August 2014

Your Holiness, Pope Francis,

Gun violence is hindering the development of many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. This region, which you know very well having been born and lived here and shared some of that pain, is the most violent in the world.

The proliferation of guns and bullets, the lack of regulation, the tendency to use weapons whether defensively or aggressively to resolve conflict and even in the attempt to prevent it – all this has resulted in our countries being the scene of 40% of the world’s murders.

Since 2005, a group of organizations in the Latin American Coalition for the Prevention of Armed Violence (CLAVE) and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) have been working to implement policies to stop this violence.

The presence of guns and bullets threatens our health systems, our safety, education, peaceful coexistence, and at times even governance in our region.

Cases like Colombia, where there is an active armed conflict, create a constant risk of contagion across the region.

In other countries, the weapons have become "tools", replacing dignified employment to become the vector of an epidemic of violence with no cure in sight.

Luckily, we can also mention countries like Brazil and Argentina, where gun control and disarmament policies have borne fruit – reducing deaths, injuries and associated trauma for victims, families and communities.

For these reasons we have come to see you, because we recognize synergies in our work: you are an activist for peace and peaceful coexistence. Like us, you know this is not a utopian or romantic goal, but that it requires very deliberate actions.

Dozens of priests and nuns, out of personal motivation and as a pastoral mission, share our aim of reducing the arsenal in Latin America, the Caribbean and the world; removing from town after town these weapons manufactured to kill and injure and whose lethality knows no equal.
We would like to join you and ask you to join us. We ask you to speak out for regulation of guns and ammunition and to support the many organizations and survivors working for disarmament in every corner of the world. To speak also against legal impunity for murder and for military and police forces to respect human rights.

Your Holiness, Pope Francis: We are grateful for your support and we assure you of ours. We urge you not to cease working for the resolution of conflict, whether within families or communities, at national or global level.

We recognise you as a leader who can accompany and support processes for disarmament, gun control and the search for pathways to peace in the different situations we are suffering in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

At a time when massacres are happening around the world, we join you in continually calling for a ceasefire everywhere where weapons are devastating the lives of thousands of people daily.

Thank you very much