

## DEFINITIONS OF PEACE

By Eduardo Posada

In the midst of last January's crisis when it was foreseen that negotiations with the FRAC would break down, former Minister Rafael Pardo said, "This process has broken down but the possibility of a negotiated peace has not." And he went on to say, "A return to the previous model would be an invitation to failure on days or months." His words were sadly prophetic. The accords which came out of the crisis did not change the course of the process. A few weeks later, after a succession of terrorist attacks by the FARC, President Pastrana decided to put an end to the peace process officially started by his administration three years before.

On 20 February, in his broadcast to announce his decision to the nation, President Pastrana said that at all events we would continue "to seek peace", but that he would not subject "the Colombian people to the arrogance of those who say they want peace, but open fire against it." There are no indications that the FARC have any intention of returning to the negotiating table with this administration, and much less that they have any intention of silencing their guns. On the contrary, their appeal to terrorist methods has intensified. In a communiqué issued on 21 February, however, the guerrilla organization suggested a certain willingness to negotiate with the future administration – on the basis of the common agenda. None of the leading candidates has closed off all possibilities of a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in the future. And representatives of the international community, including the Secretary General of the United Nations, has said that the conflict in Colombia will only be resolved by negotiation.

The prospect of a new peace process, sooner or later, and continuing dialogue with the ELN, suggests that there is an urgent need to reflect on the circumstances of unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the guerrillas – the so-called "negotiating model". This exercise would have to begin with an appreciation of the definitions of peace which have been prevalent in recent years, and how they have conditioned ambitious purposes which are unachievable in the short term. We should therefore make a careful review of some of these definitions, which I transcribe, in chronological order.

"Peace is not only the silence of the ceasefire between the army and the guerrillas. Peace is social justice and not attacking life, from conception forward" (Mgr. Pedro Rubiano, interview with *El Tiempo*, 12 February 1995)

"The Church has always been present in all that has to do with our concept of peace, welfare, justice, respect for human rights. We have a comprehensive concept of peace." (Mgr. Nel Beltran, interview with *El Tiempo*, 12 February 1995).

"The Conservatives believe that the search for lasting peace in Colombia should be more ambitious than the limited, if legitimate desire to end armed conflict and eliminate drug-trafficking. More than anything it should be a grand project for the construction of our national identity and social cohesion" (Conservative Party document *Paz de verdad. Propuesta marco para un proyecto de paz permanente*, Bogota, April 1997)

"The problem of peace cannot be reduced to the silencing of the guns, since what is at stake is the model which we Colombians want for our coexistence for the next century". (President Samper addressing the inaugural session of Congress in July 1998)

"There will be no peace without political reforms ... I have said that with hunger there will be no peace ... The State's actions are to concentrate on the so-called objective causes of violence: poverty and the

inequitable distribution of income”.(Program of presidential candidate Andres Pastrana, “Una política de Paz para el Cambio”, 8 June 1998).

“The peace which I have proposed goes beyond the solution of armed confrontation. It is a peace for us to build a new Colombia, more just, more democratic, more developed and more equitable” (President Pastrana in Puerto Wilches, 19 December 1998)

“What has happened is that people will not buy the idea of peace without removing the objective causes of violence ... When we have solved those problems we can begin to talk about peace” (Joaquin Gomez, FARC spokesman, published in El Espectador, 8 January 1999)

“Only in a society with social justice, economic equity, worthy, free, independent and sovereign will true peace flourish in full .. Peace is not only silencing the guns, or the end of military confrontation. It is the way in which that society is built. (Raul Reyes, FARC spokesman, EL Tiempo, 11 January 1999)

“Peace .. is not only the result of negotiation of the conflict. It is something all-embracing which cannot be alien to social justice” (Mgr. Alberto Giraldo, at the closing of the Episcopal Assembly in Bogota, published in El Tiempo, 10 July 1999).

