal armed conflict continued to be a key component of the fight against impunity. In Guatemala, PCS was able to contribute to the cause of justice by continuing the work started in the 1990s, while at the same time working to

help women, mainly Indigenous women, on ways to deal with their grief and injuries. PCS's intercultural perspective made it possible to address these processes, supplementing the psycho-social approach with research tools, with women as the protagonists.

*The first four years were the hardest because we had to find the women and then promote conceptual and methodological coordination. The second phase involved expanding the work, carrying out the processes, the self-awareness groups in five languages. In each group there was a promoter and a translator. The methodology included getting all the women together once a year. The tribunal of conscience began its work. PCS's most important contribution was political dialogue. Diana Ávila contributed at the time so that later the work on sexual violence would spread to Peru and Colombia. I went to Peru to advise the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The work on sexual violence spread throughout Latin America through the PCS offices. We worked from then on with the women of Sepur Zarco. (Interview with Yolanda Aguilar, former PCS consultant, August 22, 2017)*

A major milestone during that period occurred in 2011, when the Breaking the Silence and Impunity Alliance filed with the public prosecutor's office the first class action for sexual violence involving twenty women survivors of crimes against humanity at the Sepur Zarco military base in El Estor (Izabal). These efforts were carried out within the framework of national and international law, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. PCS advocacy in relation to the trial of military administrators of the Manta and Vilca bases in Peru, and the spotlighting of forced sterilizations as a crime against humanity, were part of the process.

In Colombia, PCS helped put sexual violence on the peace agenda as a pivotal aspect of the fight for truth, justice and reparation.

*When I joined PCS, the sexual violence agenda was well under way, led by women since the onset of the nineties. The Casa de la Mujer ("Women's House"), an NGO, was raising that issue, with international recognition, in fact. We were working with the global impunity agenda; we had counterparts with organizations that were doing the work in the courts (similar in Peru,*

*different with CAMEX). We were able to get a hearing at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on sexual violence and strengthen relations among women's organizations in the three countries. We built ties with organizations in Peru. (Interview with Kimberly Stanton, former executive director of PCS, September 30, 2017)*

The regional approach was applied in practice at that time in numerous encounters among women from different regions within each country and the exchanging of experiences among different countries. In Peru, the Second National Meeting of Women Affected by Political Violence, held in September 2002, gave rural women accompanied by PCS the opportunity to prepare a document, delivered in advance at the CVR public hearing, on political violence and crimes against women. This was a fundamental contribution to the Comprehensive Program of Reparations the CVR was charged with presenting.<sup>57</sup>

In 2003, the *Mental Health Seminar with Women Victims of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts* was held in Guatemala to exchange experiences on work undertaken in different countries and help collectively build a model for working on mental health with women victims of sexual violence. With the participation of women victims and professionals from Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Peru, experiences were also shared at the *Seminar on Legal Protection of Women Victims of Sex-Based Political Violence in Armed Conflicts* on the use of inter-American mechanisms for protecting the human rights of women affected by armed conflicts. A variety of publications helped synthesize these lessons learned, one of which was a book entitled *Impunidad: pongámosle fin. Violencia sexual contra las mujeres en conflicto armado y post conflicto en América Latina, (Impunity: let's put an end to it. Sexual violence against women during armed conflict and post conflict in Latin America)*, presented in Spain in 2006. In 2003, PCS helped organize a seminar on *Experiences of Displaced Populations in Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Peru* to learn more about actions undertaken in earlier decades.

## **1.2. Displaced and refugee populations as the subjects of development**

PCS solidified its strategy of strengthening participation in public policy design and implementation in the local, regional and national arenas. Locally, it worked on building



capacity for dialogue with municipal and departmental authorities so that the proposals of these populations would be included in development plans and land management policies along with allocated budgets. With participation in local affairs, the range of topics was expanded to include other matters such as micro watershed management, food security and the environment in general, as part creating sustainable conditions for the return of displaced populations that occurred over the course of the decade. PCS's attempt to reinforce participatory democracy was grounded in the conviction that the displaced and refugee returnee population should be the agent and subject of development programs guiding reconstruction.

