

Hand in Hand, Mano a Mano, United for Peace

It was the first time I’d taken “the line.” Where I come from we speak about a bus line, here in the Magdalena Medio, it’s a canoe line that stops along the river to pick people up. Our motorist turned the canoe toward a muddy bank, and an older woman descended with great agility, balancing along the canoe’s gunnel, then hopping into the boat. And so we continued up river, gathering the community: grandmothers, toddlers, teenagers, babies, and couples. [CPT-Colombia](#) accompanies two rural communities at risk for violence from the armed actors in the region—guerrilla forces, paramilitaries, the Colombian army. Today the communities were meeting with [CPT](#) to evaluate that accompaniment; and I had volunteered to coordinate activities for the children, hoping my limited Spanish would suffice.

My teammate and I spread out a cloth with the words “Mano a mano unidos por la paz” in the center. Then we traced each child onto the banner, trying to capture their distinctive features: spiky ponytails, close-cropped hair, spirals of curls, outlines of watches. I was surprised at how carefully the

children positioned themselves in order to place each hand *mano a mano* with the previous drawing. Younger children had to extend their arms full length; older children bent their elbows or slanted their bodies.

Even more, I was surprised at the children’s intense focus on painting themselves into this line of peacemakers. The older ones directed their attention to details, replicating their T-shirt logos, drawing elaborate facial features. The younger children wanted to paint every bit of their outlined bodies: heads, arms, fingers. The brushes were not large, but the children applied stroke after stroke. Even the three-year-old took this task seriously, handling his small pot of green paint with care.



A young mother traced her baby onto the banner, too, precisely drawing each tiny finger. When the baby began to whimper, several children hopped over and made soft clucking sounds, a Spanish

equivalent of baby-talk. Immediately, the baby stopped crying.



Three teenage boys had stayed on the outskirts of our activities, approaching to investigate but backing off when invited to participate. Yet they couldn’t resist when we brought out bubble wands as the finale. As one teenager blew impressive strings of bubbles, smaller children leaped about his feet, chasing the iridescent cascade. His way of being *mano a mano* with us.

In late afternoon, we reversed the line, dropping off families along the way. As each group scrambled up the steep riverbank, goodbyes reverberated: may life go well with you, thanks for coming with us.

When a woman rested her hand in my lap, I felt joined to the line, *mano a mano*. I like to think each of us has this desire to place ourselves on the banner of peace, bringing ourselves *mano a mano* into the line that connects us with our neighbors near and far.