



Dear all,

Below we share with you the security and human rights cases that WOLA has received from May 31 until July 31, 2023.

These cases shed light on various human rights abuses and the dire security situation many face in Colombia. This information serves as evidence that the U.S. Congress needs to fund foreign aid to Colombia that supports policies for comprehensive peacebuilding. [We](#) strongly urge U.S. policymakers to continue their support for peace in the country and to [acknowledge](#) the promising developments in the peace negotiations with the ELN.

We remain extremely concerned about the safety and security of *La Nueva Prensa* journalists, lawyers, and staff who are the targets of trumped-up charges. We encourage U.S. policymakers to collaborate with Colombian authorities, urging them to implement effective protection measures and to halt the ongoing judicial attacks.

***Teacher and Community Leader Disappeared (Cauca)***

The Cauca Association of Educational Instructors and Workers (*Asociación de Institutores y Trabajadores de la Educación del Cauca*, ASOINCA) [reported](#) that on May 31, Jairo Enrique Tombe and his wife Leonora Gonzalez disappeared. Tombe is a community leader, teacher, and member of their organization. ASOINCA, along with the Union of Education Workers, and the educational community in Cauca ask that anyone with information about Tombe and his wife's whereabouts promptly contact the authorities.

***Afrodescendant Official Falsely Discredited (Cauca)***

On June 7, the regional body of the Black Communities Process (*Procesos de Comunidades Negras*, PCN) in Palenke Alto Cauca, [expressed](#) their support for President Petro and Vice President Márquez social justice and equity policies. They offer full support to Víctor Hugo Moreno Mina, the Director of Affairs for Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero Communities. Mina has recently come under attack from individuals attempting to tarnish his reputation and question his contributions to the Black communities movement. PCN strongly condemns these attacks and calls out the right-wing factions within the government that are fueling such baseless accusations.

### ***Kidnappings Surge This Year***

On June 8, *Asuntos Legales* shared information from the Ministry of Defense and Police. The [report](#) revealed a staggering 126% increase in kidnapping cases in 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. Between January and April 2023, there were 89 registered cases, in 2022 during this same period the total was 34. The deteriorated security situation has led to alarming kidnapping rates that are concerning given Petro's plans for Total Peace. Despite the continued negotiation with the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN), the article points out the significant rise in kidnappings and massacre rates in Colombia. On the positive side, sexual crimes have decreased the most, and there was a slight drop in intentional homicide cases.

### ***Special Jurisdiction for Peace Magistrate Threatened***

On June 9, *W Radio* [reported](#) that the National Protection Unit (*Unidad Nacional de Protección*, UNP) was investigating a potential incident where a bullet struck the vehicle of the security scheme assigned to Hugo Escobar, a Magistrate of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*, JEP). This incident followed earlier death threats against Escobar who is investigating false positive cases in Dabeiba. The security breach occurred after Escobar had previously received threats the month before.

### ***Forced Recruitment Risks for Youth (Chocó)***

*Revista Chocó* [reported](#) on June 13 an early warning from the Ombudsman's Office raising concerns about the imminent risk of forced recruitment of children and adolescents by armed groups in the municipality of Río Iró. Confrontations between the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*, AGC) and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) are named in the report. The warning, delivered to the Ministry of the Interior, was issued after monitoring the situation and recommending to the National Government to implement actions to prevent recruitment. In the last weeks, the ELN intensified the recruitment and illicit use of minors in the townships of Río Iró. The early warning report also includes incursions by the AGC into territories where the ELN exercises territorial control, which could lead to increased armed confrontations.

***Human Rights Platforms Commend Ceasefire (Cundinamarca)***

The Colombia-United States-Europe Coordination [issued](#) a joint statement on June 13, addressed to President Petro, Vice President Márquez, The National Government, and the National Army commending their announcement of the bilateral, temporary ceasefire with the ELN, as well as the Agreement for the participation of civil society in this peace process. The statement recognizes the significance of this step towards peace and calls upon all armed actors to support it by de-escalating their armed activities. The Coordination emphasizes the importance of human rights platforms treating the ceasefire as a valuable contribution to making a substantial difference. It also thanks Cuba for its role as guarantor and supporter of Colombia's peace efforts. Additionally, it asks the international community to support political, social, and economic transformation to sustain comprehensive peace.