In line with this approach, in 1999 PCS conducted a study entitled *Poder Local. Viejos sueños, nuevas prácticas (Local Power. Old dreams, new practices)* (PCS: 1999), taking as case studies six sites, towns or municipalities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua which shared aspects of refuge, displacement and repatriation. The study served as input for discussion on ways of building local power from the bottom up. According to the PCS regional director for Central America and Mexico at that time, "during the eighties, what predominated were emergency aid efforts for uprooted groups and support for building capacities so that their representatives would be accepted as spokespersons by their own governments and international bodies. This agenda changed for PCS, other international organizations and the refugee population when the armed conflicts ended" (Danuta Sacher, former regional director of PCS for Central America and Mexico, 1999). The new challenge was to coordinate viable and sustainable concepts and strategies for the social, economic and political reinsertion of these populations.

Some examples clearly illustrate PCS's efforts in this respect: the support program for rural woman in Guatemala and Peru; strengthening of the Displaced Persons Round Table as a forum for dialogue with municipal governments in Colombia (to include aid for the displaced population in the budget); strengthening of alternative credit co-operatives in El Salvador (Chalatenango, Cuscatlán and Cabañas); and formation of the Federation of Community Associations of southern San Miguel. Efforts here focused on productive rehabilitation in areas affected by conflict, Hurricane Mitch (1998) and the 2001 earthquake.

In Nicaragua, assistance was directed at rehabilitating the rural families of Esquipulas and Pueblo Nuevo, building self-management capacities. In Peru, the strengthening of women's organizations (ASMUC and FEMUCAY) was crucial to the empowering of alderwomen on municipal councils. In Guatemala, a rural women leadership program and the edition, publication and dissemination of a study on the lives of women refugee returnees helped lay the foundations for the next stage of intervention with various organizations of uprooted rural women. In Colombia, the accompaniment of the return of organized displaced communities in the Urabá – Chocó region focused on support for sustainable production initiatives. Participation by the displaced population in the drafting of development plans for Bucaramanga and Floridablanca (Santander) is an example that clearly illustrates this intent to coordinate agendas.

Regionally and locally, PCS accompanied innovative initiatives for influencing and participating in public policies on reparations, which led to the lobbying of national authorities where final decisions were made. To advocate for enactment of the law on internal displacement (Law 28223 of 2004) in Peru, for instance, PCS worked with organizations of displaced persons, who participated in the public hearing entitled "Displaced People for the Law" (*Desplazados por la Ley*). PCS also supported work with members of Congress to pass and enact this law, contributing with its experience in other settings.

### **1.3. Migration and the regional approach**

For the work with migrant populations, the Office for Central America and Mexico (CAMEX) implemented a Mesoamerican approach. In the Andean region the approach encompassed legal advice, lobbying, research and dissemination of information on the situation of Colombian refugees in neighboring countries (Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama, mainly). PCS also promoted dialogue and coordination to highlight the situation of Central American migrants heading for the United States.

To address problems deriving from the flow of Colombian refugees to the Andean region, PCS designed the *Armed Conflict and Region* program. Two proposals were developed: one revolving around conflict and region (backed by the Dutch NGO ICCO, with support and in partnership with other international NGOs) and another, broader one based on the experience of the *South American Dialogue: A*

*Different Integration is Possible* symposium held in Quito in November 2005, attended by various aid agencies with programs in the region.

In September 2006, a dialogue was held with US and Canadian academics in Montreal, Canada, and a North-South meeting of academics and analysts was planned as part of American Sociological Association meetings in 2007. Based on this, PCS participated in the forums of the Inter-American Platform for Human Rights, Democracy and Development. In addition, it published numerous reports on the Colombian conflict, the situation on the borders and the humanitarian crisis of refugees in Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru. In Ecuador, for example, it coordinated work with a research team from the Simón Bolívar Andean University, while in Venezuela and Peru it was already doing the field work for collecting the points of view of representatives of the State, civil society and refugees themselves, in coordination with UNHCR and its partners. Furthermore, the *Border Program*, led by the Colombian office, gathered strength and relevance in this context and sought to understand migratory flows from a regional perspective, starting with the political changes and consolidation of security policies that went hand in hand with Plan Colombia, which guided the war on drugs in the region.

The second strategic direction focused PCS's gaze on the second migratory wave. The human rights situation of migrants who were risking their lives in the hands of *coyotes* to flee from the organized violence of gangs and *maras* was a new field of work that required a different methodology.

