

March 2, 2015

Mr. Diego Fernando Mora Arango
Director
National Protection Unit
Ministry of the Interior
Bogota, Colombia

Dear Mr. Mora Arango,

On behalf of the signatories below, which include human rights groups, faith-based organizations, academics and trade unions, we wish to dialogue with you on the grave security situation facing human rights defenders, journalists, Afro-Colombian and indigenous activists, religious and labor leaders in your country. The National Protection Unit plays a critical role in protecting human rights defenders in Colombia, and it is essential to overcome the challenges facing the institution and improve its protective coverage. First, we wish to strongly condemn the on-going murders of, attacks and threats against human rights defenders and activists. According to the February 2015 report by *Somos Defensores*, fifty-five human rights defenders were killed in 2014 and suffered 626 aggressions including 488 death threats. Human rights defenders have survived assassination attempts, were intimidated, harassed and the targets of illegal followings. Media reports also indicate that at least 13 of the victims who visited Havana as part of the peace talks have received death threats.

Such attacks continue unabated in 2015. The murder of Carlos Alberto Pedraza Salcedo, whose lifeless body was found on January 21 in Cundinamarca, was particularly disturbing. Mr. Pedraza was a key leader of the Congreso de los Pueblos, Cumbre Agraria and the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE). He played a central role in advocating for justice and remembrance in police brutality cases. He was killed by a shot to the head.

In late October 2014, a group of U.S. human rights advocates met with your predecessor Andres Villamizar, where we discussed the UNP's budget shortfall issues, the corruption scandal, protests by bodyguards of violation of their labor rights and large number of reports by recipients who were experiencing difficulties with the provision of measures. Sadly, we continue to receive information from our partners of serious problems concerning their measures that have yet to be resolved. This is problematic given that death threats against human rights defenders, victims and peace process supporters, labor activists and Afro-Colombians have increased since the middle of last year. In many cases, those targeted are directly and indirectly crucial to the success of Colombia's peace process so attacks against them undermine the pursuit of peace.

We respectfully urge you to take the following actions:

1) Participate proactively in the Roundtable on Guarantees for Human Rights Defenders and implement the agreements that emerge from that mechanism of dialogue between the Colombian government and Colombia's human rights defenders and implement relevant agreements. Regular, periodic meetings of the roundtable with your presence and other high-level presence from the Attorney General's office, the Presidential Advisor for Human Rights, the Ombudsman's office, the Inspector General's office, and other relevant agencies is essential to improve protection.

2) Publicly condemn all killings, attacks and threats against human rights defenders, journalists, peace, religious, land, ethnic minority, religious, and labor activists, starting with Carlos Pedraza so as to send clear and consistent messages to perpetrators that such acts will not be tolerated by the Government of Colombia. Immediately act to address the protection shortfalls and problems with measures affecting our partners (see list in addendum). We respectfully ask you to convene meetings with these recipients as soon as possible. Please let us know what advancements will take place regarding these cases since we will be monitoring them closely.

3) End the UNP's practice of sub-contracting bodyguards and protection services, as the Roundtable on Guarantees recommended and the previous UNP director agreed to implement. By doing this, the UNP can reduce costs, prevent corruption and improve the labor rights of protection program personnel. This will help the protection program more effective and accountable. Of course, when changing labor contracts it is important that this be done in consultation and agreement with the labor unions concerned.

4) Develop specialized groups of bodyguards who are trained to protect trade unionists, Afro-Colombians, and women. More ethnic minorities should be hired to serve in areas where those populations are the majority. Again, such initiatives should be consulted with the groups concerned.

5) Guarantee that proper anti-corruption measures and filters are put in place at the UNP.

6) Advance and implement the decree required for Colombian institutions to provide collective measures for Afro-Colombians and other vulnerable groups as soon as possible in full and continual consultation with the groups to be protected.

7) Use your good offices to encourage the Attorney General's office to advance on investigation of attacks against human rights defenders, including the threats that are never properly investigated. While this is not under your area of responsibility, you can

play an important role in encouraging other agencies to carry out their duties for a holistic approach to protection.

We look forward to your response. We would be honored to meet with you on your next trip to Washington, DC.

