

An aerial photograph of Bogotá, Colombia, taken at sunset. The city is densely packed with buildings, and the lights are beginning to glow. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the setting sun on the left side. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

Entrepreneurial leadership for peace in Colombia

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Participation by Colombia's business sector in support of peacebuilding has not been massive but has been the subject of numerous publications and attempts at documentation. During the last decades, the country has witnessed strategies with participation by businesses that include, among others, income generation for former combatants and victims and initiatives for local development, including the adoption of management systems that take human rights and peacebuilding into account.

These experiences provide important working models and lessons learned that should be kept in mind at this moment when we stand before a real opportunity to end an armed conflict of more than 50 years through negotiations with the insurgent group of the FARC. To turn the moment into a real opportunity must begin by recognizing that a sustainable peace requires an understanding of the road travelled as well as creative and ambitious proposals. In order to make a real contribution, the private sector must strengthen what they have been doing all along and add on new areas of action but, above

all, they must engage with peace in an innovative and bold manner. This does not necessarily imply huge economic investments or the creation of thousands of jobs for those guerrillas who are demobilized. It is possible that some of this will be required. But a sustainable peace in Colombia requires a change of mind-sets and a substantial transformation of some structures and pillars upon which the current conditions in the country have been built. Peace requires effort to achieve territorial integration of the country and to overcome historic social exclusions. In other words, an expansion of citizenship and democracy. At the same time, peace requires that Colombians be able to turn the page and to re-establish, in the good sense of the word, a country in which violence is eliminated from its repertoire of mechanisms for settling differences.

Sustainable peace, according to Reyhler and Stellamans¹, is a political reality that can be created but its construction requires, among other things, the existence

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1. Reyhler, L. and Stellamans, A. (2005), "Researching Peace Building Leadership". Cahiers Internationales de la Paix, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Hungary).



of a critical mass of committed leaders. In Colombia, business-people can be part of that leadership. Their participation in the country’s transformation, in breaking the vicious circles that feed the conflict and replacing them with virtuous circles that extend citizenship and the appropriation of rights,² is not only desirable but necessary.

The transformations required for building a sustainable peace in Colombia can be compared to the great transformations that have occurred in some Asian countries, in Eastern Europe, and even

2. See James Robinson and Daron Acemoglu. *Por qué fracasan los países: Los orígenes del poder, la prosperidad y la pobreza*. Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2012.

Ireland and South Africa at given moments. It is clear that evolutions of this scope will take years or even decades and will require a great collective effort. But as history has shown, it is well worth it.

The pacification of Colombia

Since a little over a decade ago, Colombia has experienced a pacification process and the building of the nation State. The conclusion by negotiations of the armed conflict involving the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – is a fundamental component of this process insofar as it translates into a qualitative step towards pacification and holds the prom-

ise of integrating into the nation’s life those regions that have been at the centre of the conflict. For this reason, the process of peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the FARC is also an opportunity to ponder and rethink a better country.

We stand before the possibility of closing the vicious circle of violence, exclusion, and conflict and replacing it with a virtuous circle of widening citizenship and rights. A transformation of this scope is only possible with the active engagement of the State, civil society, and the business sector. This engagement must work toward the expansion and guarantee of rights enshrined in the

Constitution of 1991 and toward the inclusion and integration of a deeply-rooted Colombia that for decades has been the epicentre of the armed conflict but which has remained at the sidelines of the construction of citizenship and the State.

The new National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo) that has just been approved by the Congress speaks about three Colombias: the prosperous, the intermediate, and the rural.³ Peacebuilding must overcome the cleavages that separate these three versions of our country, especially those that lie between prosperous and rural Colombia. The concept of “territorial peace” that the government has put forth as one of the signature differences of Colombian-style peace⁴ induces us to think precisely about closing territorial gaps and the creation of real conditions at the local level for the respect of rights and expansion of citizenship.

3. See <http://www.elspectador.com/noticias/politica/gobierno-busca-reducir-desigualdad-el-plan-nacional-de-articulo-544968>

4. See Sergio Jaramillo, “La Paz Territorial” at http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/discursos/Documents/La_Paz_Territorial_version_final.pdf

The notion of territorial peace provides important insights concerning local development and sustainable peace. First, it is urgent to undertake well-integrated work in a given territory and that to do so trust must be built up and dialogue promoted among the different actors that operate in the territory (local government, business sector, civil society organizations, communal leaders, and communities). Second, interventions in the territory must incorporate the concept of action without damage, as well as strengthening local capacities for peace and striving to expand democracy and respect of rights. This is indispensable in order to move forward effectively in transforming those conditions which nourish conflict and the use of violence as a means of social and economic regulation.

