



FUNDACION CASQUIS

Building Peaceful Futures

Las Pavas: The struggle for land

Few of the hundred and twenty-three families living in the community of Las Pavas, in Colombia’s department of Bolivar, have known anything but war and displacement. Political violence forced them to flee their communities and resettle here in the late 1990s. Daring to plant roots again, this time

The struggle for land has been a major factor in Colombia’s armed conflict.

on a parcel of land long abandoned by its owner (a relative of notorious drug lord Pablo Escobar), the families began to make the land productive, planting cassava, plantains, rice, and corn.

As the years went by, the “Paveros” developed strong ties to their new home, and their crops ensured food security for their families. But the relative stability was

short-lived. Twice – in 2003 and 2006 – the families had to flee after army-backed paramilitaries threatened them with death. After each occasion, they returned.

Working with Colombian and international organizations, Inter Pares’ counterpart Project Counselling Service (PCS) provided humanitarian and organizational support to the families. This enabled them to create a cooperative and to initiate a legal process to obtain title to the land. As this was proceeding, the absentee owner sold the land to a consortium of palm oil companies, who brought in the national police to forcibly evict the families. Determined not to give up, the Paveros returned once again in 2011. Colombia’s Constitutional Court has since ruled that the eviction was illegal, as the farmers’ land claim had not yet been addressed. Despite this victory, the struggle for legal recognition is not over, and PCS **PAGE 2 ▶**

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BBC

Karenni villagers carry their petition for the closure of an army training centre built on stolen land.

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Infusing village concerns into Burma's peace negotiations

An old proverb states that “when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.” Burma’s military took this proverb a step further. For decades, it attempted to undermine the armed opposition by burning villages, ordering civilians into garrisoned relocation camps as forced labour, and hunting and shooting those who disobeyed. Civilians are often targeted during conflicts, only to be excluded from peace negotiations.

It’s therefore not surprising that ceasefire agreements usually address the interests of combatants, and ignore the voices of people dispossessed by the conflict.

With opposition groups beginning to include human rights issues among their negotiating points, concerns of women, farmers, even children, are appearing in ceasefire agreements for the first time.

Since 2011, new ceasefire negotiations have progressed between Burma’s government and many opposition forces. Government negotiators are sticking to tactics they developed in the 1990s including evading negotiations on human rights, military accountability, or ethnic aspirations to federalism. They only discuss troop positions or infrastructure and resource ‘development’ projects. Similar negotiations created the 1994 ceasefire in Kachin State, which led to uncontrolled resource exploitation by the military and its associated companies without civilian consultation. According to the Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNNG), an Inter Pares counterpart, “forests were depleted, the waters were poisoned, and the course of rivers completely changed. Troops from Burma’s military poured in, confiscating lands” and using civilians as [PAGE 4 ▶](#)

Las Pavas: The struggle for land

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continues to work with the families in building public pressure for a lasting solution.

Many of Colombia’s 4.8 million internally displaced persons face similar struggles, with an estimated 6 million hectares taken from them in land grabs by armed groups and their allies.

The land issue is central to the latest efforts by Colombians to bring an end to fifty years of conflict. According to PCS staff member Eduardo León, “The struggle for land has been a major factor in Colombia’s armed conflict. If this is not resolved – not just by redistributing the land, but also by adopting public policies that benefit small-scale farmers – there will be no peace.”



FUNDACIÓN CHISQUIS

Community members return to Las Pavas after violent expulsion.



All over the world, people and communities experience human rights abuses and unfair treatment resulting from corporate activity. In many countries, however, it is extremely difficult for people to obtain justice. Voluntary corporate measures haven't worked, and poor people are up against the overwhelming power of foreign multinational corporations.

Join Inter Pares and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability in calling for:

- An independent extractive-sector Ombudsman in Canada to investigate accusations of abuses and make recommendations to the government and companies.
- Legislated access to Canadian courts for people who have been harmed by the international operations of Canadian companies.

Take action:
interpares.ca/openforjustice



Sefwi farmers organizing for fair compensation for farms destroyed because of a Canadian mine.