Sincerely,

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Solidarity Center

Oxfam

Latin America Working Group (LAWG)

Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights

Healing Bridges

Colombia Land Rights Monitor

Center for International Policy (CIP)

Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)

AFL-CIO

AFRODES INTERNATIONAL

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Fernando Cristo, Ministerio del Interior

Luis Carlos Villegas, Colombia Ambassador to the U.S.

Appendix of Human Rights and Labor Security Situations Requiring Intervention:

Defensores de Derechos Humanos

Acción Comunal del Porvenir en Puerto Gaitán in particular Miguel Briceño

Asociacion de Consejos Comunitarios del Norte del Cauca (ACONC)

Association de Comunidades Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACIN)

Association Nacional para Afro-Colombianos Desplazados (AFRODES) in particular, Erlendy Cuero Bravo, Bernardo Cuero and Marino Cordoba and the collective protection measures for over 140 leaders.

Caribe Afirmativo

Colectivo Jose Alvear Restrepo (CCAJAR)

Colombia Europa-Estados Unidos in particular Alberto Yepes

Comité en Solidaridad con Presos Políticos (FCSP) in particular Rommel Duran, Jose Humberto Torres, Franklin Castañeda, Leonardo Jaimes, Agustin Jimenez (ahora con la oficina de Senador Cepeda) and Gloria Silva

Consejo Comunitario Cerro Teta in particular Jose Nifer Diaz Mina

Consejo Comunitario de La Toma (Cauca) in particular Lisyfrei Ararat, Francia Elena Marquez Mina, Eduar Mina Lopez and Erley Ibarra

Consejo Comunitario Nueva Esperanza del Hoyo (Patía) in particular Jairo Contreras

Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Opoca (COCOMOPOCA)

Consejo Regional Indigena del Cauca (CRIC)

Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (CIJP) in particular Danilo Rueda

Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y Desplazamiento Forzado (CODHES) in particular Marco Romero

Credhos

DH Colombia in particular Jorge Molano

Espacio Humanitario de la Playita (Buenaventura)

Luis Ernesto Olave Valencia

Minga Conferencia National Afro-Colombiana CNOA Cauca and Unidad de Organizaciones Afrocaucanas (UOAFROC)

Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (MOVICE) in particular MOVICE Valle (Martha Giraldo Villano and Jose Milciades Sanchez Ortiz); Liliana Peña (Magdalena Medio); Diana Montilla (Nariño); MOVICE Atlántico (Maria Cedeño Sarmiento, Nevys Niño, Marta Diaz, Nicolas Castro, Rosario Montoya, Juan Martinez); MOVICE Sucre (Andres Narváez, Gustavo Arrieta, Franklin Manuel Torres, Ingrid Vergara); MOVICE Caldas (Jose Jair Valencia Agudelo, Marco Antonio Rico Restrepo, Cristian Camilo Patino Velásquez, Luz Elena Cano Perez), and Blanca Nubia Diaz and her family (Bogota/Riohacha).

NOMADESC

Organización Afrodescendiente “Centro de Autoreconocimiento Afrocolombiano” (CENAFRO)

Organización Nacional Indígena (ONIC)

Rostros y Huellas (Buenaventura) in particular Benildo Estupiñan Solis

Zonas Humanitarias de Jiguamiandó y Curvaradó (Chocó)

Defensores de Derechos Laborales

Asociación de Trabajadores Enfermos de Drummond Puerto (ASOTREDP) in particular Anibal Perez

Consejo Nacional Afro-Colombiano (CLAF) in particular Agripina Hurtado

SINALTRAINAL

Sindicato de Trabajadores de las Empresas Municipales de Cali (SINTRAEMCALI)

SINTRAINAGRO in particular Jhonsson Torres, Mauricio Ramoz Garcia, Alfonso Viafara and Oscar Delgado, Guillermo Rivera Zapata and Medardo Cuesta

Union Obrera (USO)

Union Portuaria

Union Sindical Emcali (USE) in particular Harold Viafra, Ricardo Montoya, James Agudelo and Luis Lozano

Others:

Claudia Julieta Duque

Congressman Ivan Cepeda and his aide Ana Jimena Bautista

Hollman Morris and Canal Capital staff

Jorge Rojas

Piedad Cordoba

Presbyterian Church

Guarantee integral protection for all of the victims representatives, LGBT activists and gender sub-commission experts who have and will travel to Havana, Cuba in support of the peace talks.