
CPT COLOMBIA: STATEMENT ON DETENTION

CPT Colombia team member Lisa Martens presented the following public statement Friday afternoon, October 11, in front of the Barrancabermeja City Hall, regarding her detention and that of fellow team member Ben Horst. Horst, who was in Colombia on a tourist visa, will leave the country this weekend under a deportation order issued Wednesday. Lawyers affiliated with the Colombian Mennonite Church are seeking a reconsideration of the order, which carries an 18-month ban on returning to Colombia.

CPT is a violence reduction program of churches with a tradition of peacemaking in Canada and the United States. Our ecumenical organization came to this country at the invitation of the Colombian Mennonite Church. We are in the Magdalena Medio region by invitation of the civilian population here.

We base what we do on the teachings of the Bible, with the conviction that followers of Christ should work for justice for the oppressed, show compassion for the widow and orphan, and love their enemies. We do not carry weapons, and we reject the claim made by mutually opposing groups around the world, that the use of weapons is compatible with and facilitates such tasks.

Our main activity is to accompany unarmed civilians who are threatened or endangered by any armed group. The intention of our presence is to help create a more peaceful place for civilians to live. When we encounter armed people, our message to them is that we pray that they will put down their arms and do life-giving work, and leave the civilian population in peace.

We also share with our churches and communities in North America, inviting them to join us in prayer and to work for peace in Colombia. The U.S. government gives a lot of weapons to this country. It is very important for U.S. citizens to know how they are being used.

On Tuesday, October 8, my teammate Ben Horst and I responded to a request to accompany a civilian woman to help her bring the body of a dead family member safely through a conflict region.

On the trip, we went through some military checkpoints. We spoke calmly with the personnel at each of the checkpoints, and made them aware that we were accompanying the woman to take the body of her family member to the morgue in Yondo [across the river from Barrancabermeja]. She delivered the body to the morgue, and then reported to the National Police and the inspector there.

After Ben and I had arrived back in Barrancabermeja, government officials approached us and told us we urgently needed to go to the office of the agency that handles immigration. We were held there from about 10:00 p.m. until about 5:00 p.m. the next day, without being given an explanation of the reason for our detention. We were not offered food until friends brought it in after 10:00 a.m.

During the night and day of detention Ben and I sang, prayed, and recalled the great cloud of witnesses that surround us (Hebrews 12:1), naming heroes of faith and peace throughout the centuries and from every corner of the world.

It is our intention to follow all of the administrative processes necessary to maintain our presence here in Colombia, and to continue our accompaniment of civilians in this region.