Violent conflict and human rights violations in Colombia

We want to take the occasion of Human Rights Day in 2013 to call the global Baptist family for a Day of Prayer and Action for Colombia. Since 1948, Colombia has experienced an ongoing civil war, which has killed more than 300,000 people and displaced approximately 5.8 million more, more than 10 percent of the population. The youth in Colombia does not know what it means to live in a situation other than one of armed conflict. Their social space has been significantly reduced in order for them to survive. Drug cartels (now pulverized into a large number of smaller gangs), guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the Colombian military continue to perpetrate violence in different ways, generating a situation of permanent threat and constant fear which affects a great number of Colombians, most significantly the poorest among the poor: women, Afro-Colombians, and Indigenous populations. Though peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC are taking place in Havana, there is significant distrust and lack of confidence on the part of many Colombians in their institutions. Impunity continues to be a significant problem as well. Harassment, death threats, and assassinations continue to be the norm. More than 95 percent of murders in Colombia are left without a person being brought to justice. No murderer of trade unionists has been convicted in the past two years. Workers are afraid to report crimes against them in light of the threats they receive. In 2011, Colombia passed the most ambitious reparations law in its history, formally recognizing the consequences of the ongoing internal conflict. However, the Victims Law, which was intended as a means to allow millions of displaced families to return to their lands, has not been properly implemented yet. Under threat, most of these families are afraid to return. Those sitting on the table to discuss peace need to take seriously the voices of the victims and their concerns. The international community can press the Colombian Government for firmer actions to curb the power of groups like the Paramilitary, which continue to be a deterrent to a successful transitional justice process. In June 2013, a BWA delegation visited Colombia in response to the appeal coming from Colombian Christians for international support (click here for more information on this visit include link to the press release on the visit). We not only heard terrifying stories of how much this situation of constant violence and fear has affected the lives of many Christians in the country, but we also heard inspirational reports of initiatives to promote peace and justice taken by churches and Christian
organizations in response to the situation. At the center of these efforts are the Peace Commission of the Colombian Evangelical Council (CEDECOL), and the Baptist University Foundation (UNIBAUTISTA). We urge Baptists around the globe to pray for true peace in Colombia. Pray not only for those participating in the high-level peace talks mentioned above, but also for the many courageous peacemakers who are working in a threatening environment, many times almost anonymously, to promote respect for human rights and peace. These are agents of new values and hope which can change the situation of this country in a significant way.