The Business Sector and Peace

As part of its strategy of business and peace, the government has set down three lines: 1) devise clear guidelines in terms of due diligence and action without damage; 2) develop public-private alliances that contribute to local development and the expansion

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Color, Colombia
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of democracy; and 3) undertake actions aimed at reconciliation. Defining these lines is vital but not all that is required. The ways in which businesses understand peace on a day to day basis and how they visualize their capacity to transform a reality scarred by armed conflict is also determining.

Various working business experiences in peacebuilding that have been documented in the country show that commitments for building peace by businesses do not necessarily involve expending more economic resources. Work-

ing for peace involves seeking out employment alternatives that will effectively transform reality and contribute to overcoming those conditions that the conflict in our country has thrived on. A business can contribute more to peace by participating than by donating millions of pesos to initiatives that perpetuate a restricted access to rights and a limited exercise of citizenship.

Business Alternatives: Dialogue and Imagination

What approaches that are really transforming can guide an inter-

vention by the business sector?

A first approach comes from the writings of John Paul Lederach, one of the most important current thinkers on peacebuilding: “[What is important] is an ability to bring together an improbable set of people... I think the difficult work of peacebuilding is to create a quality of relationships among people who don’t think alike”.⁵

A recent study on the roles that different actors would be willing

5. Professor of International Peacebuilding at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. <http://www.onbeing.org/program/art-peace/transcript/2328>

to assume and expect others to assume in support of peacebuilding highlights the difficulties that exist today in accepting others as valid spokespeople and agents for positive change.⁶ The difficulty in establishing dialogue between people who are different is precisely one of the great challenges that the business sector will face when it decides to support peace at the local level. Even more so when placed within the framework of the proposal of territorial peace mentioned above, the search for new forms of governance based on participatory development at the local level will be the acid test for the business community’s decision to support a sustainable peace.

It is precisely at the local level – and given the need to contribute to an expansion of democracy – that the business sector together with other actors must face the difficult task of promoting dialogue among “an improbable set of people.” Although difficult, if we achieve this an important step will have been taken towards reconciliation.

6. Perspectivas y Aportes Empresariales para la Construcción de Paz, Fundación Ideas para la Paz, Instituto Catalán Internacional para la Paz y Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá, 2015.

A second focus has to do with creativity, open-mindedness, and willingness to change, not only to achieve that dialogue among “improbables” but also to confront the huge social and political challenges. Along these lines, the idea about “moral imagination” put forth by Lederach gains traction while summarizing his understanding about peacebuilding: ... [T]he capacity to imagine and generate constructive initiatives and answers that, even though rooted in the day to day challenges brought on by violence, transcend them and, in the end, break the patterns and cycles of destruction.⁷

This notion brings to mind that of “shared value” of Porter and Kramer that is so well accepted in the business world:

The concept of shared value can be defined as the policies and operational practices that improve the competitiveness of a firm while at the same time helping to improve the social and economic conditions of the communities where they operate. The creation of shared value focuses on iden-

7. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University Press: 2005, p. 29.

Working for peace involves seeking out employment alternatives that will effectively transform reality and contribute to overcoming those conditions that the conflict in our country has thrived on.

tifying and widening the linkages between economic and social progress.⁸

The invitation extended by Porter and Kramer to the business community to reconcile their competitiveness and the improvement of the social and economic conditions of communities near their centres of operation, as well as their call for creativity and innovation in the search for solutions to the problems which afflict their operational environment, can be very useful in thinking about how they can contribute to the generation of conditions that foster peace.

Beyond the differences that exist between moral imagination and shared value, in both cases the key lies in finding answers, in creative and sustainable ways, to daily problems and challenges. The moment of truth in peacebuilding is to be found at the local level and in the capacity that we possess to overcome or not the effects of the armed conflict in our daily lives.

Some final words

The sustainability of peace requires a critical mass of leaders

with innovative proposals that will transform reality. Businesspeople can clearly play this leadership role. These proposals can provide inspiration when the time comes to think about initiatives that will effectively help to turn the page on the armed conflict with the FARC.

Furthermore, when contemplating the challenges the country will face in the event that an agreement is signed with the FARC, it might even be desirable that businesspeople consider becoming more involved. For example, aside from the areas of influence of their operations, they might contemplate a presence in areas that urgently demand actions in support of peace. In this sense, there can be an appeal to philanthropy that transforms or even to their ethical and moral duties as Colombians.

Much has been said about the peace accords not being a point of arrival but, on the contrary, a point of departure and an opportunity to take the right decisions for transforming the country. The leadership and involvement of businesspeople in this effort is undeniable.

The moment of truth in peacebuilding is to be found at the local level and in the capacity that we possess to overcome or not the effects of the armed conflict in our daily lives.

Our role as peacebuilders is to assist in the development of local and national capacities for peace (values and attitudes; social processes and relationships; political and social institutions) necessary to incrementally and effectively overcome the dynamics of conflict that lead to polarization and violence.

Interpeace, Strategic Position Paper

Portrait of a young woman, Colombia
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8. *La creación de valor compartido*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation (2011), p. 6.