



## **Young People and High School Students Advocate for Respect for Life and Nature at COP16**

*300 student delegates from high schools across Cali worked with Scholas' methodology to share their main concerns and struggles. Organized by the Mayor's Office of Cali, the Secretariat of Education, CAF - the development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean - and the Pontifical Scholas Occurrentes movement, during the experience the young people connected the abuse they suffer themselves with the abuse suffered by nature. This alliance has enabled the development of the project Laudato Si: Reconciliation with Nature, which empowers youth through art and sports and promotes reconciliation among citizens,*

institutions, and the environment. **Cali, October 28, 2024** – Today, at 8:00 a.m., in the main auditorium of the COP16 on Biodiversity, over 300 young people from Scholas Colombia presented their proposals to combat the abuse and violence they suffer and the destruction of the natural environment. Mayor Alejandro Eder and his wife, Taliana Vargas, spoke with the young people, as did CAF President Sergio Granados and Scholas President José María del Corral. This project, which will run until March 2025, aims to strengthen the role of youth through innovative educational methodologies based on art and sports. Throughout this first phase, the young people have worked on identifying key issues for their community, generating at least 15 proposals aimed at concrete solutions.

**'Cutting from the Root': Proposals for a Better Future** During their presentation, the young people introduced the project called "Cutting from the Root," whose motto is "Do not destroy the future." This work focuses on raising awareness about violence and abuse toward both nature and children and youth. The specific objectives of the project include:

1. Taking action to protect the future of children and young people
2. Raising awareness of the issues facing nature
3. Raising awareness about violence affecting children
4. Creating new educational spaces, complementary to school, where this methodology can continue to be implemented through art and sports.

The proposals were the result of a reflection process in which the young people identified two major challenges: abuse and violence toward children and youth, and abuse toward the environment. In the environmental area, topics addressed included forest fires in Buitrera, Cristo Rey, and Los Andes; pollution in the rivers of Cali; and the lack of awareness about solid waste management in the city.

**Commitment of the Authorities and a Future of Transformation** During the presentation, Alejandro Eder took the first step by signing an agreement with the Scholas Occurrentes

movement to jointly implement the proposed solutions. This agreement strengthens the alliance between Scholas and the Mayor's Office of Cali, establishing a joint roadmap to continue developing and promoting the well-being of youth and environmental protection.

With the presentation of the proposals at the COP16 on Biodiversity, the goal is to secure the commitment of local authorities to implement the proposed solutions, fostering a transformation that allows for building a future more respectful of life and nature. Scholas thus takes another step in Colombia, where it planted the olive tree for peace for the first time in November 2013 and has developed awareness and citizenship programs in Barranquilla, Medellín, Turbo, San Rafael, and now Cali, reaching 45,000 students and 10 editions of the citizenship program. José María del Corral, global president of Scholas: "You had the courage to open your hearts, to express what you were feeling. I saw it. You had the courage to get to know each other. We are also polluted inside; we fill ourselves with things that harm us. With fears, with the thought that we need to be different."