
Interview: Msgr. Héctor Julio López

‘Pastrana, a government on its knees before the FARC’

Msgr. Héctor Julio López is Apostolic Prefect of Ariari, Colombia. With the exception of San Vicente del Caguán, the other four townships which are in the “demilitarized zone” under FARC control—Mesetas, Serranía de la Macarena, Uribe, and Vista Hermosa—are part of the diocese of Monsignor López. The prefecture of Ariari includes, in all, 16 townships of the department of Meta, in which the double plague of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism mercilessly affect the population of the zone. The following are excerpts from an interview with Monsignor López conducted on May 14.

EIR: I would like to discuss with you some very polemical issues regarding the development of Colombia, and especially of this region.

Monsignor López: With pleasure. I am interested in speaking with you, because I understand that you have a great deal of experience, know of many interesting things about which you could tell us, to better understand the situation that is going on in our country.

EIR: Monsignor, knowing that for nearly 12 years you have had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over these territories, the demilitarized zone; what is your general evaluation of the zone and of the so-called “laboratory of peace” established by President Pastrana?

Monsignor López: As I have stated, we are going from *despeje al despojo* [demilitarization to plunder]. Because what the President did by conceding that territory to the FARC as a territory for détente, was nothing other than to legitimize what the FARC had already been doing for a long time, which is to seize control of the country, of that sector of the country, to impose its laws and rule as it pleases. It is not a power which promotes human dignity, which promotes work, as a government should foster public welfare. No, nothing useful is being promoted there. What they are manufacturing there are slaves, and imposing laws that simply favor the FARC’s interests.

EIR: Monsignor, are we to understand that the legitimate institutions of the state, which are the basis for, and guarantors

of a sovereign nation-state, could also be plundered?

Monsignor López: Yes, exactly. Not only is the FARC seizing power and territory, and leaving the people with practically nothing, but they have already taken all authority unto themselves. They make all the laws, impose all kinds of taxes. It is a usurpation of all territory, geographically as well as politically and socially.

EIR: How would you characterize the actions of President Andrés Pastrana?

Monsignor López: As I have already said many times, his actions are very disconcerting to me. On the one hand, I think he has been a weak ruler. A ruler, I would have to say somewhat harshly, on his knees before the FARC, who has granted to the FARC what they have asked. And he has demanded nothing in return. And so, he has been giving away, and giving away. I don’t recognize the Pastrana I saw during the campaign.

But, on the other hand, in seeing this, as so easy, which, does not fit with his manner nor that of his forefathers, I can only hope that he has ceded the maximum, to be able to later demand the maximum. And at times I imagine that he may have a hidden card that he is going to pull out at the right moment. What it is, where it is going, is practically impossible to guess. But, I have this hope and truly want to keep it alive.

EIR: Because of your responsibilities, you have heard the testimony of people from the area under your jurisdiction. What kind of excesses are the FARC committing?

Monsignor López: Well, there are many. First, on the economic side, they impose what we call “ticketing,” and what they call “war taxes.” That is, they demand money from people for everything—for owning a home, for having cattle, for cultivating the land, because they made a profit on some sale. For everything, people have to pay. Furthermore, the FARC has the custom of asking, from time to time, that a bazaar be held, to collect “X” amount of money. They shut down all the businesses in the area; one can only buy what one needs or wants in the place where the bazaar is, whose profits are for the FARC. Or, they impose raffles, and then

a community group or a neighborhood has to collect 500,000 or 700,000 pesos, and they sell raffles or whatever, but they collect the money. Those who take their products to market, have to pay to be able to take them there. Those who have a car to transport their products, have to pay for that privilege. And thus, they are economically impoverishing the people, pitilessly.

