



Pope Francis meets with Colombian victims of violence

Cristo de Bojayá will lead the national reconciliation ceremony

Villavicencio, september 8, 2017 . Today, at 3:30 pm, during the service of prayer for National Reconciliation in Las Malocas Park in Villavicencio, department of Meta (South West Colombian), Pope Francis will listen to four testimonies from victims of the Colombian armed conflict.

According to Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao, director of the National Secretariat of the Social Pastoral of the Conference Episcopal, "the testimonies of these four people will express, from profound personal experience, the way they have lived the armed conflict, what they are living today and how they perceive themselves in a future of reconciliation and peace".

An estimated 4.000 victims will be present in this event. The Victims Unit, the Archdiocese of Villavicencio and the National Secretariat of Social Pastoral, have accompanied them in the process of restoring their rights and recovery of their social fabric, caused by displacement, anti-personnel mines and extrajudicial executions. They will represent more than 8 million victims affected by violence in departments such as Huila, Cauca, Caquetá, Cundinamarca, Norte de Santander, Córdoba, Chocó, Caldas, Meta and Putumayo, as well as from the cities of Bogotá and Medellín. At present, victims have joined forces with others in their regions in order to defend and guarantee their rights, they have also combined actions to help overcome the past, serve the most vulnerable population psychologically and spiritually, and encourage entrepreneurship projects.

"The message of this ceremony will be centered on reconciliation; it will offer a view of the future in terms of building a society. It will also allow negative feelings to be released so that the atrocities of the past will never be repeated," Monsignor Henao said.

The Church with the victims

The Church carries out a variety of actions in order to support and attend the victims. Prevention undertakings, attending isolated communities with food, religious and pastoral services; spiritual support to the survivors of the



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armed conflict, helping them heal wounds in order to regain confidence and foresee a future; support to displaced people, families and communities, who have lost everything and access to routes for the restitution of rights and support to socio-political advocacy.

The ceremony

A musical group will welcome the Holy Father after which, Monsignor Óscar Urbina Archbishop of Villavicencio, will give a message of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace; then, the choir of the Corporación Universitaria Unimeta, the Musical Band of Santa Cecilia de Villavicencio and the student theater group of the University of Santo Tomás will perform an act linked to Psalm 85. Later on, the four victims will give their testimony and will light a candle next to the Christ of Bojayá. Pope Francis will close the event with his message of reconciliation to the Colombian people and with a prayer for peace.

Pilgrimage of the Christ of Bojayá

The Christ of Bojayá will be present on a cross presiding the ceremony of national reconciliation. The pilgrimage of the Christ of Bojayá began on Monday September 4, escorted by victims, leaving the Parish San Pablo Apostle of Bellavista, municipal head of Bojayá, passing through Quibdó, Bogota and arriving to Villavicencio on September 8.

What is the significance behind the Christ of Bojayá?

It gathers a very important part of the history of the violence that Colombia has endured, as it embodies one of the most painful massacres of the last decades, when In Bellavista, municipal head of Bojayá, on May 2, 2002, a cylinder bomb launched by the FARC, killed about a hundred people, including 48 children.

It symbolizes the fractured life projects of the people and the communities, and reflects the pain of the Colombian society.



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