

# **An Open Letter on the situation in Colombia: Talk of peace but lack of safeguards for the activities of the social organizations or human rights defenders**

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## **An Open Letter - Threats in Colombia: Serious Concern regarding lack of guarantees**

To the President of Colombia

To the Governments of the European Union, the countries of Europe, and the United States

To Public Opinion

October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Subject: Threats in Colombia: Serious Concern regarding lack of guarantees

The government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC guerrilla movement recently announced that they had reached an agreement on the topic of Justice, one of the subject under discussion in their ongoing talks in Havana. This is an important step, allowing us to look forward with optimism to the possible signature of an agreement that will bring to an end the armed conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerillas after more than 60 years of war, we believe that this is a possibility that must not be lost. Furthermore, we hope that talks, leading to an eventual agreement, will soon be started with the ELN guerrilla movement.

At the same time, we see with grave concern that, although there is talk of peace, there are no safeguards for the activities of the social organisations that are working to defend social rights and to oppose an economic model that is deepening inequality and that violates fundamental rights. We observe that human rights defenders, leaders of social movements, parties of the Left, people who are trying to recover their land, and independent journalists continue to be the victims of threats, acts of harassment, attacks and assassinations that are perpetrated by paramilitary groups such as the Urabeños, the Rastrojos, Aguilas Negras or Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, and others.

As was noted in the latest report on attacks against human rights defenders from Front Line Defenders, in 2014 Colombia was the country where there were the most assassinations of human rights defenders, with a total of 42 victims. The "We are Defenders" programme has signalled the fact that in the first 6 months of 2015 alone 399 acts of aggression were committed against human rights defenders and leaders of social movements; 34 human rights defenders were assassinated.

We particularly want to draw attention to the following recent incidents:

On October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a threat signed by the paramilitary group Águilas Negras was sent to 8 people and 3 organisations. We want to stress the targetting of Eberto Díaz, member of Fensuagro and a leader of La Via Campesina International, and of several leaders and spokespeople of the Agrarian,

Peasant, Ethnic, and Popular Summit, as well as of representatives of the trade union movement and social organisations, and independent journalists – including: Javier Betancourt, Andrés Gil, Carlos Ancízar Rico, Guevara Robert Daza, Jaime Cortez Suarez, la Guardia indígena, Prensa Rural, Julio Roberto Gómez, Jesús Elkin Rodríguez Moya and the CGT (General Confederation of Labour).

This is not a question of an isolated incident. At the end of September, a pamphlet was circulated bearing the signature of “the capital bloc of the águilas negras”. The pamphlet contained threats against recognised communications media, but its main message concerned more than 100 members of social and human rights organisations, members of the office of the Mayor of Bogotá, and other people connected with local peace processes – all of whom were declared to be military targets.

To the foregoing must be added: assassinations, disappearances, and threats against social movement leaders in different regions of the country. These incidents raise the question as to whether the limited security measures offered by the government are sufficient or effective. Conversely, the incidents are evidence of the absence of safeguards for the essential work of human rights advocacy.

This situation confirms the existence of important anti-peace forces which want to maintain a state of permanent conflict, in order to further their own interests. If these criminal groups, whether they be called paramilitaries or “bacrim” (criminal bands), are not disbanded and brought before the law – together with those members of the public security forces who maintain ties with them — we are certain that they will become the seed from which renewed conflict will grow.

Only a Peace with guarantees of respect for human rights, and real guarantees for the work of social organisations in the defence of human rights, is a Peace with prospects of lasting. It is imperative that the Colombian State take decisive action and that it disband the paramilitary groups.

In addition, the international community of friends of the Colombian peace process: Governments, representatives of civil society, churches, and international organisations, must state firmly and clearly their opposition to the actions of these groups and their support for the legitimate and democratic activities of the different political forces and social movements. We invite the European Union, in accordance with its own commitment to human rights, to observe and accompany the work of human rights defenders in Colombia.

#### *Signing Organisations:*

Alianza por la Justicia Global

All Nepal Peasants’ Federation

Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition

Asociacion Sindical de Trabajadores Bananeros Agricolas y Campesinos

Attac

Canadian Community Economic Development Network

Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos “Segundo Montes Mozo S.J.”

Centro Internazionale Crocevia

Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores/as de las Americas

Confédération Paysanne

Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias

Convergence globale des luttes de la Terre et Eau Ouest Africaine

Convergence malienne contre les accaparements de terres

Ecologistas en Accion

Farmworker Association of Florida

FOS Andes

Fundacion Mundubat

Global Forest Coalition

GRAIN

Grupo Sur

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

La Vía Campesina

México vía Berlin

Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les peuples

Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo

Réseau Maghrébin d'Associations de Développement Local en milieu Rural

Sindicato Galego Labrego

SOA Watch Austin

SOLdePaz-Pachakuti

Solidaridad Suecia - America Latina

Transnational Institute

Union Paysanne

Uniterre

World Forum of Fisher Peoples

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