

The Women Will Build Peace



Introduction Carol Foltz Spring, a *Christian Peacemaker Team* Member in war-torn Colombia, shared this inspiring moment about the courage of women seeking to bring peace to Colombia.

On July 25, [2002], Matt Schaaf (from Winnipeg, Manitoba) and I (from Palo Alto, California) marched with over 20,000 women and men in the National Mobilization of Women against the War in downtown Bogota. Matt and I had accompanied the forty-eight buses from Barrancabermeja organized by the Organizacion Femenina Popular (*Grassroots Women's Organization*), a group that just celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

*The dawn
from on high
will break upon us,
to give light
to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet
into the way of peace.*

Luke 1:78-79

I felt proud to be a woman, and proud to accompany these courageous women who had come from far-flung reaches of the country, braving long bus rides and sev-

eral nights with little sleep.

They came to demand a negotiated peace, an end to war. “Not one woman, nor one man, nor one peso more for the war,” the women proclaimed in unison. Some women wore giant butterflies on their shirts, carried flowers, danced joyfully with ribbons and acted out stories of liberation in various skits as they marched forward. “The women will build peace,” they shouted. Indigenous women wore tape over their mouths, symbolizing their forced silence. Many women dressed in black, borrowing from the [Women in Black](#) movement, in remembrance of the many women, men, and children who have been killed in Colombia. “We dress in black because of our pain over the 251 forced disappearances and 3,041 kidnappings in 2001,” one banner said.

They came to present a nonviolent alternative — “a million friends in favor of life” — to the plans of [then] President-elect Alvaro Uribe, who [took] office on August 7. Uribe had proposed, as part of his campaign

platform, to create a network of a million informants, people who would report on their neighbors and be paid weekly. When Uribe was governor of the state of Antioquia several years ago, he recruited hundreds of civilians to work as spies and extra fighters in groups called “Convivir,” some of which became paramilitary and criminal gangs.

After marching through downtown Bogota, we gathered in the main square for a rally. Thirty-foot-high banners demanded direct participation of women in the peace process. (One of the banners I had noticed earlier said, “Out of 42,000,000 residents in Colombia, 21,406,863 are women, and we do not have a place in political negotiation of the armed conflict.”)

Music and candles closed the evening, and we rode all night to arrive back in Barranca the next morning. Women returned to their homes exhausted but exhilarated, renewed by another step forward in the long nonviolent struggle against the war in Colombia.