***Civil Society Organizations Call for Participation in Total Peace Effort (Multiple)***

On June 13, an open letter signed by various civil society organizations addressed President Gustavo Petro and Vice President Francia Márquez and expressed their support for the administration's integral peace plan. The organizations [commend](#) efforts to include an integral, rights-based approach to peace. However, they remain concerned about the escalation of violence in various territories. Such violence is having a detrimental impact on children, women, and the civil population. Urgent inclusion of humanitarian safeguards in all peace negotiations is emphasized, along with the importance of civil society involvement to ensure the incorporation of territorial realities in dialogues.

***Minor Recruits Returned to Indigenous Territories (Cauca)***

On June 13, the 139 traditional authorities of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*, CRIC) [issued](#) a statement commending the humanitarian gesture made by the Central General Staff of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) by handing over two recruited Indigenous minors of the Huellas Caloto and San Roque territories. The minors were recruited by the Dagoberto Ramos Front (*Frente Dagoberto Ramos*), a FARC dissident group, last December. CRIC commends this action, which aligns with humanitarian frameworks and processes in coordination with the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. CRIC calls for multilateral ceasefires, expanding beyond bilateral agreements, involving all political and non-political armed actors committed to the Total Peace policy.

***Indigenous Murui-Muina Adolescents Killed by Armed Group (Caquetá)***

On June 15, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) [condemned](#) the murders of at least three indigenous adolescents who were victims of forced recruitment and killed by an armed group in Caquetá on May 17. Given the escalating presence of illegal actors in the region, the IACHR calls upon the Office of the Attorney General to undertake a thorough investigation into these appalling incidents. Furthermore, the IACHR urges the development of comprehensive actions to prevent such tragedies from recurring and to provide essential reparations for the families of the victims.

***Death Threats Against Truth Commission Investigator Intensify***

According to an article [published](#) by *El Espectador* on June 16, threats against a Truth Commission investigator, Andrés Celis, intensified to the point he was forced into exile. Unidentified intruders broke into his house and stole electronic equipment with copies of statements from the former head of the Gulf Clan (*Clan del Golfo*) Antonio Úsuga - known as "Otoniel." Celis received numerous phone [calls](#) from an individual identified as Luis Beltrán, commander of the main block of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC) informing him that his organization received 15 million pesos to assassinate him unless he negotiated for his life. Despite Celis filing three complaints with the prosecutor's Office, progress has been distressingly slow. Additionally, the UNP reported that security measures were not granted to his family.

***Massive Displacement of Communities from Armed Group Confrontations (Chocó)***

An alert sent by Black Communities Process (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, PCN) on June 18 [informed](#) the National government and international human rights organizations of communities' massive displacement and humanitarian situation in San Juan, Chocó. Due to confrontations between the AGC and the ELN, inhabitants are forced to leave their homes. Reportedly hundreds of people and entire families have been displaced so far. PCN warns about the risk of further displacement for other vulnerable communities as well.

***Assassination of Council Candidate and Social Leader (Valle de Cauca)***

Senator Alexander López Maya [denounced](#) the murder of social leader, lawyer, and pre-candidate for the Council in Tuluá, Alejandro Forero. Expressing grave concern over ongoing threats against Forero's life, Senator López urgently demands that the National Attorney's Office and National Police take resolute action to prevent any immunity for his murderers. This tragedy emphasizes the pressing need for safeguarding the lives of those bravely advocating for their communities.

