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Toribio Attacked
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The town of Toribio has been cruelly attacked by war since April 14. Yes, this is the same people that promoted and then made a reality the massive Indigenous 'Minga' that marched to Cali from September 13-16 of 2004 against the Free Trade Agreement with the US (TLC or FTA in english); against the 'constitutional reform' and the 'democratic security' projects of the Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez, and against violence. It is the same people who promoted and then made a reality the popular consultation against the FTA in which 75% of the citizens voted and 98% said NO to the FTA.

A new mass movement surged vigorously in Colombia in 2004 and there can be no doubt: little Toribio has been its epicenter. The national strike on October 12 and the multitudinous marches of that day, the worker's strikes – especially that of the workers of Ecopetrol, the state oil company – the repeated protests against the FTA negotiations, and especially the massive participation of youth who returned to the scene on April 13 of this year, have characterized this growing massive struggle against Uribe. The struggle has countered with facts the claims of Uribe's massive popularity that are constantly presented in the media's polls.

But a massive popular movement in Colombia always faces violence. That is what happened on February 21-22 in the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado when its most outstanding leader and seven others, three of whom were children, were massacred. According to the community the massacre took place at the hands of the Colombian Army. That is what happened on August 5, 2004, when the Army executed Alirio Martinez, a historic peasant leader of Arauca, and two union leaders. That is what happened when Pedro Jaime Mosquera, another peasant leader from Arauca, was kidnapped in Venezuela, tortured, and murdered on October 6, 2004.

But in Toribio it has been the FARC who took the initiative in creating tragedy. On April 14 they attacked and began combat that ended up having 200 soldiers and police deployed against them, along with air support. The various explosives they deployed (including gas pipe bombs) caused great damage to civilians and their homes.

What happened? The guerrillas have been developing a growing offensive over the past year. Their offensive is the direct result of the military plan called 'Plan Patriota', which was developed by the Southern Command of the US Military. The plan was to surround and annihilate the FARC's support bases in the south and east of the country. Analysts like the ex-advisor to the Army Alfredo Rangel warned that this plan would fail.

The US commander and the Uribe administration overestimated their own forces just as the FARC had underestimated them four years before. The blows suffered by the FARC as a result of its politics and its erroneous calculations in the last years of the Pastrana government and the first months of the Uribe government were interpreted wrongly by Uribe, who believed that the time had come for a definitive blow against the FARC's strongest zones.

It is worth noting that the indigenous, and especially those of Toribio and Northern Cauca had always opposed 'Plan Patriota', as they had opposed 'Plan Colombia' before that. They understand very well the basis and consequences of the Colombian conflict. It is no surprise to them that despite the fumigation of 130 000 hectares of coca over the past year (14 000 more hectares than were in fact being cultivated), according to official data there is today not one hectare less of coca being cultivated than there was before the fumigation. The indigenous have always said that the solution to the problem of illegal cultivation is economic and social and not repressive. They have also long known that Uribe's plan to annihilate the FARC would become, as it has become, a new opportunity for the strengthening of and eventual counterattack by the guerrillas, who have attacked in Narino, Putumayo, Uraba, Arauca. Meanwhile the Colombian Army bleeds in combat, minefields, and tropical diseases where they think they are going on the offensive.

The FARC, now on the offensive, has been spectacularly dismissive of the mass movement of the popular sectors of Colombia. The FARC is uninterested. This is the meaning of FARC's decision to attack Toribio based on a militaristic calculation.

Activists of the popular movement who take our lives in our hands knowing that any day we will become victims of the regime's assassins have learned over the past year to look to Toribio as our own child, our own dreams, and we want Toribio to be treated that way. That is why we call to join the Nasa's invitation to a Forum for Life and Peace and Against War, called by the indigenous Nasa people of Toribio and other indigenous peoples of Cauca, organized for April 22. We know that the Colombian conflict can only be solved through a negotiated, political solution with agrarian reform and devolution of lands to the displaced. This is what the regime has denied for 41 years. But we know something else: we struggle so that the people can govern, and it is only in the people that we trust, to free us from a regime of death that has been imposed for decades here. It is popular power that the indigenous and the people of Toribio have shown us when they made the Minga in September 2004 and the Consulta in March 2005.

In Toribio the people give the mayor orders and not vice versa. The indigenous councils give the orders to the mayor and he obeys like any member of the community, doing what he has to be done in accordance with the law. In Toribio the Indigenous Guards, without weapons, with only the intrinsic authority, respect of the community, and the sticks that symbolize it, protect the people, facilitate mobilization and

resistance.

Anyone who struggles for an alternative to the unrestricted power of multinationals, for another possible world, has to extend their solidarity to Toribio. It is there that hope is alive and acts in organization and popular, civil resistance. In these difficult moments, helping the people of Toribio move forward is to guarantee that the massive struggle of the Colombian people will overthrow Uribe and the FTA and build the foundations of another Colombia, part of Latin America that is moving forward towards another possible world that is being built on the barricades of the world.

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[translated by Justin Podur. For a major photo essay with background on the indigenous of Cauca and Toribio, see this link from Feb 2004]