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## PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA: REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS FROM THE LIBRARY SECTOR<sup>1</sup>

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### Context

Different social conflicts have given rise to a harsh reality in Colombia, an internal war. From a historical point of view, the Colombian society has endured a permanent conflict since the beginning of its republican era, from the war of independence (called "The Great War" by its contemporaries), to the paramilitary actions and criminal urban gangs of recent times. In the intervening years, we have witnessed the consolidation of the State, the War of Parties, the birth of guerrilla movements, drug trafficking and a tradition of corruption that spans all its history.

This process has permeated the lives of Colombians in all possible areas and has become a daily reality. Violence has been present in the city and in the countryside and has been incorporated into arts and literature, graphics and performing arts, music and television, etc. Many of these works have been focused on remembering events in order to aid reconstruction and avoid repetition, especially at the current stage of implementing the agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP, for its acronym in Spanish), one of the oldest and most active insurgent groups, which has been intensely involved in the conflict throughout the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation to English provided by Julieta Reinoso and Andrés Reinoso from the original article in Spanish "Paz y desarrollo sostenible en Colombia: Reflexiones y acciones desde el sector bibliotecario".

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ascolbi.org/>

At the global level, peace was one of the principles of the last General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) that produced the document "Transform our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"<sup>3</sup>. This proclaims that "We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."

For the library sector in Colombia, which has already taken its own journey in reflecting on peace and conflict in the design of services focused on reconstructing society, avoiding the repetition of past mistakes, and, in general, the rescue and appropriation of historical memory – an essential element in human civilization – this is a highly topical subject for debate and general interest.

## **The role of libraries in the conflict**

Libraries in general, and public libraries in particular, play an active role in times of armed conflict. Many spaces that at one time were affected by the violence, or threatened by urban guerrilla units, or common criminals, have been transformed by the creation of library-linked reading programs, generating new dynamics of access to culture in communities, especially written culture, allowing "the recovery of hope to compensate for their lives, their dignity as persons, the creation of opportunities for security and the return of trust in the social environment" (Jaramillo, 2012: 78).

After the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP, different sectors of society, including libraries, have used the slogan 'May the War Rest in Peace' as a way to put the armed conflict behind them. As a result, the Ministry of Culture, through the National Library and the National Network of Public Libraries, launched the Mobile Libraries for Peace<sup>4</sup> program in 2017. This is a program that seeks, in the rural Veredales areas, to help demobilized FARC-EP guerrillas to step back into civilian life. It is comprised of twenty libraries with services focused on reading and IT skills.

Other actions that have been developed are:

- In August 2016 Redprodepaz<sup>5</sup> created the first library specializing in peace and development. The Library Alma Rosa Jaramillo L. is made up of a bibliographic, digital and audiovisual collection and offers services from Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.
- Since September 2016, the Network of Public Libraries of Cali<sup>6</sup> has included the final peace agreement between the government and the FARC in the collection of the 61 libraries of the network, as well as promote reading aloud on a weekly basis in different libraries.
- The V National Congress of Public Libraries<sup>7</sup> took place in October 2016, bringing together librarians from around the country to analyze the subject "Public Libraries as scenarios for peace".

These and other actions demonstrate the interest that the Colombian library community has shown in the joint construction of peace and show the role of the libraries as key institutions not

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>4</sup> <http://es.presidencia.gov.co/noticia/170123-20-bibliotecas-moviles-para-la-paz-iran-a-zonas-veredales-de-normalizacion>

<sup>5</sup> <http://redprodepaz.org.co/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cali.gov.co/cultura/publicaciones/110128/red-de-bibliotecas-publicas-de-cali-landing/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bibliotecanacional.gov.co/rnbp/noticias/v-congreso-nacional-de-bibliotecas-publicas>

just in the current process of implementing the peace agreement, but in general, in the process of human civilization.

## **A reflection on the library sector in 2017**

Libraries are reinvigorating social change. Their actions impact the lives of people beyond the satisfaction of information needs. It is possible to find, in the different types of libraries, allies that accompany processes of appropriation of the public space, give access to different forms of culture, provide support for the processes of teaching, research and citizenship education, allow for the discussion and socialization of historical memory and social, scientific and cultural knowledge.

These and other practices, common in the library work, in addition to leadership and political awareness, directly impact the lives of people who come to enjoy the information services, and indirectly help many others through the realization of the ideas born in libraries. With reflections of this kind, at the end of 2017 the 14th National Congress of Library and Information Science<sup>8</sup> will take place, and will offer a space for reflection on the political action of librarians, the necessary integration of library planning in local, national, regional and global agendas, as well as the development understanding of the important role of the librarian in mainstreaming the ideas of social change, promoted by the UN in the Agenda 2030.

One of the main topics of discussion at the Congress will be Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of the Agenda: "To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, one of the targets under this Goal is to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements". Successful experiences of services that support the SDGs and that demonstrate the impact of libraries in the Colombian society, including actions aimed at peace and post-agreement, will be gathered and highlighted in the Congress.

## **Towards Goal 16**

Out of the 17 SDGs, there is one that is of great importance for Colombia. The current context forces us to focus our attention on the peace process on which, since 2012, the national Colombian government has been making progress. The negotiations with the FARC-EP and the signing of a peace agreement have enabled work towards the achievement of SDG 16, which seeks to promote fair, peaceful and inclusive societies.

SDG 16 acquires great importance for libraries in Colombia, since it should be a priority to strengthen institutions and organizations that are dedicated to the promotion and defense of access to information and justice, intellectual freedom and human rights. Libraries play an important role in society by helping people to access the information they need, promoting the achievement of other goals such as quality education, good health and well-being, and gender equality, among others.

The targets under the SDG 16 are ambitious. In the Colombian context, they may seem impossible, as it is well-known that the country, throughout its history, has not experienced a time without

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<sup>8</sup> <http://ascolbi.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

violence. For this reason, it is a challenge for the government and civil society, to carry out the necessary actions to achieve this goal, in favor of sustainable development in Colombia.

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