

"Preventing and mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises on minorities"

Paper by Erlendy Cuero

Title: Lessons from the organizational process of Afro-Colombian victims for the protection of ethnic minorities in humanitarian crisis contexts.

Thank you very much for the invitation to participate in this Forum. I deeply appreciate that as a direct victim of a conflict you have invited me to share my experience in this important event.

My name is Erlendy Cuervo Bravo. I am the vice president of the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians, AFRODES. AFRODES is a platform made up of 100 Afro-Colombian and Afro-Colombian grassroots organizations that have been displaced as a result of the Colombian armed conflict.

This conflict has had very serious differential impacts on Afro-Colombian communities. Of the 8 million victims that have produced this conflict of more than 50 years, at least 2 million are Afro-Colombians. Taking into account that the last national census showed that at least 10% of the population is Afro-Colombian. This means that 50% of our communities have been expelled from their territories and/or have been victims of other violations of their rights because of the conflict.

Personally, I have been a victim and survivor of this conflict. I was born and raised in a village in the rural area of Buenaventura (Colombia's main seaport on the Pacific coast). In the late 1980s, the Colombian armed conflict reached my region. Military confrontations to control that region, between the Colombian army, leftist guerrillas, paramilitary forces and drug traffickers, began to produce a deep humanitarian crisis: thousands of families were displaced and those who remained were subjected to multiple violations of their human rights. During this dynamic, my father was killed by armed people who had links with the guerrillas, who later became associated with drug dealers and paramilitaries. Between 2000 and 2008 several members of my family were killed: two uncles, six cousins and a nephew. In the year 2000, four women in my family and I were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by armed people. I was forced to move to the urban area of Cali, and at the end of 2000 I began to work with organizational processes that sought to support the Afro-Colombian communities that remained displaced.

This leadership job has not been easy. Especially because my family and I have continued to be victims of threats and attacks on our lives. And unfortunately, the Colombian government has not given me the protection measures necessary to continue my leadership work. Nowadays, my family's and my own lives are still at risk. I have been invited to this panel to share with you my thoughts on the steps that states and the United Nations should take to prevent or mitigate the negative consequences of humanitarian crises on minorities. The experience of Afro-Colombian organizational processes in dealing with the humanitarian crisis produced by the conflict undoubtedly offers important lessons. I will share with you some:

- **Statistical and cultural invisibility of minorities is a significant risk factor in the face of humanitarian crises.** Colombia, cultural diversity finally began to be included as an ethnic variable in population censuses after hundreds of years because of a constitutional reform in 1991. Racial discrimination still characterizes our society and institutions, it has

contributed to the indifference of society and the state on the differential impacts that the conflict has had on our lives.

- **A model of extractive and exclusionary economic development has been at the root of the causes of the conflict and its consequences:** before the armed conflict impacted our communities, the economic actors supported by the government encouraged the extraction of natural resources. Regardless of the living conditions of our communities. This continuous dynamic has increased the vulnerability of communities being the reason why the conflict deepened the situation of exclusion.
- **The failure to effectively implement differential approaches, both before and during the humanitarian crisis caused by the Colombian armed conflict, has led to the profound deterioration of the Afro-Colombian communities that are victims of the conflict.** In Colombia, laws and policies have been formulated following all international standards related to the protection of minorities. However, the allocation of financial and technical resources has not been sufficient or adequate to comply with what the law establishes. The formulation of legislation and policies do not guarantee the effective protection of minorities.
- **The protection of women belonging to minority groups, especially regarding sexual violence, should be the number-one priority in dealing with humanitarian crises associated with armed conflict.** In the Colombian case, it has been verified what has already been widely observed: sexual violence against women is used as a strategy of war by all armed actors. In the Colombian case, and despite progress in adopting general measures, there is still a lack of care protocols that recognize the particularities of Afro-Colombian and indigenous women who have been victims of sexual violence.
- **Prevention and Protection of Children (Afro-Colombian Children and Adolescents, especially against consumption of Psychoactive substances and recruitment to armed groups and criminal gangs).** The different expressions of violence have been affecting our children and adolescents through the lack of programs that allow addressing this in a comprehensive manner, recognizing their extreme vulnerability, converting them from victims to perpetrators as the only alternative for living. Priority is required to adopt programs for personal, family and community development.
- **Strengthening the autonomy of communities is a necessary condition for the strengthening of government institutions to lead to the protection and restoration of minorities affected by a humanitarian crisis.** Colombia had had a huge investment of resources to strengthen institutions. The results of this investment are very limited. The Colombian government and some actors of international cooperation continue to fail to prioritize the strengthening of communities.
- **The Colombian state is about to end the military confrontation against the largest guerrilla group.** A Peace Agreement, initially rejected by a majority of Colombians through a plebiscite, has been renegotiated. Afro-Colombian communities have supported the political solution to the conflict, and we believe that the Peace Agreement has integrated

some standards that can lead to the restoration of our rights. However, as long as the strengthening of the participation of our communities is not taken seriously, the international standards and recommendations we discuss today in this Forum will not have the desired effects.

Thank you very much.

Erlendy Cuervo Bravo

Vice President AFRODES NACIONAL

Legal Representative of El Camino Propuesto - Cali

Cellphone: 3146116002

Email: dycuero.afrodes@gmail.com