



Una red de personas  
construyendo paz

# COLOMBIA-VENEZUELA CITIZEN BRIDGES (PCCV)

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Citizen diplomacy is a civil-society led effort and initiative that seeks to build capacity for prevention and shared action in the context of various dire circumstances: the external effects of internal crises in countries facing acute political polarization, humanitarian emergencies and/or armed conflict; increased tension between governments or states; and cross-border dynamics that can escalate conflicts carrying a high cost and impact on local, border, national or regional governance and peace. It is, therefore, an initiative designed to create actions to gain better understanding of these crises, strengthen positive links between the affected people and sectors, articulate networks to act both directly, exercising a form of deliberative and participatory democracy, and advocating through those who can cope with the growing complexity of these conflicts, whether social sectors, political and/or economic actors, local or national governments, regional or global multilateral spheres.

PCCV (Puentes Ciudadanos) has been trying to engage in citizen diplomacy since its creation, initially as a binational effort proposed during the GPPAC LAC Regional

Steering Group meeting, and supported by the participants of the IV Regional Responses Workshop co-organized by the Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES, by its Spanish acronym) and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, in partnership with Instituto Pensar, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the Jesuit Refugee Service Colombia, events that took place in April 2019 in Cúcuta, Colombia. In September 2019, PCCV began a process of institutionalization through a manifesto launching a Colombian-Venezuelan citizen convergence initiative. This declaration was signed by more than one hundred scholars, members of social, humanitarian, trade union, and business organizations, networks, and cultural collectives from both sides of the border and from the national capitals amid the suspension of diplomatic relations between both countries and of the entire institutional framework for the management of a jam-packed binational agenda and a complex shared border, all in the face of an increasingly intricate humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

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PCCV has been built on the basis of mutual rapprochement, knowledge and recognition among many of the signatories of that initial manifesto and many other sectors with which we have held around a dozen meetings in this first year of joint work. In approximately twenty dialogue fora, PCCV has sought to advance citizen diplomacy centered around five pillars: a negotiated and democratic solution to the crises in Venezuela by the citizens of that country themselves; peacebuilding in Colombia; the granting of a voice to and articulation of diverse sectors and authorities on both sides of the border; the defense of the rights of migrants and returnees in the midst of a complex humanitarian crisis; and the reconstruction of the consular system and the binational relationship.

In November 2019, in Bogotá, PCCV brought together various sectors from both countries to analyze problems in each of them and at their common border. In January 2020, in Cúcuta, PCCV reviewed with mayors and elected governors from the Colombian side the situation at each border area and how to include the topic of the forced exodus from Venezuela in local development plans. In February, it held meetings in Bogotá with the Second Commission of the Senate and House of Representatives responsible for foreign policy and with the President of Congress, in order to examine the situation at the border and the actions of the Colombian government with respect to Venezuela and the exodus from that country. Also, on February 29, in Bogotá, PCCV organized together with Fundimusicol a concert of the Binational Youth Symphony Orchestra called "Colombia-Venezuela, more than a conflict". Subsequently, it has collaborated in a fundraising campaign to sustain the Orchestra and purchase musical instruments for many of the young Venezuelans participating in it.

Since March, in the midst of the lockdown, in addition to internal meetings, PCCV has hosted or participated in a series of virtual

dialogues with indigenous people, community leaders, social organizations, communication networks, chambers of commerce, and universities from the Guajira, Perijá, Andean, Llanos and Orinoquia regions, as well as from the interior of Colombia and Venezuela. In these conversations, the impacts of the pandemic and the difficulties of dealing together with this high-risk situation were analyzed. Some of these meetings included Venezuelan and Colombian returnees as well as members of universities, the Church and social organizations dedicated to monitoring the migration problem, especially in Bogotá, Cúcuta and the Caribbean, which are the epicenter of the exodus.

In order to analyze how the closing of bridges and official crossings ordered from Caracas and Bogotá worsened the border situation, PCCV has hosted and/or participated in meetings with economic unions and chambers of commerce of the border area and of each country, as well as with the government of the state of Táchira and the Northern Department of Santander. With them, it has examined the need to resume commercial and economic activities to deal with the crisis at the border, which requires opening the legal border crossings.

In many cases, the dialogues were combined with other university events, the World Refugee Day, the presentation by Fundación Pares of its studies on border security; or with programs of the Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES), El Espectador, Semana, the Fredrich Ebert Foundation, the Colombian-Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce, the United States Institute of Peace, the Institute for Integrated Transitions, as well as entities from European Union countries that support humanitarian management. It has also interacted with organizations such as UNHCR and Human Rights organizations to better understand the problem of forced migration.



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To this day, PCCV continues to strengthen cooperation and coordination ties among various sectors of both countries, as well as the capacity of advocacy and articulation between the groups promoting the initiative. PCCV, together with social and humanitarian organizations, governments and chambers of commerce, is trying to advocate so that decisions are made and long-overdue actions are taken to immediately address emergency situations at the border, such as the humanitarian crisis caused by the pandemic, the migratory crisis that calls for the reestablishment of consular operations and the economic crisis that requires the reactivation of trade.