***Gulf Clan Kills Two Indigenous Embera Members (Chocó)***

According to a report from *Breaking Latest News* on June 20, a confrontation between the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo) and the Indigenous Guard in the Puesto Indio Jurubirá Chorí Indigenous Reserve resulted in the [injury](#) of two indigenous individuals. The territory belongs to the Embera Katio Indigenous Authority. Video footage captured the Gulf Clan engaging in a violent altercation, but the indigenous community effectively repelled the armed group's attempt to seize control. General Murrillo, the commander of the Seventh Division of the National Army, congratulated the indigenous people for preventing the armed group from entering and taking over their territory. General Murillo also added military troops to the site to guarantee the community's safety.

***Social Organization Publishes Annual Report (Multiple)***

On June 20, *Somos Defensores* [published](#) its 2022 Annual Report which documents the situation faced by human rights defenders and social leaders. These leaders faced high records of violence, and over half (54%) of the leaders killed were murdered by unknown actors. Paramilitary groups were the highest perpetrators of these killings, with the Gulf Clan being the most attributed offender. The report underscores the urgency for targeted action against selective violence inflicted upon human rights defenders, notably by state entities. Amidst Colombia's political transition, the report emphasizes the need for more robust implementation of both the Emergency Plan and Total Peace, expressing concern over the government's current approach.

***International Condemnation of Racist Attacks Against VP Márquez***

On June 22, Colombia Acuerdo de Paz NGO and other organizations with WOLA [condemned](#) the ongoing, racist, classist, and sexist attacks Vice President Francia Márquez continues to receive. The letter details the numerous incidents of racist and sexist attacks the Vice President faced and calls for the perpetrators of the attacks to be sanctioned and condoned. These attacks reflect the structural racism that translates into people of African descent living in deplorable living conditions and being denied access to education, health, housing, and employment. The consequences of racism are fatal, evident in the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by Afro-descendants at the hands of all legal and illegal armed groups and others.

***Hundreds of Intellectuals Call for Freedom of Political Prisoners***

A statement from hundreds of intellectuals from France and other countries on June 27, [called](#) for the release of prisoners detained during the social protests in 2021. More than two years after the events, 305 young people remain incarcerated without trial. By keeping these individuals imprisoned Attorney General Barbosa sends a threatening message to potential future mobilizers. They call on unions, political organizers, and youth to organize a campaign to release those imprisoned for their participation in the 2021 protests.

***Two Massacres in One Day (Atlántico and Valle de Cauca)***

According to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (*Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz*, INDEPAZ), on June 29 there were two massacres [registered](#) on the same day. A father and his two sons were killed in the metropolitan area of Barranquilla, and three youths were murdered in Cali. These were the 48th and 49th massacres to take place in Colombia in 2023 recorded by INDEPAZ.

***Mayoral Candidate Threatened (Valle de Cauca)***

The safety of Historical Pact mayoral candidate Edgar Patiño was seriously compromised on July 1 when an attempt was made on his life. The report highlighted Patiño's recent videos pointing out the corruption and chaos within the municipality due to governmental corruption. As he gained citizen support, he was surprised when approached by "alternative" political movements seeking his approval, yet knew he faced enormous powers opposing him.

***Civil Society Ready for Peace Dialogue (Multiple)***

Communities Constructing Peace in Colombia (*Asociación Comunidades Construyendo Paz en Colombia*, CONPAZCOL) [published](#) a statement on July 3 asserting their pivotal role in spearheading tangible peace initiatives. Comprising Indigenous, Afrodescendant, and rural communities, CONPAZCOL is committed to addressing the pervasive violence in Colombia and harnessing the wisdom gained to contribute to an overarching vision of Total Peace. CONPAZCOL demands that the national government and Colombian State guarantee genuine conditions of participation in humanitarian, social, political, and legal dialogues with armed actors present in their territories. They also seek that a multilateral ceasefire agreed to at the dialogue table is established to protect life as well as guarantee the right to return to their territories.

***Indigenous Infant Dies (Valle de Cauca)***

CONPAZCOL [tweeted](#) an alert on July 3, informing that a 2-month-old Indigenous Waunan Noman infant had died, and their body was yet to be delivered to family members. Because they were not registered with a Health Promoting Entity (*Entidad Promotora de Salud*, EPS), the family will have to pay COP 3.500.000 due to lack of Civil Registration.

