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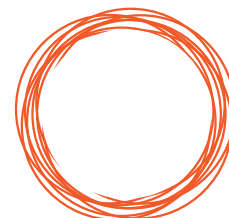
Women Peacemakers Mobilizing Against War

Political Action, Civil Disobedience

Amanda Lucía Camilo Ibarra

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Women Peacemakers Mobilizing Against War

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Also contributing: Irma Ortiz, spokesperson for Ruta Pacifica, and Esther Marina Gallego Z., attorney and National Executive Coordinator for Ruta Pacifica.

Photo courtesy of Movimiento Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres

La Ruta Pacífica

The Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres, or Women's Peaceful Path, is a movement that seeks a negotiated solution for the armed conflict in Colombia. The Ruta is feminist and pacifist, and its political, cultural, and social actions aim to strengthen the ethical positions of nonviolence, civil resistance against the war, and feminism's pacifist perspective. It makes visible the effects of the war on the lives and bodies of women, and promotes the inclusion of Colombian women's political and social proposals.

Women from all segments of society come together in the Ruta: rural women, indigenous women, afro-descendants, mestizas, housewives, community leaders, professional women,

intellectuals, artists, and university students; and some men. The women of the Ruta have decided to break the silence and the cycle of fear that produces war, and to construct new symbolic languages.

The Ruta maintains a presence in nine of Colombia's departments, or regions: Putumayo, Bogotá, Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, Risaralda, Santander, and Cartagena. Approximately 350 social organizations converge around this political concept, an idea that validates efforts to bring about negotiations between the state and the different armed groups to recognize the urgency of a humanitarian agreement, a cease-fire, respect for human rights and the International Humanitarian Law.

At the same time, we seek to promote the mobilization of Colombian women in resistance to the war; to construct a feminist analysis of the Colombian armed conflict, an analysis that recognizes the patriarchal nature of the war; to articulate the different dimensions of violence, both private and public, linking daily violence against women to the war experienced by the country; and, finally, to present alternative interventions in the problem.

Our shared commitment includes working through a political and methodological process focused on the armed conflict and its possible solutions; strengthening and coordinating the women's movement around a pacifist and feminist future for the country; making sustainable the mobilization of women for a politically negotiated solution; and playing a constructive role in the re-envisioning and redirection of the Colombian women's movement.



Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebooks series!

In each notebook, a human rights defender describes an innovative tactic used successfully in his or her work. The authors have been pioneers in tactics that have contributed to human rights in their own countries, demonstrating also that these tactics can be adapted and applied in other countries and contexts in order to address a variety of issues.

All of the authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, representing governmental and/or nongovernmental perspectives, educators, law enforcement, mental health workers and truth and reconciliation processes. Each notebook contains detailed information about the author or authors and their organization, what they have accomplished, and the methods and resources used to accomplish it.

We hope to inspire other human rights activists to think tactically and to broaden their range of tactics to include those that have successfully advanced human rights elsewhere.

The Ruta Pacífica is a movement of Colombian women who have directly confronted the violence of the armed actors with large mobilizations of caravans, marches, and public events, crossing the country and entering conflict zones under military control. There, the women of the Ruta have broken the silence in order to mobilize the voices for peace in their country. With a clear pacifist and anti-discrimination message they have demonstrated that solidarity, courage, and active mobilization can reorient the debate and the conscience of peace in a country with more than fifty years of continuous armed conflict. Their mobilizations are characterized by rigorous organization that—ritually—protects and instills social and political awareness in its participants, communicating in effective and novel ways the images and messages it directs at national public opinion.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at www.newtactics.com. Other notebooks will be added over time. On our website you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners, and information about our workshops and symposia. If you wish to subscribe to the New Tactics bulletin, please send an email message to newtactics@cvt.org.

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and grew out of our experience as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that, in this sense, these informative notebooks will be useful in continuing to reflect together.

Nancy L. Pearson

New Tactics in Human Rights Project Manager

Cuando se siente que podría tomarse en una sola mano de mujer un manajo de llaves para abrir las compuertas de todas la prisiones y que podría repartirse esta voz entre millones como pan venido a mas, sin pensar en nada supersticioso o milagroso como un pan ansiado desde el encierro oscuro del hambre cuando soy más porque soy menos y soy menos y soy todas/os cuando me ocupas, Colombia y soy este botón agradecido que ha buscado su ojal entre lo oscuro de la tarde y se ha topado con la sal de tu sol cuando la vida vuelve a ser este milagro escribo vida y te canto con amor y te canto.

When one senses that one could take up in one woman's hand a handful of keys to open the doors of all the prisons and that this voice could be shared out among millions like rising bread, without thinking of anything superstitious or miraculous like a piece of bread ached for from within the dark enclosure of hunger when I am more because I am less and I am less and I am all men and women when you inhabit me, Colombia and I am this grateful button that has sought its eyelet amid the darkness of the evening and has encountered the salt of your sun when life becomes again this miracle I write life and I sing to you with love and I sing to you.