The challenges were numerous, however. There was no longer any organization within this diaspora, dispersed throughout various cities, seeking a different economic future and politically disenchanted with the collective actions initiated by their parents in past decades. Here PCS concentrated its efforts on political advocacy with Mexican, Guatemalan and Salvadoran government organizations and organizations such as the International Organization on Migration (IOM).

The main strategy was to provide guidance on options for assistance and international observation missions. Rather than working in the areas of expulsion, PCS's advocacy was now directed at the migratory route and

the forms of protection and care provided to migrants through dedicated parish churches in the most critical areas. The Mesoamerican approach reinforced PCS's regional view of migratory processes beyond borders, including Mexico's relationship with the region and security policies for Central America. In Mexico, PCS accompanied the Group for the Defence of the *Rights of Migrants* with its member organizations in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. In 2006, PCS strengthened the Rights of Migrants program as a line of work and made progress in its assessment of the migrant situation and organizations working with migrants in Central America.

Mayra Alarcón, former director of the PCS Office for Central America and Mexico, describes these contributions in the political context at that time:

*I was the CAMEX representative for four years, from 2013 to 2016. At that time the issue of migration and refuge was extremely relevant.... One of the things I liked the most about PCS was the Mesoamerican approach. That view highlighted the struggles and situations in southern Mexico and their connections to northern Central America. When I joined the organization, the issue of migration was already more than 10 years old; there was already a program that the CAMEX office was working with. Continuity in the work with migrants was important because PCS started working with refugees in the eighties.* (Interview with Mayra Alarcón, former director of the PCS CAMEX office, October 12, 2017)

## 2. Latin Americanization as an option (2007-2016)

In its efforts to coordinate human rights work with a development-centred agenda, as a pillar of reconstruction in the post-conflict phase, PCS faced several challenges, including a concentration of international aid funding in state programs and an internal debate on the nature of the organization.<sup>58</sup> Jean Symes, of Inter Pares, was chair of the last Board to be made up of agencies from the North. In her speech at the event in which the institution was handed over to a new Board of Directors, most of them from Latin America, she declared:

*We are an international group, coming together this evening from many countries. But tonight we can truly*

say that we are compatriots, working in common cause in a changing hemisphere and a changing world (...) working together (...) to ensure that the 30 year legacy of PCS is passed intact and healthy to an entirely new organization that can respond to the current context and challenges we face in this hemisphere.

*The consortium of organizations from Canada and Europe that founded and sponsored PCS since 1979 has changed and shifted over these many years. Through all of those changes, the consortium has done its best to remain true to its mandate and commitment to accompany and support Latin American counterparts and colleagues in the cause of justice, democracy and human rights in places wracked by civil violence and repressive regimes. Now the consortium, in consultation with a broad range of actors, is relinquishing its stewardship and transferring the equity and resources of PCS to a new and independent regional institution, a Latin American organization with an international Board of Directors. Our solidarity and support will continue; our ownership has been passed on.*<sup>59</sup>

Diana Ávila, PCS executive director, noted in the 2006 report on activities that:

*We have made progress on winning recognition for PCS in the region as coordinators and promoters of synergies among national stakeholders and the international community. (...) In this context, PCS has continued to support peacebuilding efforts, promoting and strengthening the participation of the organized population in the fragile Central American democracies and in other Andean countries. (...) Our effort to achieve a fairer and equitable democratic Latin America is still our main goal. (Report on Activities, April 2006)*

The concern for fostering Latin America processes aimed at consolidating democracy and encouraging integration guided the discussions and transition of PCS's governing body in 2007:

*In 2006, the PCS's Sponsorship Group, comprised at that time of Inter Pares from Canada, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Dutch Interchurch Aid (DIA) and Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS), reflecting on the processes underway in the region, initiated changes in the governance structure to install, in 2007, a Board*

*of Directors that now consisted of individuals – mostly from Latin America – rather than aid agencies.... This rejuvenating decision by PCS enabled us, as an institution, to play a new role in the region in our desire to foster the building of participatory democracy and respect for human rights. (Diana Ávila, Reflexión-Acción. PCS Latinoamericanización, 2013)*

PCS thus aimed for a work model where different stakeholders (regional Latin American agencies, regional, national and municipal governments, non-governmental organizations, universities, social organizations and affected populations) would converge with international cooperation from Europe and Canada. Agencies that supported PCS, though not members, included the following: European church NGOs, the Anglican Church of Canada through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), ICCO, Trocaire, CAFOD, Christian Aid and Bread for the World. The change towards "Latinamericanization" started with the change in the governance structure. At a time when international cooperation had one foot out the door of Latin America and member agencies were no longer opting for the PCS consortium but rather seeking to raise their own profiles, PCS sought leadership with roots in the region.

