

KWD 100 Projects for Peace: “Displaced Art,” Baru Island, Columbia
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A “Project for Peace” designed and implemented by today’s youth is especially vital to Colombia, a nation not only considered part of the third world, but also one plagued by the evils of cocaine, kidnapping, narco-guerrillas, and terrorism. Because of these problems, Colombia presently has more displaced persons within its borders than any other nation in the world. Rebel guerrilla groups such as the FARC, ELN, EPL, and AUC, among others, terrorize and threaten the civilian population. They have forced more than 1.5 million Colombians to flee from their ancestral homes and native lands, leaving everything behind. This has initiated a vicious cycle of escalating crime; refugees without skills or education, and thus opportunities, are forced to disregard safety and morality in a desperate attempt to feed themselves. Refugees and displaced people have constituted more than 70% of the street crime occurring in the last decade in Bogota, Medellin, and Cali, the three biggest cities in Colombia. The government’s “Oficina para Desplazados” (Office for the Displaced) has relocated approximately 5,000 families in an attempt to mitigate the social effects of mass homelessness.

My peace initiative seeks to create permanent change by empowering the people. Allowing displaced persons to focus their efforts in this project will empower them and will ultimately lead to progress. I have already made contact with twenty widowed family heads through the secretary of the Office of the Displaced whose displaced families have already been relocated from the Cali streets in southern Colombia to government lands on Baru Island off the Colombian Caribbean coast. The twenty women, whose husbands have either died or abandoned them, constitute the economic heads of their families. These women have barely managed to survive by scavenging for material in the streets and making handbags to sell. This project will make use of the women’s already learned skills by creating a sustainable micro-enterprise out of their artisanship. All the women who have been contacted have two or more children to take care of. Most have been refugees for more than seven years, have no property, and live in extreme poverty, earning less than two dollars a day. My project will provide a sustainable, profitable, and honest opportunity to create a whole new lifestyle for twenty families.

With the pre-approved donation of \$15,000 USD from Tiling Corporation and Santodomingo Foundation we will set up a workshop equipped with all the necessary material to make the product. To clarify, this donation made by private individuals is contingent upon the receipt of a grant from “100 Projects for Peace.” The contacted corporations and foundations have expressed their trust in my leadership, and have offered their money without conditions and with no intention of participating in my execution of this project. Colombina S.A. and Riopaila S.A. have agreed to donate one metric ton of recycled plastic and paper every quarter for the first two years to the workshop. They have also agreed to ship the recycled material quarterly to Baru Island at no cost. The law firm Reyes has offered their expert advice and agreed to handle all the legal procedures necessary to create an established, recognized cooperative owned by the twenty women. Most importantly, Ecoist, a Florida-based eco-fashion accessories seller, has agreed to buy the women’s products for the first two years once the project is set up. This secures a well-paying market for the women’s crafted eco-friendly products. Ecoist’s owner has agreed to buy the products at a generous rate, to cover the shipping and exporting fees, and pay the taxes of the products made in Baru.

The first stage of the project, to be initiated in the summer of 2007, consists of physically organizing the micro-enterprise and establishing its legal status. The second stage will focus on buying and setting up the equipment to create the workshop. The cost of the necessary equipment and machinery is well within the proposed budget. Santodomingo Foundation has agreed to

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donate the land necessary for the construction of the workshop, which is essentially a gift of \$15,000 USD. The third crucial step in the project is to inspire in these women a sense of responsibility for and commitment to their enterprise. With the help of Colombina S.A. experts in teamwork and team building, we will seek to promote a sense of ownership and pride in the future they are earning for themselves. In the early stages of the project we will motivate the women to organize themselves by electing a project leader from amongst their ranks.

This visionary project will produce a long lasting impact on the much needed peace that Colombia strives for because:

- We are not simply buying short-term happiness by filling their stomachs or giving away goods. We are developing a sustainable project by assuring that the people will have work, capital, skill, and guaranteed revenue.
- We are empowering the people by providing them with the means to take charge of their own success while encouraging a sense of work towards a shared destiny. In this way we are creating generators of future change. If these women can achieve a certain degree of success, they will be likely to expand their endeavors and include others in their efforts, creating a positive cycle of change.
- This project will serve as a role model for other refugees, foundations, and governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- This project is credible, honest, and sustainable because there are a large number of powerful organizations involved. I do not intend to work alone. Instead, I seek to bring together the contribution of many foundations, companies, and individuals who share mutual trust. The advantage of this is a greater flow of ideas and the ability to ensure needed capital and expert legal collaboration.
- We expect this project to grow in terms of the number of people involved (especially targeting women family heads) and in the exportation of products; the end goal being the creation of a cooperative enterprise managed and owned completely by artisans.

By starting a project that will provide an honest living for twenty families we are creating an opportunity for some of the most devastated war-displaced people in today’s world to take control of their lives. Colombians suffer directly from the consequences of a brutal war that has raged without pause for more than forty years. The only way to improve the welfare of my nation is to empower those who have lost everything to secure themselves a decent and fulfilling existence. The pre-approvalⁱ given by all involved parties gives me faith that my desire to make a difference will be turned into action. With the help of “100 Projects for Peace” we will plant a seed of hope for the sake of humans facing a desperate future.

ⁱ I met with representatives of the various companies, foundations, and individuals mentioned above in December 2006, and all have given their word of commitment to collaborate on what is stated in the project “Displaced Art.” I want to clarify that business in Colombia is conducted differently than in the United States. The word of these groups is sufficient evidence for their solid commitment in the development of my project.