Anabel Torres

1. Introduction

With the persistent and steadily worsening armed conflict in Colombia for more than four decades, as well as the involvement of the civilian population in the war with devastating psychological, economic, social, and cultural effects, a group of Colombian women in 1996 began thinking about the need to publicly oppose the war and its effects on women. The loss of sons and daughters; the loss of land through forced displacement; the drawing of sons and daughters into the war; the systematic rape of women as a weapon of war; expulsion; and fear were the motivations for a national mobilization of women to a zone where the escalation of the armed conflict between guerrillas and paramilitaries had reached its peak.

From this critical moment, the first time that thousands of women from remote regions mobilized to express their politically conscious rejection of wars and violence using colors, rituals, and phrases that invited the dismantling of the artifacts of war, Ruta Pacífica has been characterized by its capacity for mobilization as

a repudiation of war, as a form of solidarity and as support for women and their communities confronting the effects of war and violence in the Colombian armed conflict.¹

The Ruta has carried out 10 national mobilizations in the departments of Antioquia, Chocó, Putumayo, Magdalena Medio, Bogotá, and Cauca y Bolívar, with the participation of nearly 20,000 women and covering more than 1700 kilometers, opening a path to pacifist resistance to the war. We want to deconstruct the war in favor of constructing a peaceful and democratic country, a country respectful of nature, respectful of difference and, above all, one that gives new meaning to the role of women in the construction of public and private life.

In the following pages, we will describe the context of war in Colombia, by which we mean the structural causes of this long-lasting armed conflict, its impact on the civilian population and on women, in order to then discuss our tactic of mobilizations, peaceful resistance and protecting

¹ See section 10 describing mobilizations carried out by the Ruta: year, location, and number of women participants.

women in the context of the war. We will place special emphasis on mobilization as a strategy for political influence, describing the actions and messages, their relationship to women's reality, participant testimonies, the symbolic vision of the strategy, the strategy of protection, the role of communications, and the accomplishments of the mobilizations. We will conclude with a brief discussion of the potential for this tactic in different socio-political contexts.

2. Women and the War in Colombia

Colombia is a country with a population of 42.3 million people, 71 percent urban and 29 percent rural; 62 percent live in conditions of absolute poverty, and of this percentage, 9 million Colombians, both male and female, are indigent. The middle class, in continuous decline, represents 33 percent of the population, and the sectors with greatest wealth and political power, approximately 5 percent. Gaps in income, opportunities, and living conditions continue to grow among both urban and rural sectors and for most of the social pyramid.

In its social, political, and economic dimensions, Colombia is characterized by a profound crisis, as seen in problems of social exclusion; income and wealth inequality; loss of credibility and confidence in institutions and their leadership by much of the population; economic dependency; a large external debt; social fragmentation; unstable social processes; weakness in the systems of justice, security and defense; growing administrative corruption; generalized impunity; patronage practices; and multiple forms of violence and worsening of the armed conflict, which represents one of the rawest realities of the country. All of these factors impede the collective construction of a shared national and democratic vision, capable of going beyond the specialized interests of individuals and social groups. In addition, a greater awareness of the gravity of the social crisis within the framework of globalization has been developing, which constitutes the greatest challenge for society and the state.²

2 CLADEM, CORPORACIÓN CASA DE LA MUJER. Diagnóstico sobre derechos sexuales y reproductivos: 1995-2002. Bogotá, 2004. p.15

Over the past 40 years, Colombia has experienced a continuous expansion of its internal war, which has extended from the countryside into the centers of national power. By the end of the 1990s, the internal conflict was marked by expanded power of the guerrillas and the paramilitary groups locally, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis, with a displaced population of approximately 3 million people. On a daily basis, 9 percent of the country experiences direct armed conflict, with human rights violations and violations of the International Humanitarian Law, in the form of displacement, forced recruitment, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial executions, control of social organizations, sexual violence, and confinement of populations and/or communities.

For women, social, economic, political, and cultural inequality continue with increasing rates of poverty, technological underdevelopment, and unemployment, to say nothing of low levels of political participation. To this can be added the poor state of sexual health and reproductive health services, and the fact that abuse and violence continue to be a constant in the lives of Colombian women, representing an obstacle for women's full development. It is clear that democracy and social justice will become a reality for women only when they are able to fully exercise their citizenship, take ownership of the cultural arena, and affirm their rights to their distinct situation.³

The armed conflict specifically affects women and their fundamental rights. Some of the kinds of violations of women's human rights identified by the "Women and Conflict" working group are:

Homicides and Indictments

Both women and girls in zones of armed conflict are victims of homicide and indictments, targeted for having personal relationships with participants in the armed conflict.

Homicides Preceded by Torture and Sexual Violence

Homicides of women and girls, on many occasions, are preceded by torture or sexual violence. This is not always taken into account by

3 CORPORACIÓN VIVA LA CIUDADANÍA. "Mujer y Pobreza." Working documents in preparation for the Social Summit Against Poverty, and for Peace and Equality. Bogotá. 1998. p. 2.

investigators, resulting in victims appearing in the charges as victims of an attack on their life, while the crimes that preceded their death are omitted from the investigation.

Violence Against Women's Organizations

National and regional women's organizations, especially those that operate in zones of armed conflict, are the target of threats and harassment, which affect both their members and the community projects they develop. The factions view the leadership exercised by women's organizations as an obstacle to their social and territorial control.

