Colombia in times of COVID-19: a people without legs that keeps on walking

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In the midst of the crisis caused by COVID-19 and the state of emergency declared by the government, the consequences of years of violence of the armed conflict are clearly felt. Living in constant conflict with each other, letting our thoughts be determined by intimidation and the construction of enemy images, all this has become normal over the years. Now we are confronted with an “enemy” called “COVID-19” which threatens not only our health but also social dynamics. Consequently, our society, dominated by violence, is resolutely trying to defend itself against that which represents “a current threat: persons infected with COVID-19 and healthcare professionals”. Many of us are wondering why some people do not even shy away from threatening doctors’ families, destroying the homes of people infected with the coronavirus or trying to intimidate them through social media. The answer may be found in our history: violence breeds new violence and the wounds inflicted by the armed conflict and its atrocities could still not be healed.

Right now, we are facing two major challenges: The first is famine which already prevails in many areas of Colombia. The compulsory isolation as a result of COVID-19 only protects few people (middle/upper class), but those most vulnerable in society fall prey to it. In addition to that, another serious danger exists: politicians who take advantage of the crisis to make money for themselves out of public funds. There is a danger that financial means that were supposed to cover the costs of overcoming the food crisis as well as providing basic medical equipment might now end up in the pockets of certain interest groups instead of being used for the common good of the Colombian people. Corruption in our country is spreading even faster than the virus does and has the potential to increase the numbers of deaths by far as hunger and unemployment can in many cases facilitate violence and the formation of criminal groups – which is exactly what such a corrupt system gives a boost to.

Even though the worldwide economy is suffering greatly from the effects of COVID-19 and many countries have had no choice but to take hard emergency measures, some of the main problems have not re-emerged in Colombia, but have only intensified: violence, ignorance and corruption. Nevertheless, the experiences made in the past should help us to learn for the future and contribute to a revitalisation of a critical, peaceful, committed and solidary society. A people without legs that still keeps walking.

\(^1\) line from the song *Latinoamérica* of the music group Calle 13. ("un pueblo sin piernas pero que camina")