***Food Insecurity Hits Coastal Regions (Multiple)***

An article from *Chocó 7 Días* on July 4 [reported](#) that areas along the Atlantic Coast and in the department of Chocó experience the most food insecurity in the country. The study was conducted by the National Administrative Department of Statistics alongside the UN Food and Agricultural Organization. La Guajira is the department with the highest reported food insecurity per household, while in Chocó, 43 out of 100 households reportedly grapple with compromised quality and quantity of food. This report is important because it can inform policy interventions for those in vulnerable conditions.

***Armed Groups Continue Community Violations (Antioquia)***

On July 4, the San Jose de Apartadó Peace Community (*Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó*, CPSJA) [reported](#) several incidents of armed group presence in their communities in the past few weeks. According to their report, six armed paramilitary members entered a community member's private property. The next day five paramilitary members gathered community members and threatened to prevent them from cultivating their territory if they refused to pay high fines. Additionally, the presence of armed groups constructing exclusive roads and the involvement of known paramilitary figures have further escalated tensions. CPSJA extends gratitude to the resilient communities, organizations, and individuals supporting their unwavering pursuit of peace.

***International Statement Applaud Truth Commission Efforts (Multiple)***

On July 5, over a dozen international civil society organizations, including WOLA, [issued](#) a statement expressing their support for the independent and rigorous work carried out by the Truth Commission. The Final Report published by the Commission has played a pivotal role in advancing peace-building efforts and amplifying the voices of thousands. Furthermore, the letter welcomes the recommendations derived from the Final Report, supports the Follow-Up and Monitoring Commission, and aligns their efforts to monitor the evolving human rights and humanitarian situation across various territories.

***Paramilitaries Kill Two Men (Valle de Cauca)***

On July 6, CONPAZCOL [reported](#) that Hever Gamboa Gamboa and his employer, both Afro-Colombian individuals, were killed on the banks of the Dagua River during their work. Gamboa was a member of the Cabildo Nonam Dur Council, a father of two, and a community leader. Heavily armed men detained two other people from the Cabildo who were heading to work by the river bank. The armed men introduced themselves as belonging to the AGC and that they were looking for Shotas and Espartanos. The community awaits the intervention of the Public Ministry and the activation of a comprehensive emergency response for those at imminent risk of displacement.

***National Electoral Commission Asks for Role in Peace Negotiations (Multiple)***

According to *El Tiempo* on July 6, the Electoral Observation Mission's (*Misión de Observación Electoral*, MOE) oversight office has [requested](#) the National Peace Commissioner to be included in the peace negotiations with the ELN. MOE claims that armed groups must respect electoral processes and participants, regardless of whether they are voters or candidates. MOE also expressed its concern about the lack of effective controls over campaign financing, raising significant challenges to the integrity of the electoral process.

***Kidnapping by Armed Group (Arauca)***

The Movement Defending Peace (*Movimiento Defendamos la Paz*, MDP) [published](#) a statement on July 7 denouncing the recent kidnapping of Second Sergeant Ghislaine Ramírez and her two children, one of whom reportedly has autism. A temporary bilateral ceasefire with the ELN and the National government was announced just two days prior, set to be in effect on August 3, and MDP calls for Ramírez and her sons' immediate release.

***FARC Dissident Ceasefire Agreement Reached***

The Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, and the FARC-EP Dialogue Commission [announced](#) on July 7, that they had reached an agreement to install a peace dialogue table. This pivotal platform will facilitate comprehensive discussions and approval of a bilateral and temporary national ceasefire. Guided by the auspices of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, this process marks a critical step towards lasting peace. In the preliminary phase, parties will discuss 1) adjustments to the ceasefire protocols, protection of the civilian population, and the implementation of the Oversight, Monitoring, and Verification Mechanisms, 2) formulation of a pre-agenda of the Peace Dialogue Table, 3) the methodology, and 4) mechanisms for civil participation. Delegates of the international community will be present at the table as well.