Kidnapping

From October 1996 through September 1999, the number of women victims of kidnapping increased more than 300 percent: 38 women were kidnapped in 1996; 162 in 1999. In total, 272 women were kidnapped in the period studied. Of those, 248 are attributed to the guerrillas and 19 to paramilitary groups.⁴

3. The Women of the Ruta Pacífica Seek Solutions to the Conflict

The Mobilization Route

Faced with the country's situation, women from organizations throughout Colombia decided to focus their political efforts on pressing for a negotiated end to the armed conflict from a position of inclusiveness in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, generation, profession, social class and religion, urban and rural residents—which is to say, promoting a process that would include the entire country in all of its diversity.

We women of the Ruta speak out in order to tell Colombia of the urgent necessity of disarming bodies and spirits, since the militarization of civilian life, both urban and rural, only leads to an upsurge of violence and the emergence of new players. What we require are civilian approaches to find solutions for armed and social conflicts, and violence.

4 Women and Armed Conflict working group. Second draft of the report on violence against women and girls in the Colombian armed conflict. Bogotá, 2001, p.12 and passim.

We question the traditional and exclusionary models for negotiation between governments and insurgent groups. These failed efforts destroy the model of democratic authority and threaten the autonomy and civility of the population.

Such models have been characterized by exclusion of social participation; by conceiving negotiations in the context of confrontation without a framework of agreements about human rights and international humanitarian law, and without agendas that would include commissions on truth, justice and reparations as means to protect the people. Another feature of this kind of model is the loss of the rule of law resulting from the presence of armed groups in territories where they impose arbitrary norms on the civilian population.

The armed groups justify war with reasons such as the defense of the nation and its liberation from the hands the enemy, claiming to act in the name of the people and to defend the state and its institutions. Nonetheless, despite their ideological differences, they have something in common: the immense capacity for destruction, barbarity, genocide, exclusion, and driving people off their land, into exile and desolation. Their methods include a circle of death and darkness that runs through the social fabric, leaving behind pain, upheaval, and resentment. And because it is profitable, it is not in the interests of any of its promoters to stop it; not the arms dealers, nor the drug producers, nor the corrupt politicians, all of who have turned war into a source of wealth.

In this context, the women of the Ruta Pacífica reject the war, and for this reason we make ourselves a presence in those cities and locations where the armed conflicts intensify, using our creativity, skill, intellect, insight, magic and intuition. Under the slogan, "We did not give birth to sons and daughters for war," we construct language and symbols for the defense of our rights and nonviolent strategies for countering the war's perverse effects on the most vulnerable populations.

Mobilizations and Peaceful Resistance

Mobilizations are a part of Ruta Pacífica's strategy for influence. In that sense, they are a tactic for achieving short-, medium-, and long-term political objectives. They create spaces for



The Ruta Pacífica has allowed women to reclaim hope, to affect the country's future, and to build a better future for ourselves and for coming generations.

communicating and educating about women's issues in the context of the armed conflict, and articulate an agenda for political pressure and lobbying. Their nature is clearly pacifist; their purpose is the subversion of the dominant cultural codes about war.⁵

They, in turn, constitute a set of actions and symbolic language that, in voices of sisterhood (brotherhood), solidarity and power, join with other women who live in areas of conflict. They are the result of months of work, discussion, and research. The women of the Ruta Pacífica travel across Colombia's geography toward those sites where the armed conflict has intensified, with the goal of regaining the population's civil autonomy and denouncing the effects of the conflict on the bodies and in the lives of women and their communities.

The mobilizations are the result of a long process of preparation in which we investigate the causes of the Colombian armed conflict and its impact on the lives of women; define the symbolic language for communicating what we think; and establish our positions and political proposals.

⁵ Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres. *Mobilizaciones de la Ruta Pacífica 1996-2003; Nuevas formas de resistencia civil: De lo privado a lo público.* 2004.

We create slogans and message and prepare our bodies and minds in order to take the journey responsibly and with clarity. The mobilizations are the expression of a framework of ideas, a warp of many threads: pacifism, feminism and non-violence that act as the compass for our tactic.

For the women of the Ruta, the mobilizations are a marvelous adventure in self knowledge; in them we recognize ourselves, we feel the scars on our bodies, criss-crossed by individual and collective histories.

In the mobilizations we are able to identify and carry out meaningful, vital and mobilizing experiences that correspond with the reality of the conflict and our quest. The mobilizations are one of our tactics and strategies for championing life and reclaiming our rights.

Mobilization, Step by Step

The mobilizations require a preparation process consisting of several steps and actions, which we will describe below:

Phase One: Analysis

Analysis of the armed conflict and the situation of women in the region toward which the mobilization is directed.

- The specific situation experienced in the region is analyzed: displacement, sexual violence against women, disappearances, kidnappings, fumigations, militarization by all armed actors, threats and intimidation targeting social organizations and women, etc. It is essential that in the region in question there are women's organizations or organizations that belong to Ruta Pacífica.
- The political are defined.
- Research and/or documentation are conducted in order to clarify the issues.
- Proposals are defined in order to be developed, positioned, negotiated and agreed upon during the three stages: Before, During, and After.
- A national preparatory commission is named that will be in charge of developing the agenda: methodological design of the actions to be carried out, symbolic script, strategies for positioning and diffusion, and networking and alliances.
- Preparations are begun in each of the regions, municipalities, localities. The process consists of a political component and an operational and logistical component.

