

Opinion

## **COLOMBIA - It is not Venezuela, it's Colombia**

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Latin America, with its multitudinous faces and multiple ethnicities, is black, has the strength and resilience of African descent. An ancient root that we continue to deny as part of our cultural identity. As Afro-descendants in Latin America we remain invisible even more than indigenous peoples.

In the beauty of the Patria Grande, in the jungles of Darién and the basins of the Atrato and San Juan rivers in the Colombian Pacific, is located the department of Chocó; inhabited by ethnic Emberá and the Waunana of Bajo San Juan. Chocó much as Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Bolívar, Atlántico and Magdalena represents the dignity of Colombia's afro-descendants. As the Garifunas in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua in Central America. Like Brazil, beautifully black.

For any socio-political-cultural study is worth mentioning that Chocó is Afro-descendant. The misfortune of the Chocó is its amazing natural beauty; exuberant for the traitors of the homeland. Starting with paramilitarism (which I doubt it will disappear with the Signing of Peace -in Guatemala 19 years later it is still active, disguised as a common violence) and continuing with the oligarchies thirsty for power and money, which they obtain at the expense of the lives of thousands of farmers.

Chocó is an example of what happens in the world (Africa is all bones for the same reason, governments and European and American smugglers plundering it for centuries) and we can exemplify it in Latin America with the neoliberal governments resorting to mining, ecocides, forced disappearances, and the most ruthless killings to terrorize the population.

If we say hunger, plunder, death, misery and corruption, while thinking about Colombia, it immediately will come to mind La Guajira, but Chocó is going through a barbaric and unspeakable calamity. Its inhabitants have spent decades demanding the government infrastructure, education, health, respect for human rights, and improvement of public services. Yes, a widespread reality that can be seen across the continent (except for countries with progressive governments that are trying to end social inequality) as a result of neoliberal policies that correspond with the interests of capitalism.

It's not Venezuela, it's Colombia, it's Chocó screaming loudly for social inclusion and respect for the ecosystem and life. It's Chocó demanding what's rightly theirs. Demanding the return of the land and everything that has been stolen by the oligarchy. It is Chocó imploring an end to paramilitarism, to government assaults that force them to appear in the bitterness of forced displacement. It is afro-descendant Chocó, Emberá and Waunana demanding Juan Manuel Santos to deliver on his campaign promises.

They are the ancestors, the grandparents, the children, taking to the streets in mass demonstrations, shouting to the world that Chocó exist! That it is alive, breathing, yearning, suffering and feeling. It is there: beaten, abused, exploited, hurt, resisting. Chocó resist! We say Chocó and feel the homeland. We say Chocó, and we feel in the depths of our desires the Patria Grande in search for freedom.

We say Chocó and we must think about the country displaced population, it is a people who have been forced to migrate, to leave their homes, their land, their rivers and their yearnings to save their lives in other parts of Colombia where they are seen as lepers and therefore excluded: For being blacks!

Chocó exists, of course, but only for transnational corporations, mining, and corruption, deforestation and land theft. When will Chocó exist as an afro-descendant people, as ethnic Emberá and Waunana, as a rightful owner of the land? When will their rights be returned back to them? When will Chocó recover the abundance snatched from them?

We say Chocó and a deep sadness overwhelms us, because it is a reflection of what happens in Latin America. We are all Chocó; it's our people, our street, our river, our linked desires. It is our collective illusion, our fight, our cooking fire, and our garden vegetables. It is our blooming field. It is the corn growing, the sun-drenched Caribbean.

We are all Chocó, those of us who yearn for a free Patria Grande bloomed on the smile of the children from the slum. Of all of us who believe in the dignity and integrity as a human essence. Of those who are committed to collective, loving and fruitful sensitivity. Of those who are committed to social inclusion policies. To social equality. Of those who dream with forever abolishing racism, classism, insensibility and selfishness that cause us so much harm.

I say Chocó and also Patria Grande, and say beauty of Mother Africa.

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