

Advocacy case studies

Religious organisations' rights in Colombia

Country:

Colombia

Themes:

Governance

Advocacy approaches:

Building relationships; government officials: meeting with; mobilising people and campaigning

Colombia suffered decades of civil war and fighting until the recent historic peace agreement between opposing forces. The many years of insecurity had resulted in restrictions on civil liberties, including religious freedoms, meaning different religious groups suffered persecution, threats and violence. This was due to their belief in speaking out and standing up for innocent people being displaced and killed by armed actors such as guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the army. The instability also saw restrictions on religious groups' involvement in political processes, with the government refusing to allow or recognise the legitimacy of religious organisations' advocacy.

Many religious groups in Colombia have spent more than a decade campaigning for greater recognition from the state, and to secure their right to participate in political processes as members of civil society. Among those seeking for religious groups to be given rights in law was Lorena Ríos, Coordinator of Religious Affairs at the Ministry of the Interior, who Tearfund joined with in coalition to campaign for these rights. Tearfund also wanted to ensure that the voices of leaders in the evangelical church were heard and encouraged them to participate in the process as well.

A working group meeting was organised in Barranquilla, bringing together attendees of many faiths, including representatives from Tearfund and evangelical church leaders. Due to her role at the Ministry of the Interior, Lorena led the group as they sought to agree the way forward on this issue.

The meeting was successful and resulted in the creation of the first Comprehensive Public Policy on Religious Freedom and Worship, clarifying the relationship between religious organisations and the state, and securing the rights of churches and others to participate in political processes as members of civil society. Tearfund will now support church leaders to ensure that the policy is implemented at regional and local levels across Colombia.

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