“Poverty, inequalities of income, ownership and opportunity, the exclusion of large sectors of the population from the benefits of modern life, and amongst other things, the absence of a true political and social democracy as a regime, are the objective factors which determine the consolidation and intensification of conditions which favor the spread of war to new fronts ... The future elimination of just some of these fronts but not all of them, would not be enough to achieve true peace, which is nothing less than the construction of a society governed by political and social democracy”. (Luis Jorge Garay, in the book ¿Para dónde va Colombia? Ed. Hernando Gomez, Bogota, February 1999)

“I think, and should say, that the solution to armed conflict is not the road to peace for Colombia. If we think of our culture of violence and death and all these other factors., we would have to say that our work would not just be a dialogue, but an entire education for peace.” (Mgr. Alberto Giraldo, at the Peace Conference at the LVII Coffee-Growers Conference, 2 December 1999)

“The Church has been the leading proponent of the idea that peace is not just a matter of settling a political conflict.... In parallel to the political agreement there must be an agreement on structural reforms. Colombia cannot continue to be managed in such unfair terms ..... People must understand that the peace process is not simply designed to reach a political agreement with the guerrillas., (Fabio Valencia, then government negotiator in the peace process, published in El Espectador, 31 January 2001)

“Our concept of peace is not as simplistic as to think the peace amounts to the signature of an agreement with the guerrillas., We have to make peace with the unemployed, with underdevelopment and with ignorance.” (Presidential candidate Noemi Sanin, published in El Espectador, 15 February 2001)

“I would like to think ... that the problem of peace or war could be conceived as an opportunity for all of us to change and not as an opportunity for the government and the guerrillas ... I believe in peace, but it is not only the reconciliation of guerrillas with government, it is the reconciliation of every Colombian with all other Colombians” (Ana Teresa Bernal, Director of REDEPAZ at the Seminar Hacienda Paz, Cartagena, 9-11 March 2001)

“The private sector starts to take an interest in peace ... the negotiations should be a process of re-founding of our nation, not limited simply to the solution of the armed conflict.” (Eugenio Marulanda,

President of Confecameras. “Los empresarios y la paz: hora de actuar”, EL Espectador 21 March 2001)

“Today the name of peace is employment . . . Peace is not achieved only by overcoming violence. The other unarmed arm – but equally harmful to peace – is corruption.”(Juan Camilo Restrepo, accepting the Conservative nomination for the presidential elections, January 2002)

It is very possible that the above quotations form part of a more complex discourse, with other shades of expression that make the definitions of peace given here even more complex. It is also possible that, with the results of the process, some of them would have changed their concepts. But I think that the quotations are a good illustration of the notion of peace which prevailed, and still prevails, in many parts of Colombian society.

We should note some of the disastrous consequences of these definitions. First, the peace to be desired is not the reconciliation of those who have risen up in arms against the State and society, but between all Colombians, as if we were involved in an “all-against-all” situation. Second, the solution to the armed conflict would then cease to be the main purpose of the peace process: “true peace” or “comprehensive peace” as it is often called, seeks social justice, or a complete reconstruction of society. And third, The possibility of making State policy to obtain peace in the short term is diluted in utopian agendas of national reconstruction, while the armed conflict continues to claim its victims and destroy the fabric of society.

Whatever the prospects of a new peace process with the guerrillas, it is time now for an urgent and careful examination of the concept of “peace” imposed on the country for so many years. Those definitions, which Jesus Bejarano styled “maximalist” have been opposed by others. Antonio Navarro, for example, recently said that “peace is no more than changing the methods of political action – exchanging the bullet for the ballot-box for the same and only object of politics: power”. Marco Palacios suggested a similar definition of peace “in the Anglo-Saxon style”, “the absence of armed conflict in the struggle for power”. Former President Gaviria offered another definition with minimal criteria – “peace is the reincorporation of the guerrillas into a democratic political system and the laying down of arms”. The redefinition of peace is not merely an exercise in rhetoric. The definition which is adopted will to a great extent determine the way in which the problem is approached.