In 2007 PCS went from being led by a Sponsorship Group made up of international agencies to a structure consisting of a Board of Directors, an Executive Director and staff teams in regional offices (with nine individual members, essentially from Latin America, on the Board). The change in the origins of the Board's, along with the absence of agencies who contributed to fundraising, posed major challenges, since a large part of PCS's efforts had to go into this task.

There were numerous changes in international aid and these had an impact on the transformations in PCS, affecting its fundraising results. In *Contexto de la Cooperación Internacional: aportes para la sostenibilidad financiera de PCS (The International Aid Context: thoughts on PCS's financial sustainability)* (2015), the result of a consultancy funded by PCS to identify effective solutions for these changes, Zoraida Castillo pointed out the following:

*Changing international relationships, caused to a large extent by the last fifty years of globalization, have given rise to a new architecture of aid, where*



development cooperation is part of an integrated multilateral system. At the end of the 1990s, the twenty-two members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) accounted for 95% of total aid to developing countries. Today, aid to developing countries is channeled through more than 150 multilateral and bilateral agencies (<http://www.southsouth.info/>). Developing countries are looking more and more to their southern peers for exchanging knowledge and experiences. This, together with the development of new technologies and the growing number of private philanthropic and business organizations, has definitively transformed and increased the complexity of the international cooperation system, creating opportunities as well as many challenges.<sup>60</sup>

These changes can be summarized as: a) a tendency for donors to channel resources through the financial systems of the recipient countries; b) delivery of aid to state agencies in order to improve mutual accountability and further institutional strengthening during the post-conflict period; c) fragmentation of funds among many stakeholders, with greater participation of the business sector; d) a cross-cutting human rights approach that addresses aspects of poverty, social exclusion and environmental vulnerability within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals; e) a growing importance of South-South cooperation (among developing countries), in an attempt to decentralize official development aid from countries in the North; and f) a tendency to support national NGOs.

According to Zoraida,

*International organizations, and in this case Latin American ones such as PCS, face fundraising challenges because we more and more frequently find international donors channelling their funds through state agencies in order to conform to the criteria of ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability and results-oriented management. In addition, they are starting to require public-private partnerships or partnering with local stakeholders, and they see national NGOs as important recipients. These changes require organizations to seek different fundraising methods, enter into new partnerships and innovate.*<sup>61</sup>



Demonstration by Central American migrants

In line with these changes, in 2013 PCS was already considering the need to strengthen different types of action that had been put forward in 2007 during the discussion of the move to becoming a Latin American organization:

*There are obviously some unsolved issues that must be urgently addressed in a regional agenda, such as: 1) handling the impacts of mega-mining, oil exploitation, logging and other crops; 2) the impact of drug trafficking and organized crime on human rights, especially those of Indigenous peoples; 3) political participation and rights of the opposition in the new democratic processes; 4) regional economic integration, migration and labour rights; and 5) the need to strengthen an environmental and sustainability agenda in the face of the new challenges posed by regional economic expansion, expressed, for instance, in the so-called Amazon agreements, where qualified treatment can be given to the impacts on land and human rights, an aspect that includes the entire Andean region. (Diana Ávila, Reflexión-Acción. PCS Latinoamericanización, 2013)*

Five years into this transformation, Diana Ávila's report concluded that PCS was more like "a funding NGO that functioned according to project logic and the ongoing pursuit of increasingly scarce financing" (Diana Ávila, document sent to PCS teams in December 2012). She also noted that PCS had not achieved thematic leadership in 2013 to match its capacities and possibilities in Latin America, and suggested it focus its efforts on the regionally-focused migration program and the peacebuilding process in Colombia.