Political Component. This component is developed through preparatory workshops that cover the themes to be developed, the regional context for the mobilization, and situation analysis of the armed conflict. Resources are gathered for the symbolic action, a protection strategy is developed, and the protection pact is made.

Operational and Logistical Component. In this component the different commissions are named (list of participants, health, food, local resources, team for the symbolic action, protection team⁶, bus coordinators). Each commission has its own respective functions and tasks.

- The communications plan is designed and carried out with respect to national and international media, and governmental and diplomatic bodies.
- Strategic alliances are established, basically

6 Bus coordinators, protection coordinators, type of organization and coordinators of the first and last bus.

with the peace movement, human rights movement, and women's movement on national and international levels.

- Civilian and military authorities are informed of the mobilization and conditions are requested in order to avoid mishaps.
- The "Humanitarian Corridor" proposal is delivered to the armed actors through their web pages, requesting that they respect the pacifist mobilization.

Phase Two: Carrying out the Mobilization

The mobilization begins with the departure of buses from each regional center and culminates with their return to the points of origin.

This phase includes:

- The deployment of women from their points of origin.
- Activation of the regional and national alert teams.⁷
- Activation of the mobilization's coordination and protection teams.⁸
- Activation of the system of technical communication between buses and regional and national alert teams.⁹
- Development of planned communication activities for the mobilization.¹⁰

7 Regional and national reaction teams. In each region from which women of the Ruta depart a three-person team is formed, whose role is to communicate news of the mobilization to the media, social organizations and other public entities of the local and regional arena. The national team is responsible for reporting any irregularities to national civilian and military bodies, as well as to national and international bodies.

8 See appendix.

9 The system of technical communication is activated through previously agreed upon reports. In order to define these reports, schedules, locations, and access to communications are taken into account.

10 The communications plan establishes a database in the national office in order to provide information about the development of the mobilization. The database includes photographic and video documentation of the mobilization.

- The protection pact is activated.¹¹ In other words, each of the women who will participate in the mobilization will comply with collectively established agreements.
- Political actions are carried out in the region or zone of the mobilization:
 - **A demonstration** through the main streets of the city or municipality.
 - **An academic presentation** about the issues that the women intend to highlight.
 - **A public presentation** that integrates symbolic activities for protecting women and their organizations. We exorcise fear and war.
 - **Vigils** that integrate cultural presentations by organizations of the region or municipality and in which the public declaration of the Ruta's position in the face of armed conflict is read.
- Our demands are delivered to the civilian authorities, the media, social and political organizations, and international organizations.
- We prepare ourselves for the return trip.

Phase Three: Post-mobilization

This phase is one of evaluation and follow-through on the proposed agenda.

- The mobilization is evaluated in each region.
- The agenda developed by the mobilization is evaluated and next steps are identified.
- The mobilization's visual documentation is publicly distributed, in the form of a CD of photographs and videos preserving the memory of the mobilization. These products are distributed in the national and international arenas as a strategy for circulating the Ruta's political discourse.

¹¹ See appendix.

4. Thematic and Political Agendas Developed in the Mobilizations of Ruta Pacífica

- Effects of the armed conflict on women.
- Against impunity and for recovery of memory.
- Women's bodies as the bounty of war.
- Women's peaceful resistance against war.
- Political negotiation and demilitarization of civilian life.
- Anti-drug policy and its effects on the lives and bodies of women.

5. The Symbolic as Recovery of the Feminine

The Ruta as symbol has political, aesthetics, emotional, and historical meaning for women. The Ruta rescues memory from oblivion and reclaims the language that bring us closer to explanations and support for that mysterious world of the feminine which has been obscured by cultural impositions.

The Ruta intends to reveal war as the highest expression of patriarchy, which excludes, eliminates, subordinates, discriminates against, oppresses, and destroys; these manifestations are expressed and exacerbated with greatest emphasis in wars. In this sense, symbolic expression allows for denunciation and repair of the wounds that war has left on women.

In contrast to the symbolic dimension of war: fear, desperation, weapons, displacement, imposed silence; the symbolism of the Ruta reclaims creativity, the word, silence, art, dance, ritual, the sacred, the cleansing of the body and the spirit.

The symbolic dimension as a form of doing and expressing politics has an important impact on women because they feel a closeness to this language, because new forms of expression different from the traditional ones can be established, and because these forms of expression are highly political.

The symbolic dimension plays a role in excising rigid cultural patterns; it deconstructs the language of war and the antagonistic responses to

such language. The symbolic dimension implicitly carries new feminine forms of expressing pain, anguish and our concerns about the future of our sons and daughters. For the Ruta, the symbolic aims to ridicule war.

“Symbols are our paraphernalia, with them we walk forward and retreat, with them we speak in silence, they are our poetical metaphors for calling for another dialogue, that dialogue that was broken at the very beginning of our history. There we were marked by the schizophrenia of the conquest.”¹²

We reclaim the territories taken by the armed conflict, by creating symbols of our lives and of the plans built up over many years.

6. Protection Strategies

Because the purpose of Ruta Pacífica is the subversion of dominant cultural codes about war, and because the mobilization uses pacifist civil resistance, it has generated discomfort among the lords of war, whose real interests are thus publicly unmasked and their territories invaded by a logic different from the logic of war they impose.