***Breakdown of Agricultural Agreement (Caquetá)***

Criticizing the unwarranted intrusion of external political actors, the Coordinator of the Colombian South East for Agrarian, Environmental and Social Processes (*Coordinadora del Sur Oriente Colombiano Para los Procesos Agrarios, Ambientales y Sociales*, COSCOPAAS) [published](#) a statement on July 7. The organization rejects attempts by such actors to claim credit for agreements forged through their social organization's efforts, specifically about a Well Inspection in the San Vicente del Caguan municipality. COSCOPAAS denounces representative Jhon Freddy Nuñez's public assertions of managing the agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, asserting that the accord was directly established between COSCOPAAS and the National Government on June 20. The organization calls on the National Government and President Petro to immediately comply with the agreed-upon agenda to address the crisis in the dairy sector and strictly monitor and comply with the established commitments.

***Leader and Mayoral Candidate Attacked (Atlántico)***

Maria Esther Correa Vasquez, a community leader and mayoral candidate part of the Historical Pact (*Pacto Histórico*), was [attacked](#) alongside her family on July 9. A taxi without license plates approached her residence, and the perpetrators were identified as part of a criminal group before they attacked. The following day Vasquez filed a complaint with the Prosecutor's Office and the police to investigate the case.



***Congressmen Alerts Humanitarian Crisis (Chocó)***

On July 11, Representative James Mosquera Torres [issued](#) an alert concerning the worsening humanitarian situation in the Department of Chocó. While the ELN's access to the humanitarian corridor was a positive step, it was only temporary. Torres urged the administration to implement a comprehensive and structural plan that guarantees the right to life for victims of violence, basic protection of human rights, and restoring the rights of those displaced, beyond immediate humanitarian relief.

***Political, Academic, and Union Leaders Receive Death Threats (Atlántico)***

Sixteen social organizations [published](#) a joint statement on July 12, rejecting the recent threats made to political, academic, and trade union leaders by armed groups. This follows a series of attacks targeting individuals such as a mayoral candidate for Barranquilla, two university researchers, and unionized Ombudsman's Office personnel. They demand the implementation of necessary measures to guarantee the safety, prevention, and protection of human rights.

***Journalist and Family Face Threats (Chocó)***

On July 12, the Circle of Journalists and Social Communicators of Chocó (*Círculo de Periodistas y Comunicadores Sociales de Chocó*, CPCH) [condemned](#) the death threats targeting Marino Moreno Chaverra, one of its members. These threats are an attack against freedom of expression and information. CPCH asks the Attorney General and National Police to quickly determine who is responsible for these threats, and guarantee Chaverra's life and that of his family.

***Human Rights Defender Condemns Death of Afro-Colombian Man (Cundinamarca)***

Human rights defender and lawyer Alí Bantú Ashanti [posted](#) a tweet on July 13 condemning the assassination of Afro-Chocoan Zamir Martínez Pacheco in Bogota. Police officers shot Pacheco in the waist, handcuffed, and threatened him before taking him away in a marked police car. He was later found dead with signs of torture. Ashanti calls out to the Office of the Attorney General (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*) as well as the Technical Investigative Corps (*Cuerpo Técnico de investigación*, CTI) for not coming to the crime scene nor collecting evidence for the case, claiming they are facilitating policy impunity. He also raised his voice against President Petro and Defense Minister Iván Velásquez urging that the officers responsible be held accountable and temporarily removed from the police force to ensure justice prevails.

***Journalist Forced into Exile Following Death Threats (Córdoba)***

According to *Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa* on July 13, Yamir Jhan Pico, director of *Caribe Noticias 24/7*, was [forced](#) to leave the country and seek exile following constant death threats he received in recent months. Throughout this year, Pico received a total of four death threats, including an incident involving an individual claiming affiliation with the Gulf Clan. This prompted Pico to relinquish his protection scheme and flee the country with his family so he can continue working as a reporter safely. Pico, like many others, has filed complaints to the Prosecutor's Office and the UNP, however, lack of progress in the investigations kept his life at risk. Regrettably, Pico is not alone in this ordeal, as two other journalists and seventeen cases of threats have been documented since January 2022. The lack of substantial investigation, prosecution, and accountability perpetuates the cycle of these grievous crimes.