The need for closure was already foreseen at that time, even though major efforts were being made to consolidate an agenda in these two fields of endeavour. In Peru, the projects had broken up into small rural production initiatives that were failing to consolidate into sustainable political and social processes. In Guatemala, while simultaneously continuing its accompaniment of women, PCS was working with rural Huehuetenango communities affected by large hydroelectric projects (the *Huehuetenango Governance* program). In this field of work, a new line of action was adopted in relation to land rights and participation in regions where the extractive model was taking firmer root after the signing of the peace accords.

Nevertheless, this area of activity focusing on democratic governance, strengthening citizen participation in territorial decisions, failed to achieve continuity in Guatemala or consolidate in Peru. The work in Huehuetenango demonstrated the importance of counselling as a way to coordinate networks for capacity building and collective action of rural communities resisting this type of economic intervention.

*Counselling encouraged partnering and coordination. At that time we had institutional backing. Between 2007 and 2009, in Huehuetenango all the community consultations were carried out. PCS accompanied the consultations on these hydroelectric projects, bringing women leaders from Bolivia and various academics to the region. We worked with PCS on social control over the system of departmental development councils.*  
(Interview with Tania Palencia, August 22, 2017)

In Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014) enacted the Victims Law (Law 1448 of 2011) in 2011, which included important steps forward in terms of reparations and, most of all, initiated the process of returning land to displaced persons and victims of land grabs. Progress on the peace talks between the government and the FARC (begun with the setting up of the negotiating table in Havana in 2012 and ending with the signing of the final agreement in November 2016)<sup>62</sup> failed to bring in more available funding for NGOs. Official development aid began to be channelled through the Colombian International Cooperation Agency (ACCI) and the national system for international cooperation.



Ritual for life. Conference on strategic litigation. Guatemala City.

The humanitarian crisis persisted, however, and forced displacement continued. In this context, PCS focused its efforts on strengthening political processes associated with the fight against impunity, support for organization of the displaced population and the enforceability of its rights, and peacebuilding. A continuous line in the history of PCS, up until 2013, was its support for uprooted populations:

*I can point out three experiences of public policy advocacy that had an impact on uprooted persons. The first [was] with FEDEAGROMISBOL (Agromining Federation of Southern Bolívar), which became a stakeholder capable of participating and speaking with local authorities to influence land development plans, of becoming a highly sustainable economic and clean mining agenda. The second [was] in Bogotá with associations of displaced persons. We helped create a production and harvest co-operative. We attempted to fund a pilot development project led by displaced persons wishing to return under decent conditions.*

*The third example was the work we did in the last phase, which was to accompany returns to the communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó (Colombian Pacific) with the backing of several court decisions (Constitutional Court), lobbying and coordinating with the Colombian government on the rules for determining who had the right to return to that land, trying to*

*make the government comply with the Constitutional Court's decisions so that the people could return.*

*In the area of peacebuilding, PCS launched the Sala Jurídica (legal chamber) where transitional justice was debated with NGO experts, social movements, academics and lawyers. The teams on the ground went ahead with what they understood to be "Latinamericanization", gathering the best practices from a region and offering this experience to the other offices. New relationships were forged with CAMEX, Mexico and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. (Interview with Kimberly Stanton, former Executive Director of PCS, September 30, 2017)*

The final endeavours of the Colombia office, from 2014 to 2016 when the Board decided on definitive closure, were focused on positioning the agenda of the social organizations in the peace process between the FARC and the national government. Working with Humanas and the *Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres* (Women's Path to Peace), a social organization platform, PCS was able to support the Working Group on Gender, which contributed recommendations to the Havana negotiating table and set up a communication channel with the Colombian Congress. This input was included in the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace* (November 2016). The gender approach was not only established as a principle in the final agreement, but also a monitoring body was created for mainstreaming this approach in the implementation of the agreement.

Another fundamental contribution in this final phase was through the forum for coordination of aid agencies in which PCS participated. A consensus was reached in this forum on the type of cooperation needed for peace – cooperation directed at protecting human rights and supporting civil society initiatives rather than providing aid to State institutions. The result was a joint statement that set criteria for official cooperation.<sup>63</sup>

In Guatemala, the *Observation Mission on the human rights of Honduran migrants* in 2015 and meetings with national authorities in later months foreshadowed further work in this field. The endeavours of the teams on the ground continued to be significant, but without planned coordination among the different offices.