Thus the mobilizations can be seen as a threat to the homogeneity and hegemony of war, and therefore can become a military target.

The Ruta Pacífica is a project that works for peace in a context of conflict, and its work includes the generation of trust and the exorcizing of fear as fundamental tasks. The Ruta has developed as part of its daily operations self-protection and protection based on the idea of not breaking ties, of weaving and strengthening relations of trust, of recognizing fears in order to put them in their true proportions and construct alternatives to confront them.

This historic work has afforded the Ruta an accumulation of political-symbolic capital that contributes to the construction of a system of political protection based on mobilization and civil resistance against the war, violence, and authoritarianism.

12 Clara Inés Mazo. *Lo simbólico de la Ruta. La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres*. p. 133. 2003

For Ruta Pacífica, self-protection and protection refer to preserving, protecting, and safeguarding the life of each and every participant in the Ruta; projecting, strengthening, and making publicly visible the political movement and social organization. In this way the system of protection serves as a support for the Ruta's political projection.

At the same time, the Ruta is considered a strategy of both self-protection and protection due to its political gambits and philosophical principles which are based on pacifism, nonviolence, anti-militarism, and peaceful, playful and symbolic resistance to war and violence through self-care, nonviolent action, and the loving, politic and dialogue-based treatment of conflicts.

The Ruta Pacífica is not opposed to anyone. It is in favor of a negotiated resolution to the Colombian armed conflict, and it proposes a way of treating all of society's conflicts, both public and private.

International Accompaniment

The objective is political support expressed through physical accompaniment, written and audiovisual greetings, communiques to the national government demanding appropriate conditions for the mobilization, simultaneous actions in other parts of the world, and dissemination of information about the mobilization.

Along these lines, alliances are sought with international organizations to develop actions in support of the mobilizations in their own countries. A concrete example is the alliance with the International Movement of Women in Black Against War. The women of this movement have carried out supporting actions centered in Spain, in the cities of Seville, Barcelona, and Madrid. Similarly, in Italy they organized demonstrations in Florence, Rome, Turin, and Alba, among other cities. The actions took place in public squares and in front of Colombian embassies in both countries.

Accountability

One of the guiding principles of the Ruta is transparency, focused on accountability for the government agencies in charge of guaranteeing safety and respect for human rights, demanding the best conditions for the mobilization.

Accordingly, one of the actions is to identify the military and civilian authorities present on the entire planned route of the mobilization. Once identified, a database is created and a communique is sent to these authorities announcing the mobilization and demanding guarantees for its safe conduct, and advising them of our rejection of militarization as a protection strategy.

Civilian authorities include mayors, public defenders, functionaries of the Ministry of the Interior (peace advisors, for example), who are also informed of the mobilization and from whom an immediate response is requested in case of a problem.

Alliances

Alliances, based on solidarity, cooperation and equality, are maintained with the citizens' peace movement, with the human rights movement and with the women's movement.

In addition to solidarity actions, political backing is sought to guarantee that in the event of any problem or risk, these organizations will activate their capacity for denunciation and response in the local, national, and international spheres.

Protection Plan

The protection plan is based on the concepts of protection and self-protection that take into account the treatment of fear and stress.

Tools of the Plan

Risk Map

The map identifies possible risks and ways of responding. This map is analyzed in relation to the before, during and after stages of the mobilization.

Analysis of the Armed Groups

Each of the armed groups along the route and at the arrival site is identified and categorized as legal or illegal, political or criminal, taking into account their position with regard to the Ruta: hostility, indifference, harassment or threat.

Map of Alliances

People and/or organizations are identified who would have the capacity to respond and the political will to act in the face of problems during the

mobilization. These are categorized as regional, local, national, and international, and in terms of the type of relationship that can be established.

Protection Pact in Sisterhood and Solidarity

In addition to taking up the principles of Ruta Pacifica and the political meaning and goals of the mobilization, the pact incorporates the concepts of protection and self-protection, which are also expressed in collective agreements about conduct.

Protection Teams and Their Functions

Teams who will be in charge of the main thread of the contingency plan are named, and communication mechanisms are created in case of an incident.

7. The Role of Communications

The mobilization itself is an act of communication that combines strategies and outcomes with the goal of disseminating a message.

The experience of communications work in the mobilizations is part of the strategy of dissemination, positioning, and protection for the organization. It seeks to achieve widespread interest in our actions, thus generating opportunities for debate and opinion on the themes and issues we address in the mobilizations.

There have been important advances in the process of dissemination within the organizations of the peace movement and the women's movement at the national and international levels, but it has been difficult to gain access to the mass media because resistance actions such as ours do not fit the news agenda due to the pro-government orientation of the media, which views war as the only valid means of action.

The communications media provide information about a mobilization only marginally, without emphasis, and almost always alongside some other activity, without the context needed to identify it as a coherent peace project.

8. National Reality and the Commitment of Women Activists

Through its mobilizations, Ruta Pacífica expresses its commitment to pacifism and nonviolence and to building a country free of war, fear, and violence. These are some of the messages we express in each mobilization through oral, written, and symbolic language, and through which we stake out a position in favor of a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and for peaceful response to all conflicts, by calling upon peaceful women and men to not collaborate with war and its warriors.

