

# *Settling an old debt with Afro-Colombian communities*

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**The decrees carry with them the idea of freedom, justice and peace.**

By María Josefina Arce

In 1993, Law 70 was sanctioned in Colombia, the result of the struggle for their rights by the Afro-Colombian communities, historically subjected to discrimination. It was a victory for this important part of society, but 30 years later it has still not been fully implemented.

It was a pending issue of the various administrations with the Afro-Colombians. For example, although in 2021 the Administrative Court of Cauca ordered the government, then presided over by Iván Duque, that in a term of six months it should regulate several articles of the law, everything remained there.

Duque did not comply with the black communities. His promises to implement the law in its entirety were left up in the air, as important chapters were left pending.

Issues related to land use and protection of natural resources and the environment, mining resources, as well as the economic and social development of this segment of the population, victim of great inequalities, were not regulated.

In fact, poverty affects 37% of Afro-Colombians, a figure 10 percentage points above the national average. And if the unemployment rate is high among men, among women it is almost 22%.

Moreover, their access to health and education is limited. They even represent only 5.2% of the citizens linked to professional and technical activities.

Now Petro, committed to change in the country, has come to do justice and make possible the full implementation of this legislation. To this end, he has signed two decrees in the last few days.

The purpose of the documents is to regulate chapters IV and V, to adopt special mechanisms for the promotion and development of mining activities in the collective territories of the black communities for their benefit and always with responsibility to take care of the environment, an aspect in which they will be accompanied by the authorities.

The mining rights of Afro-Colombians are also recognized in order to delimit mining zones of this sector of Colombian society.

After the signing of the decrees, Vice President Francia Márquez assured that the implementation of Law 70 will contribute to total peace in Colombia.

Petro's government has settled a historical debt by advancing in the implementation of an important law that 30 years after its sanction was still waiting to be fully regulated.

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