***Former Truth Commissioner Expresses Concern for Peace Developments (Chocó)***

An article from *Chocó 7 días* from July 14 [detailed](#) former Truth Commissioner, Leyner Palacios Asprilla's concerns for the civilian population in Chocó. A direct victim of the armed conflict in the department himself, Palacios draws attention to the escalating hostilities and emphasizes the urgent need for the State to extend its protective mantle over these territories. Palacios further emphasizes the pervasive factors of inequality, racism, and exclusion that pose formidable obstacles to achieving lasting peace. Nonetheless, he maintains a glimmer of hope, asserting that the realization of the recommendations articulated in the Final Truth Commission Report could pave the way toward a more promising future.

***Comprehensive Database of Social Leaders Killed in 2023***

*La Silla Vacía* [published](#) an article on July 14 compiling data from INDEPAZ, Human Rights Watch, the Ombudsman's Office, and the JEP to consolidate its own database on social leaders' assassinations in 2023. President Petro's protection plan has yet to land, and 77 people have been assassinated in 21 departments and 58 municipalities across the country. Cauca, Antioquia, and Nariño are the most dangerous departments for social leaders. The ELN has a presence in 72 percent of the municipalities where leaders were killed. The data shows that while ceasefires reduce confrontations between the National Army and armed groups, intergroup clashes continue, leaving the civilian population at risk. Additionally, violence against indigenous leaders is rampant, and 76 percent of municipalities where leaders are killed voted to elect peace seats in Congress.

***LGBTQ+ Rights Defender Killed (Atlántico)***

On July 14, *Caribe Afirmativo* [reported](#) that Franklin Pabon, a nonbinary LGBTQ+ rights defender and social leader was killed. Pabon was the liaison officer for the LGBTQ+ population in the Malambo municipality. *Caribe Afirmativo* states that in the days previous to their death Pabon had denounced multiple threats against their life by armed groups.

***Threats to Community Leaders (Valle de Cauca)***

On July 12, the Community Council of Black Communities of Bahía Málaga (*Consejo Comunitario de las Comunidades Negras de la Plata Bahía Málaga*) [issued](#) an urgent statement informing the local, regional, and national authorities of the serious death threats leaders of the Community Council continue to face. The statement claims the threats originate from illegal groups in Buenaventura. The Council holds the Ministry of the Interior and the UNP responsible for the lack of effective measures to ensure their security and mobility. With an unflinching resolve, the Community Council underscores its status as a victim of State negligence, appealing for immediate and decisive intervention to rectify this perilous situation.

***Union Alleges Worker Abuses by Beverage Company***

The National Union of Workers in the Food, Agro-Industrial, Agri-Food Support Services, Beverages, and Related Sectors (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Sector Alimentario, Agroindustrial, Agropecuario, Agroalimentaria de Servicios de Apoyo, Bebidas, Afines y Similares*, SINTRAIMAGRA) [published](#) a statement detailing complaints against the company Molinos Santa Marta belonging to the Nutresa Group in Colombia. SINTRAIMAGRA claims the company has disrespected unionists and mistreated its workers, thus creating a tense work environment. The union alleges that despite the signing of a Collective Labor Agreement a few months prior, the company resorted to dismissing a segment of the union, effectively seeking to erode its presence. This calculated action stands in direct violation of national labor laws. SINTRAIMAGRA, advocating for justice and fairness, urgently calls upon both national and international organizations to disseminate their grievances. Their plea echoes the urgent need to halt the persecution of the union and the ongoing workplace harassment while upholding the terms of the existing collective labor agreement.

Sincerely,

Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli



Director for the Andes

7 August 2023