Then, there is the question of the family. They passed a law that there, in the demilitarized territory, after they had given an opportunity for those who didn't want to stay to leave the territory, the rest, by virtue of having decided to stay, had to belong to the guerrilla group in some fashion, becoming fighters, sympathizers, or informants. And, belonging to them meant that their children, from 13 years of age onward, had to go join the ranks of the FARC. Then, they destroy the family, terrorizing people so, that they have to leave their land with everything they have, to be able to save their children. And there is an even worse rupture, which is for the parents to know that their child is with the guerrillas, killing, abusing in a thousand ways, and that their child is there and that they will never be able to rescue him or her.

Also, socially, there is a serious problem, which is the order the guerrillas give from time to time, according to which the entire population, men and women alike, from 13 to 60 years of age, have to present themselves for so many days, three or four days, to train, under the argument that they have to learn to kill soldiers when they see them, because otherwise they will supposedly have to suffer the persecution and excesses of the army. Now, on the political side, no one is free to choose their party or their ideology, all have to accept the Communist ideology, like it or not. . . .

EIR: Have the terrorist attacks affected the pastoral work in your diocese?

Monsignor López: At no point, have they even put limitations on pastoral efforts. There was at one point an attempt to limit the pastoral efforts of lay workers. Then there were dialogues, and at least for now, they allow us to work freely; but, one must always ask permission, or advise them when a catechist is going somewhere and what they are going to do. There are obstacles in one sense, and in another, not. They have always respected the work of the Church; for better or worse, they accept it out of religiosity, which they retain—after all, they are children of Colombia. And, they want the priests to baptize their children, for the bishop to confirm them when he goes there. . . .

EIR: In these times, we could compare the narc-FARC with a faction of that same international oligarchy. What do you think about this?

Monsignor López: Well, the FARC has some of each. I think, on the one hand, it is a terrorist group, and on the

other, it is a financial group, because they are powerful. This information unfortunately is almost never published, but it has on occasion been proven that the FARC is the second or third most powerful group in Colombia, economically speaking. This information is not always published, because I think that there is still a great deal of fear of confronting the guerrillas, but this is a reality. The amount of money they handle is awesome, because they have two very large sources, which are: kidnapping and the drug trade. Their economic power is overwhelming, it is to be feared.

It is perhaps some consolation that they haven't sufficient people, because they have lost many, and their ranks are filled with children and with people naturally unprepared in every sense. This is what can lose them much of this attempt to govern, to be imperialists. . . .

EIR: Monsignor, with respect to President Pastrana, who you describe as on his knees to the FARC, what would your message to him be?

Monsignor López: I would tell the President to look at all the Colombians who are hungry; at all the Colombians who do not cease to cry for a loved one that has been kidnapped; at all the Colombians who suffer orphanhood or widowhood because of all the violence. That he look at a country with so many unexploited possibilities, and realize that in continuing to yield to violent people, to continue in this way, as if he has no plan, is extremely discouraging, disconcerting, and people no longer have the strength to react. Before people become fatally anemic, please either take out that card which it seems he has hidden away, or decide to lead a movement of unity of all Colombians against these forces of evil. If you, Mr. President, decide to make of Colombia a united people, I am sure that many, very many, will follow you. First will be the Church, because, as we have discussed here, unity is the great principle and mandate of the Lord. We need leaders, and you, who call yourself a believer and have been elected President by a Catholic people, you who understand well what the force of the Church is, must take advantage of that opportunity.

EIR: Monsignor, aren't you afraid, because of the statements you have made, for your security, of the possibility of a kidnapping, or even an attempt on your life, given that the FARC could take some kind of reprisal due to the international dissemination of your views?

Monsignor López: I must confess that, naturally, I have this fear. I am not made of stone. Yes, I am afraid. But I believe that even more horrible, more shameful than fear, is to remain silent. I was more afraid before, of being silenced. I hear so much from the people! I am practically the voice of those who have no voice. There is no one else. If there were someone else, it were better if he spoke; fine, let him do it. But, I realize that there is no one else. So, I have to be the one who speaks.