*The weaknesses: We could have done more with refugees at the Latin American level. From an environmental perspective, we could have addressed the issue of refugees and persons displaced by development projects. CAMEX was interested in opposing extractive projects. We had identified it as an issue to be addressed in the country team exchanges. We could have moved forward on a pro-environment development agenda. We needed to make progress on this issue. We had communities opposing projects that were displacing them again, but it was a big jump from there to consolidating a development agenda. (Interview with Kimberly Stanton, former Executive Director of PCS, September 30, 2017)*

The absence of shared visions among the different offices and a lack of resources for funding the programs preventing PCS from implementing the strategies for "Latinamericanization" that had been agreed in the 2014 strategic planning process (with the participation of the Colombia and CAMEX office teams). In the end, the teams seemed to focus on surviving, seeking funding from sources that preferred to fund grassroots social organizations directly, with projects in specific fields rather than organizing processes on a grand scale.

### 3. Epilogue: Closing Time

By way of summary, we might say that PCS contributed to the organizational processes of internally displaced, refugee and persecuted populations caught up in armed conflicts and repression in El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Peru, identifying vulnerable groups, in order to prevent violence. During armed conflicts, its efforts focused on creating humanitarian, political and dialogue opportunities for vulnerable populations, positioning refugees, internally displaced persons and NGOs in policymaking forums. It served as a hinge for opening doors and a bridge for dialogue with a variety of stakeholders at a variety of levels (from accompaniment in refugee camps besieged by the military to meetings with national governments and United Nations agencies for peace negotiations).

In the post-conflict phase, PCS supported social, economic and political reconstruction, taking a leading role in debate forums on the meaning of democracy and peace



as well as dignity and autonomy as the pillar of truth, justice and comprehensive reparations for victims of violence. It advanced a gender approach based on interculturality, contextual understanding and healing as part of the rights perspective of victims of sexual and other types of violence unleashed by internal armed conflict. Throughout it all, PCS worked to build citizenries able to claim their rights, reconstruct the community and social fabric and recognize victims as the agents of their own development.

In this final phase, the discussions within the Board had reached the point of setting a deadline for finding the funding to make PCS's work viable over the long run. By this juncture, its small-scale funding had fragmented PCS's strategic action into many small short-term projects. Subsistence was not an option for an organization that had played an essential political role in the transition of Central America, Peru and the Southern Cone and had supported social initiatives that persevered in seeking peace in Colombia.

In the words of Pilar Trujillo, former Executive Director of PCS,

*The search for funding, which had become the institution's highest priority task, made survival the gravitational centre of PCS, rather than the matters that concerned political and strategic outreach (...) Fundraising through projects, one by one, does not lead to sustainability. And given the size of the crisis, managing it took up individual and group time and effort without giving satisfactory results. (On the Organizational Model, Report to the Board, 2015)*

That same year, Mildrey Corrales, former Director of the Colombia office, said that "no progress was being made on a strategic projection of the program of displacement and forced migration" due, in part, to the fact that "there is no programming coordination," referring to coordination among the different PCS offices' programs (Management Report to the Board, 2015).

By this time, opting for a dignified closure made the most sense, since PCS's role as a hinge, coordinator and promoter of grassroots social and political processes had been diluted into the role of funding broker between aid agencies and social organizations in order to secure

resources. Almost forty years had passed, and the aid scene had changed. PCS had fulfilled its function and it was time to leave.

## NOTES

56. The demobilizations, ordered in compliance with the Santa Fe de Ralito accord signed on July 15, 2003, with the Uribe Vélez administration, helped reinforce the downward trend of massacres that had been taking place since 2002. Demobilization of the self-defense forces started on November 25, 2003, in Medellín with the Cacique Nutibara Bloc and ended August 15, 2006, with the Elmer Cárdenas Bloc. In 38 acts, 31,671 members of irregular groups were demobilized. See VERDAD ABIERTA, *La desmovilización: el proceso de paz* (2003-2006). Available at: <http://www.verdadabierta.com/justicia-y-paz/244-la-historia/auc/54-periodo4>

57. ÁVILA, Diana. "América Latina: Desplazados en Perú ¿concluyendo su proceso?" In *Revista Migraciones Forzadas - Forced Migration Review* No. 16/17, November 2003. Published by the Refugee Studies Centre in association with the Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project. (Spanish edition published by the Institute of Inter-Ethnic Studies, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala).