We declare ourselves Actively Neutral, taking a position of non-cooperation with all armed groups, including the military forces of the State, who have exacerbated the conflicts by encouraging and legitimating paramilitary groups that administer their own justice.

We will not allow our hands or wombs to provide fodder for war and violence. We will teach our sons and daughters to exchange cries of shock and horror in the face of death for hope and solidarity.

We will not be silent in the face of pain and suffering produced by war, or by the violence committed against women anywhere on the planet, even when it does not appear in official records.

We will not forget our political commitment to protect our planet, Mother Earth. Always remembering that resources invested in war that should be dedicated to development. Without sustainable development there will be no peace.

We raise our collective voice because today there is an effort to pacify the country with totalitarian projects of death. There is a growing number of groups that operate in the name of citizen defense and under legal protection spread blood and resentment. How to pacify the pacifiers?¹³

13 Manifesto of the mobilization to Mutatá, Urabá in Antioquia province in 1996.

We are ready to break up the everyday mechanisms that nourish and justify war. If we err, let it at least be on the right side, contributing toward delivering to our sons and daughters a better country than the one we live in.

Women give birth to civilians and patriarchal society turns them into warriors.

Who are the men we love? What do they think of the war? It may be these men we love who decide who lives and who dies. Who are the fathers of our children? They could be fathers who teach contempt and hatred from birth. They could believe that there are some human beings who are disposable and others worth saving. Or, instead, they could promote life and respect for others, whether or not others belong to different ethnic groups, different religions, another sex, or another social class.¹⁴

9. What Women of the Ruta Say

“The Ruta Pacífica is a project that has allowed women to reclaim hope and confidence in our capacity to politically affect the country’s future, to build a better future for ourselves and for coming generations...”

“In Ruta Pacífica one can also say that the symbolic dimension has therapeutic and reparative effects, disarming the armed groups. It weaves invisible threads between beings, it is a language to which we can all have access, even without words...”

— *Reflections on the symbolic and aesthetic project of the Ruta. Marta Colorado, member of the Ruta.*

“The empty cooking pot, the black of mourning, yellow flowers, silence, the dreamcatcher, the weaving, the doll that symbolizes our others (other women, different from ourselves). The yellow of truth, the white of justice, the blue of reparation, the green of hope, the orange of peaceful resistance, the red of life; they are all a symbolic invitation to reclaim and create new

14 Rocío Pineda. *Lisistratas colombianas a las puertas del nuevo milenio. Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres.* 2003.

meaning and the power of celebration and of laughter in our culture, to break the scheme of destruction and death...”

—*The symbolic dimension of the Ruta. Clara Inés Mazo, member of the Ruta Pacífica.*

“For me the change is that we are no longer afraid... a courage has been born in us, we can talk to anyone without being afraid and that has been an important change.... We believe that we have gained tremendously... and to speak with the government, the mayor, with the armed groups, it’s a great achievement, because... we’ve made our demands and we are taken into account.”

—*Testimony of women from Putumayo after the November 2003 mobilization.*

“... and during the march, that slogan: We did not give birth to sons and daughters for the war, that resonated inside me and that made me see how I was bottled up in my own glass of water when Colombia is in an ocean. That awoke in me a love for my country. When I would hear the national anthem my eyes would tear up, because I was only seeing the circle where I was standing, I wasn’t seeing past my own nose and I started to understand this.”

“... for me it has been a very... very big change, I feel Colombian, to make our presence felt, to pressure not with just two or three of us but with two or three thousand women, it’s all a matter of what I’m willing to do, of what I want...”

10. Achievements of the Mobilizations

History of the Mobilization Tactic

PLACE	DATE	NUMBER OF WOMEN
Mutató – Urabá	25 November 1996	800 women
Southeastern Antioquia	17 November 1997	1500 women
Cartagena	25 November 1999	1000 women
Barrancabermeja	25 November 2000	2500 women
Barrancabermeja	17 August 2001	2500 women
Working class neighborhoods of Medellín	25 November 2001	500 women from Antioquia
Bogotá	25 July 2002	7000 women
Putumayo	25 November 2003	3500 women
Quibdo – Chocó	25 November 2004	1000 women
Toribío and Jambaló – Cauca	23 and 24 July 2005	1000 women

On November 25, 2002, the eight regional teams of the Ruta carried out mobilizations within our localities. On other occasions, the Ruta’s regional teams have independently undertaken to respond to specific situations through the mobilization of women of their city or department.

The Ruta Pacífica has had the capacity to mobilize a total of 21,300 women. Thus it could be said that since the suffragettes of the 1940s, the Ruta has been the women’s project with the greatest capacity for systematic and permanent mobilization articulated with a programmatic approach.

In addition:

- The Ruta has made visible the fact that the armed conflict affects men and women differently and that the field of battle creates an environment of mistreatment and sexual abuse targeting women.
- By asserting that women’s bodies are not the spoils of war, the Ruta has established a new point of reference for redefining or attributing new meaning to violence against women.
- The mobilizations have allowed women to progressively develop a politics for and by women.