Conflict Prevention: The option of justice

Ghanaian villagers' struggle for fair recompense for land

Escaping the baking West African sun, we sat in the shade of a large acacia tree. Nicholas Ennin and five other cocoa farmers began to speak: "In 2004, they came and destroyed our farms to make way for the mine..." What followed was a painful story of deceit and displacement, and the devastation of a Ghanaian community for the construction of Canadian-owned Chirano Mine.

After receiving its lease from the government, Red Back Mines (now owned by Vancouver-based Kinross Gold) offered the cocoa farmers compensation of 2.50 cedis (about \$1.20 CDN) per mature cocoa tree, proclaiming this a generous increase over the government-approved minimum rate of 2.30 cedis.

When the community discovered that the legal minimum was actually *twice* the "generous" offer, they confronted the company representative: "He said they would only pay us more if we could prove the government rate was higher." While many families had already accepted the lower rate,

twenty-five families insisted on the legal minimum compensation.

Inter Pares and Third World Network-Africa have supported the farmers in their peaceful struggle for a just settlement. Two out-of-court agreements and the Ghanaian parliament all ordered Kinross to pay; facing pressure, the company promised in July 2013 to deliver

Young people, with no work or prospects, are beginning to steal to eat. Meanwhile, Kinross earned over \$200 million in profit from Chirano in 2011 alone.

compensation, but demanded concessions from the farmers, and challenged the interest calculations. As of January 2014, Kinross had not yet provided the full compensation, and maintained in its *2011 Corporate Responsibility Report*¹ that the lower rate was legitimate. **PAGE 4 >**

¹ <http://takingresponsibility2011.kinross.com/in-the-community/practices/key-stakeholder-issues>

Military conflict, civilian ceasefire

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forced labour. Many of the dispossessed migrated “to squalid mining camps ... many young women have been trafficked to China ... Drug abuse is now rampant in mining areas.” Tensions mounted, leading to the resumption of armed conflict in 2011. Since then, 100,000 Kachin civilians have been

Inter Pares will continue supporting Burmese community-based organizations toward the dream articulated by many local activists: a political peace shaped around civilian, rather than military, interests.

displaced, with little hope of return in sight.

KDNG told their story to warn ethnic groups now in ceasefire talks: first, that agreements must address political rights and not merely dish out ‘development’ concessions; and second, that civilian voices must have a role in negotiating peace.

Some of the community-based organizations (CBOs) that Inter Pares has supported for many years are working to change this pattern. Dozens of groups from many different ethnic regions have come together to share expertise and ideas, and draft

policies which they hope will influence ceasefire agreements and future development plans. CBOs have also been engaged in discussions with both armed and political opposition groups to articulate villagers’ concerns on issues like land rights, forced labour, and landmine contamination. In at least one case, an ethnic opposition group has been requesting CBO input in building its negotiating platform over the last two years.

With opposition groups beginning to include human rights issues among their negotiating points, concerns of women, farmers, even children, are appearing in ceasefire agreements for the first time. The ceasefire agreement in Karenni State now mandates local civilian groups to monitor certain state projects, while the new Chin State agreement makes free, prior, and informed consent of local populations a precondition for any large-scale development.

With sustainable peace still far off, Burma’s community-based organizations are working hard to influence the terms. Inter Pares will continue supporting them toward the dream articulated by many local activists: a political peace shaped around civilian, rather than military, interests. ☺

Conflict Prevention: The option of justice

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Sefwi farmers consult on their legal options.

Farmers are left with no land and no money to buy land. Desperate, they’ve threatened to re-occupy their land, risking violent repression. They are concerned that their

young people, with no work or prospects, are beginning to steal to eat. Meanwhile, Kinross earned over \$200 million in profit from Chirano in 2011 alone.

Listening to Nicholas and his neighbours – dignified even as they describe the strain of their long struggle – it is clear that only a just resolution based on fair compensation can avoid deepening conflict, and even more devastating harm to this distraught community. ☺

To learn more about this story, please visit www.interpares.ca/sefwi.

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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