58. HANDOVER SPEECH

*Good evening, friends, colleagues.*

*On behalf of my colleagues at Inter Pares, and particularly all of us who have worked with PCS over the years, thank you for this kind gift. We treasure our long relationship with PCS, and look forward to the coming years as we develop and re-develop that relationship, with my new colleagues at Inter Pares, and our new and old colleagues at PCS.*

*We are an international group, coming together this evening from many countries. But tonight we can truly say that we are compatriots, working in common cause in a changing hemisphere and a changing world.*

*Over the past few days, and especially this evening, we are celebrating an historic transition. Today marks the completion of one epoch of PCS, and the beginning of a new era – an era that will build on a long and deep experience of political solidarity, common cause and international cooperation in Latin America.*

*The ending we are marking with PCS this evening, also creates a future; and the new beginning of PCS that we are celebrating, affirms a remarkable past. This is a transition to truly celebrate.*

*This transition has been achieved by many people from many countries in the region, and beyond, working together over a period of many months, in fact years — "giving as much care to the end as to the beginning" as the Chinese tradition of the Tao teaches us— to ensure that the 30 year legacy of PCS is passed intact and healthy to an entirely new organization that can respond to the current context and challenges we face in this hemisphere.*

And we can truly say that the Project Counselling Service that we inaugurate this evening is, indeed, a new organization.

The consortium of organizations from Canada and Europe that founded and sponsored PCS since 1979 has changed and shifted over these many years. Through all of those changes, the consortium has done its best to remain true to its mandate and commitment to accompany and support Latin American counterparts and colleagues in the cause of justice, democracy and human rights in places wracked by civil violence and repressive regimes. Now the consortium, in consultation with a broad range of actors, is relinquishing its stewardship and transferring the equity and resources of PCS to a new and independent regional institution, a Latin American organization with an international Board of Directors. Our solidarity and support will continue; our ownership has been passed on.

Much more than most international NGOs, PCS has always been very much rooted in Latin America. From its very early beginnings in the tumultuous years of the late 1970s, the Headquarters of PCS has been in Latin America, led by an international staff made up largely by Latin Americans, and a governing body that relied heavily on Latin American expertise. From the beginning PCS was conceived as an autonomous organization following the logic of its own experience and relationships. Its preoccupations were the preoccupations of Latin American counterparts caught up in struggle; and of local people uprooted and dispersed, but still valiant and defiant in their determination to build a better future for their families, communities and countries.

In this sense, the transition we celebrate is a natural evolution. At the same time, while perhaps a natural evolution, it was not inevitable.

For this transition to be possible PCS itself needed to endure in its difficult work, sometimes stumbling, but with the wisdom and strength to maintain its equilibrium and capacity through all the struggles it faced. Thanks to its remarkable staff, and to those who have supported them, PCS has prevailed through many difficult times, and emerged stronger for it.

At the same time, another critical element was necessary for this transition to be possible. It was necessary at a crucial moment for leaders to emerge with the talent and political foresight – the will, and the energy – to embrace the challenge of accepting the legacy of PCS and transforming it into the new organization it has now become, and accepting the mantle of stewardship of PCS that this implies.

It is now our collective history that these two elements have come together and the natural evolution that many dreamed and hoped for has become not only possible, but a reality. And so a new history begins. Tonight you will meet and hear from some of those who have helped make this possible. It is a night to celebrate, and I celebrate you all for being part of it.

Please join us in a toast to the new PCS.

## 59. RECOGNIZING DIANA

It is my honour now to celebrate Diana Avila Paulette, the remarkable woman who has led us all to this moment of transition, of new beginnings. What a moment! For me, for all of us, and especially, Diana, for you.

I have so many emotions, so many memories, I could speak for an hour, and more, about this dear, dear woman, and never begin to say it all.

I won't try to do that. Let me tell you one story, though.

Many years ago – in the mid-90s, in the middle of the dark years of Fujimori — Diana and I traveled for several days in the highlands, driving overland from Ayacucho to Huancavelica and then on to Huanayo and to the capital. It was one of many long trips through this beautiful country that we have shared in the 15 years we have been friends and colleagues.