- We have made advances in the construction of a symbolic language as potential for recognition and identity, and through that language we have achieved the dismantling of artifacts of war, of steel, of words for inciting violence, of collective forgetting.
- The mobilizations have served as a means for bringing together and establishing alliances among women's groups and organizations.
- We recognize in the mobilizations a systematic and permanent expression of the Ruta program's goals.
- The mobilizations have made possible increased knowledge about the reality of women's lives, comparative understanding of the reality of other women, contextualization of the Colombian armed conflict, knowledge of the situation in different departments of the country, building of ties of solidarity, and sharing of knowledge and experience.
- Women have gained self-esteem and autonomy and have learned that they are not alone in confronting the impact of the armed conflict.

11. Lessons for Other Contexts

- The mobilizations against contexts of violence and war are useful because they play a role of denunciation and demand, of both governments and fighters in the conflict.
- For women, it is very important to express opposition through languages different from the traditional ones, and to exorcise the fears that we feel in the face of violence and war, in order to focus on life.
- The mobilizations organized and carried out by women leave an important message for others who face these issues, whether actively or passively.
- The Ruta's actions and the reclaiming of symbolic language have served in other contexts such as Spain, Israel, and with Women in Black in different countries.
- With our mobilizations women have positioned ourselves as a political force, which can later be a determining factor in any negotiation process.

Appendices

The tables below can serve as a guide for development of a protection strategy.

Risk Analysis Table—History of the Mobilization Tactic

Possible Situation	Agreed-Upon Actions	Observations
Pre-mobilization		
Pamphleteering against the mobilization.	Evaluate the implications of what is stated in the pamphlets and define a communication strategy for the mobilization.	If the pamphlets were distributed regionally, the evaluation should be conducted in that region and both the content of the pamphlet and its evaluation will input analysis by a national body of the Ruta. The communication strategy will be designed in accordance with decisions at the national level.
During the mobilization		
One of the armed fighters blocks the road and intends to carry off one of the participants in the mobilization.	<p>Under no circumstance will one of the women be separated from the site of the mobilization in order to speak with an armed actor or state actor.</p> <p>Everyone must be alert to any indication of the use of force to separate someone from the group. The response will be to exercise the pressure of the group.</p>	It must be remembered that this action will not include any verbal exchange with the armed fighters.
Post-mobilization		
Hostility towards the women of a region participating in the mobilization.	First, an evaluation will be conducted about the type of hostilities, who is likely to carry them out, the risk that this might represent, etc. This evaluation will be analyzed by the national protection team and decisions will be made accordingly.	In cases like these, we will have to remember the necessity of managing our fear. We must remember that generating fear is one of the goals of those who use this kind of tactic, because it guarantees that we will feel vulnerable and could potentially lose our ability to analyze and act appropriately.

Analysis of the armed players

Name _____	Character _____ (indifference, hostility, threat, accountability, etc)	Attitude Toward the Ruta (legal, illegal, political, criminal, etc.)
XXXXX	XXXXX	XXXXX

Table for Analysis of Allies and Relationships

Name/ Organization _____	Character (local, regional, _____ national, international, governmental, etc.)	Type of Relationship _____	Action needed to establish alliance
International Movement of Women in Black	International XXXX	Alliance	In this case it is a matter of maintaining the alliance, which means nurturing the relationship through infor- mation and plans for con- crete actions.

Protection pact with the women

- Do not drink alcohol during the mobilization.
- Respect the instructions of the bus coordinators, which must not be taken as capricious or arbitrary since they reflect prior agreements.
- All participants in bus transportation must relate to one another in a respectful manner; in the event of a conflict the bus coordinators must be informed.
- Nobody other than the bus coordinators should transmit information to the group or to the bus drivers about situations on the road or announcements of stops.
- Respect the agreements about communications: spokespersons and coordination.
- Nobody should participate in talks with armed groups or with civilian and military authorities.
- In the event of a roadblock, whether by legal or illegal actors, nobody should approach them to enter into dialogue.
- Care must be taken not to provoke aggression. The protection team is responsible for attempting a resolution of the situation.
- During stopovers and at sites of demonstrations, the safety of persons with whom a relationship is established must be kept in mind as part of the protection and self-protection strategy. The women of the Ruta Pacifica are part of civil society and cannot be compelled to enter into contact with any armed actor, including the armed forces of the state and the police.

Functions of protection teams

Bus coordinators

Each bus includes two coordinators, one charged with dealing with situations inside the bus and the other acting as liaison with the protection team.

Coordinator 1

- Serves as spokesperson in communication with the protection team.
- Receives information about everything that takes place during the trip.
- In the event of new information regarding safety, she will be the first to know it and will deal with the information according to established agreements.
- Inspects the bus in order to assure that there are no unwanted packages.
- Carries a folder with letters sent to different military and civilian bodies, as well as the responses received.
- Informs the protection team and the bus coordinators of any stop (due to armed groups, technical problems, etc.). No bus is authorized to stop at locations not previously agreed upon.
- Establishes a direct relationship with the bus driver during stops, opens the door, and assures that the bus maintains its assigned place in the caravan. Will also monitor the state of alertness or fatigue of the driver.

Tools

- Lists of women from each bus making up the caravan.
- Folder with all communications sent to the military and civilian authorities.
- List of cellular phone numbers for the entire protection coordination team.

