

BIBLE-BASED ADVOCACY TO RESTORE PEACE AND HOPE



BUILDING NETWORKS AND ADVOCACY MOVEMENTS IN PERU

Our partnership helped establish one of South America's first Christian human rights groups, supporting it to play a lead role in mobilising the church to end conflict in Peru.

Between 1980 and 2000, the Peruvian people were caught in the crossfire between government forces and rebel groups such as Shining Path. An estimated 70,000 Peruvians, mostly indigenous people, were killed and 1.5 million displaced. While human rights abuses were committed on both sides, thousands of people were imprisoned to cover up crimes committed by the government.

In response, the National Evangelical Council of Peru (CONEP) formed a truth commission, Paz y Esperanza ('Peace and Hope'), to promote justice and peace. Run by Christian legal graduates, the group investigated war crimes and provided legal defence for those falsely imprisoned.

They also worked with local church leaders to educate communities about their rights. They were passionate about combining legal practice with Christian values – but had little experience and no precedents to follow.

Tearfund had been working in Peru since 1980 and already had a relationship with CONEP. Tearfund was Paz y Esperanza's first external funder and played a key role in building its organisational capacity. As Alfonso Wieland, founder member of Paz y Esperanza, says: 'Tearfund was the first organisation to believe in our work. This was very significant and through Tearfund we went on to make other contacts.'



Peruvian lady taking part in women's empowerment workshop. Photo: Lydia Powell/Tearfund

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This was a bold move and a defining moment for Tearfund: the language of human rights was new and the idea of the church becoming socially and politically engaged was controversial, within both the Peruvian church and our own supporter base. Paz y Esperanza still struggles to convince some sectors of the church of the need to engage in advocacy, even today. But other churches now see this as part of their Christian calling and, with training and support from Paz y Esperanza and Tearfund, many churches are now bringing hope and justice in their communities.

We were keen to develop a theology of advocacy and worked closely with Paz y Esperanza to that end. The advocacy toolkits that arose from these discussions encouraged practices such as praying about cases before taking them on and rebuilding relationships by modelling peaceful behaviour.

To promote mutual learning, we took Paz y Esperanza to Africa, to witness advocacy work there, and involved them in advocacy training for other American partners.

We also connected them with the UK church: our supporters wrote thousands of letters to the UK embassy and the Peruvian government calling for fair trials, and to political prisoners such as Juan Mallea. His subsequent acquittal became so high-profile that Paz y Esperanza set a precedent for releasing other prisoners.

With Tearfund's support, Paz y Esperanza lobbied for a commission to review prisoners' sentences, which led to the release of more than 1,000 people. They also advocated for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which led to President Alberto Fujimori being convicted of crimes against humanity and prompted institutional reform to avert further conflict. Paz y Esperanza has won international recognition and respect for its work in helping bring the conflict to an end.

With Tearfund's support, their human rights advocacy work has expanded to include a range of issues, such as child protection, women's rights and indigenous rights. As a result, Peru now has more laws and practices in place to protect vulnerable people.

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Registered Charity No. 265464 (England & Wales)
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