

03-GS-18 VOTED: The Twenty-fourth General Synod adopts the resolution "To Support Colombian Churches and Leaders Under Attack"

### **TO SUPPORT COLOMBIAN CHURCHES AND LEADERS UNDER ATTACK**

WHEREAS, Colombian churches and church leaders are under attack. Colombia's armed groups target both Protestants and Roman Catholics who counsel nonviolence, refuse to take sides, and provide pastoral care and humanitarian assistance to the 2.7 million displaced persons. Protestant leaders reported that during the first seven months of 2002, at least twenty Protestant pastors and church leaders were assassinated and more than four hundred churches were closed. Offices of churches and church alliances working for peace have been intimidated through unwarranted searches; and

WHEREAS, at the same time that churches and leaders who provide humanitarian aid have come under attack, the number of displaced Colombians has continued to grow, with the 342,000 displaced in 2001 increased by one thousand per month in the first six months of 2002, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees; and

WHEREAS, throughout the countryside, churches are caught in the middle of the conflict. In Bojaya, Choco, in May 2002, one hundred nineteen Afro-Colombians were killed in their church, where they had taken refuge during a fight between two armed groups. Colombian pastors and church leaders met with the United Church of Christ Ecumenical Delegation in July 2002 and reported on their situations. Their common plea to North Americans was, "No more arms, no more arms;" and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress has authorized increased funds for U.S. military action in support of the Colombian government as part of drug enforcement, war against guerrilla groups, and protection of oil pipelines; and violence toward churches and church leaders has increased in the areas of intensified military action at the expense of humanitarian aid and human services, particularly in Arauca; and

WHEREAS, the Colombian Mennonite Church continues to provide strong leadership for Christian unity and peace in Colombia and to give support and encouragement for evangelical (Protestant) churches who are under attack. Justapaz, the peace and justice office of the Colombian Mennonite Church, and CEDECOL, the Colombian Council of Evangelical Churches, need and deserve our support.

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod asks Wider Church Ministries to develop programs to support Colombian churches and church leaders under attack; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Synod urges Justice and Witness Ministries to call attention to U.S. support for the militarization of Colombia at the expense of humanitarian aid and human services and to the increased attacks on churches and church leaders; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that Justice and Witness Ministries call on the United States government to grant Temporary Protective Status to Colombians who are in need of international protection, as urged by the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Synod encourages church delegations, including representatives of the national offices, to visit Colombian churches and councils of churches and to support their humanitarian and peace work; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that Wider Church Ministries provides information for local congregations to develop direct relationships with Protestant congregations in Colombia through the Sister Church program of Justapaz and CEDECOL. Materials will also describe the process for becoming sanctuary churches, providing protection and hospitality to Colombians needing to flee for safety; and

LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that all congregations of the United Church of Christ be urged to pray and work for peace in Colombia and to develop church partnerships and letter-writing campaigns to officials here and in Colombia. Congregations are urged to work for an end to U.S. policies that add to the violence among our brothers and sisters there.

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available