Coordinator 2

- Is responsible for dealing with any situation occurring inside the bus or any disagreement among the travelers.
- Maintains a calm atmosphere inside the bus.
- Ensures that her bus always has the banner that identifies it as belonging to the Ruta.
- Inspects the state of the bus (toilets, seats, floor, etc.).

- Before the women enter the bus, she inspects the bus to ensure that there are no foreign packages on board.
- At each stop, she confirms that nobody has been left behind and that nobody moves to another bus.
- Will oversee and distribute food tokens.

Tools

- List of women on the bus she is coordinating.
- Some short reading related to the mobilization.
- Drops for helping to manage stress and fear.
- Music to share.
- Folder with symbolic script.

Information on the women participants in the mobilization is listed as follows:

Table for analysis of allies and relationships

Organization	First and Last Name	Identification document	Type of medical affiliation	Observations
Xxxxx	Xxxxx Xxxxxxx	xxx xxxx xxxxxxxx	Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	Xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Protection Team

Will be comprised of no more than six women and will be determined according to the size of the caravan.

- They will safeguard the commitments of the mobilization, which means knowing and managing any situation that could place the caravan at risk, whether due to internal behavior or external factors related to the context and the armed groups.
- They will coordinate the reports from the mobilization communicated to the teams based in the cities of Medellín and Bogotá.
- They will analyze situations as they occur en route and, together with the national coordination for the mobilization, they will decide how to respond.
- They will share spokesperson duties with the national coordination in communication with civilian and military authorities.

This team should name two spokespersons in charge of providing the bus coordinators with information relevant to protection. This team must be informed of all situations that might limit the activities of the Ruta.

Tools

- Folder with lists of travelers.
- Folder with communications sent and received by civilian, military authorities and communications expressing political support.
- Technical communication equipment (satellite/cellular/radio telephones, walkie-talkies).
- List of reports and of the national rapid response team.

Coordination of the first and last bus

The protection team must make sure that one of its members is on the first bus and another is on the last bus. The presence of the protection coordinators does not substitute for the presence of the bus coordinators.

These coordinators will ensure that no buses are left behind and that the caravan maintains a consistent rate of speed. These functions are in addition to the previously indicated responsibilities related to protection.

Regional and National Response Teams

- They will receive and monitor reports conducted by the protection team from the caravan, over the entire route. The reports are agreed upon prior to the departure of the mobilization and are adjusted according to the dynamics of the mobilization.
- They will respond to any situation that represents an obstacle to the mobilization. Such responses will be carried out in communication with civilian and military authorities; the international community; the diplomatic corps; and national and international human rights networks.
- In the event of a delayed report from one of the caravans, the offices of the transportation companies

will be contacted to inquire what was the last report received from the offices on the road and to clearly identify the cause of the delay.

Tools

- Lists of all women traveling with the caravan, including name and telephone number of a family member.
- List and copies of all communications with civilian and military authorities.
- List and copies of all communications sent and received by the diplomatic corps.
- List of communication media.

Levels of Communication and Decision Making

There are three levels of communication:

National coordinators, who are in charge of organizing political and logistical actions aimed at improving the ability to achieve the political objective of the mobilization.

Protection coordinators, who are in charge of securing the conditions that allow for the mobilization to go forward, reach its destination and overcome situations that present obstacles.

Bus coordinators, who are in charge of maintaining a respectful, calm and informed environment on the bus route.

Communication is conducted on these three levels. In the event of situations that go beyond the agreed-upon responsibilities or the abilities of a particular level, and/or in the event of unforeseen issues, one should turn to the coordination group that serves as support. For example, from bus coordinators to protection coordinators and/or from the latter to the national coordinators.

To illustrate the performance of the entire protection team on the ground, the following is a brief narrative of a situation experienced during the November 25, 2005 cross-regional mobilization:

A group of 250 women from the department of Antioquia were mobilized toward Quibdó, in the department of Chocó. On one of the sections of the trip, three drivers of three different vehicles traveling in the opposite direction announced that the road ahead was blocked because one of the armed groups that controls that territory had burned three vehicles transporting food supplies, completely closing off the road.

First response: The caravan was stopped and an initial meeting of the protection team was announced. The team evaluated the situation and decided:

- To continue with the mobilization until the incident on the road could be confirmed.
- The time of day was taken into account, since if the caravan were to return, we needed to be sure that it would be during daylight hours.
- The protection team met with the coordinator of the bus drivers and asked that the caravan be tightened, that the buses travel closer together than normal. The team asked representatives of Peace Brigades International to inform their teams about the situation in order to alert the response teams, since in the caravan's location the cell phones had no signal.
- The protection team met with coordinator "1's" so they in turn could process the information on the buses with coordinator "2's".
- The protection team established itself on the first bus and selected spokespersons in the event of a direct encounter with the armed fighter.
- If new information arose, the protection team would meet again and make needed decisions.

In effect, the caravan continued and in response to each new occurrence and information the protection team met and made decisions that were in turn processed with coordinators 1 and 2.

At the same time, the response team:

- Analyzed the situation.
- Drafted a communiqué.
- Took responsibility for informing supporting organizations of the situation so that they could activate their data bases of information and alliances, among other responses.

This is a general description of a concrete event which, although it is not described in detail, does show how agreements and protection teams are operationalized during a mobilization.