On that trip we visited many remote communities that were just beginning to rebuild from the devastation, repression and violence they endured during the political turmoil of the previous decade. One night we found ourselves in Julcamarca. At that time, and for many years previously, Julcamarca rarely saw visitors from outside, and the town had few amenities.

Our hosts however had prepared for us as best they could, setting up wooden frames for our bedrolls in an old, deserted ruin of a hotel in the town square. It probably had been quite a charming inn in less troubled times, but it had been deserted and unused since the owner had been murdered and his family forced to flee the community many years before – rumours said, as result of threats from Sendero.

After washing up at the standpipe of a community centre nearby, and sharing with our hosts a light meal of bread, canned meat, and cheese that we had brought with us, we finished the evening with a calming evening stroll around the ancient town square. Then we returned to the crumbling hotel to retire for the night.

As we climbed with our flickering candles through the wreckage and up the trembling stairs to our rustic suite, we heard behind us the key on the huge wooden door turn and a padlock being wrestled into place.

We had been carefully locked in to ensure our safety from whatever dangers lurked outside!

We looked at each other in surprise, then horror... and finally in delight at the sheer madness of the world, and the way locking something out so quickly turns into being locked in. We stumbled up the stairs laughing uncontrollably, leaving our hosts outside to wonder at our sanity.

I could share so many stories about adventures with Diana, during which I learned more than I ever imagined there was to learn, and achieved things I never imagined could be achieved. And this is what is most striking about Diana, and what she has brought to PCS since her arrival in 1992.

Diana has imagined things that could be done that few others would dare imagine. And then, working carefully with others – her PCS colleagues, local counterparts, other key political actors, and those of us in the PCS consortium of agencies — she set about doing what she imagined, and helping others to begin to imagine as well.

I sometimes think that in the last few years PCS has been for Diana — and the staff she has led since she became Executive Director in 1997 — a little like that old hotel we shared in Julcamarca in the last days of an insurrection. We were in a building that was locked from the outside by very kind and gra-

*cious hosts with all the best intentions in the world, wanting to care for wonderful people doing important work and traveling on strange roads.*

*But one of the dreams that needed dreaming — by all of us involved in PCS — was to change the locks so that they could be managed from the inside, and remodel the building to throw it open to a changing world.*

*Well, this is what has been achieved — achieved with Diana's imagination, determination and guidance. She has not done it alone. It could not have been done alone — as Diana would be the first to say. And that, too, is part of Diana's wisdom and her strength.*

*With Diana's leadership, together we have achieved what others perhaps would never have dreamed.*

*I know of no other international NGO, anywhere else in the world, that has achieved the kind of transition of ownership and governance as PCS has in these last few years. It is a unique achievement. For this, and for so much else, we have Diana to thank.*

*Please join me in raising my glass to toast Diana, a gracious, wise and talented woman, a lasting friend to PCS, and dedicated activist for social change in the Latin America she loves.*

60. CASTILLO, Zoraida (2015). *Contexto de la Cooperación Internacional: aportes para la sostenibilidad financiera de PCS*, page 5.

61. *Ibid.*, page 27.

62. This final agreement was signed in Bogotá in November, after adjustments had been made to the text that had been approved in Havana and submitted to referendum in October that same year, when the "No" vote carried a majority in rejection of the initial text. The opposition was led by a strong pro-Uribe faction and a section of evangelical churches.

63. See "Cómo puede apoyar la cooperación internacional el proceso de paz?" (How can international aid support the peace process?) Available at: <https://www.las2orillas.co/como-puede-apoyar-la-cooperacion-internacional-el-proceso-de-paz/>









This document recounts PCS's main contributions, at various levels, to political and social processes during times of war and transition to peace and democracy in Latin America. PCS worked regionally and at the country level in Mexico, Central and South America, in contexts of repression and political violence that generated massive flows of internally displaced people, refugees and exiles.

These pages attempt to capture PCS's most significant contributions through the voices of those involved, directly or indirectly, in the processes and mechanisms that arose and were accompanied by PCS. It is not a comprehensive systematization nor an historical account of the work of PCS over its forty years of existence. The aim is to highlight the role of PCS in the major political and social developments that led to and characterized the various periods of violence, armed conflict, transition and peacebuilding in the countries and regions of Latin America.