

Civil Society International Organisations express its concerned and rejection for the killings of social leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia: peace cannot be built without guarantees

Bogotá - Brussels, March 22, 2016. The signing Civil Society International Organisations express their concern and rejection for the recent killings and the increasing threats against social leaders and human rights defenders in several regions of Colombia.

During the last three weeks, Marisela Tombe, rural leader (February 28, El Tambo, Cauca), Willar Alexander Oime Alarco, indigenous leader (March 2, Popayan, Cauca)¹, Nando Perez, land restitution leader (March 2, Palmitos, Sucre)², Klaus Zapata, grassroots journalist and activist of the Colombian Communist Youth (March 6, Soacha, Cundinamarca)³, William Castillo, founder of the Association of Agroecological and Mining Fraternities of Guamoco - Aheramigua (March 7, El Bagre, Antioquia)⁴, Gil de Jesus Salgado, member of the Farmer Association of Arauca - ACA (March 10, Arauquita, Arauca)⁵ and James Balanta, Afrocolombian leader (March 16, Caloto, Cauca)⁶, were gunned down. Also, on March 10, Milton Escobar, bodyguard of human rights defender Martin Sandoval, member of the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights – CPDH, was killed⁷, and on March 11, in Santa Rosa del Sur, department of Bolivar, Sharon Dariana Marmol Tellez, 14 years-old daughter of Evelio Marmol, member of the Agro-mining Federation of Sur de Bolivar - Fedeagromisbol and director of the Agro-mining Association of San Juan, was found dead⁸.

¹ Association of Indigenous Councils of the North of Cauca (ACIN), *Pronunciamento frente a los últimos hechos de violencia presentados en el departamento del Cauca*, March 3, 2016

² Contagio Radio, *ESMAD y militares adelantan desalojo de 15 familias víctimas de Montes de María*, March 2, 2016

³ Prensa Rural Agency, *Asesinado en Soacha Klaus Zapata, militante de la Juventud Comunista*, March 7, 2016

⁴ Colombia - Europe - United States Coordination (CCEEU) *Nodo Antioquia, Comunicado sobre asesinato de líder William Castillo*, March 9, 2016

⁵ Joel Sierra Foundation, *Pronunciamento público: el conflicto armado cobró tres nuevas vidas en el municipio de Arauquita*, March 13, 2016

⁶ Telesur, *Asesinan en el Cauca a líder social colombiano James Balanta*, March 16, 2016

⁷ Joel Sierra Foundation, *Idem*

⁸ Agro-mining Federation of Sur de Bolivar, *Denuncia pública: hija de dirigente agrominero del Sur de Bolívar fue desaparecida y asesinada*

In March, the National Movement for Victims of State Crimes - MOVICE, sections Sucre⁹ and Atlántico¹⁰, and the Victims Associations of Mapiripán, Meta, among others, were threatened¹¹. The use of massive threats against human rights defenders continued to increase in 2015, as 400 of them received 27 pamphlets signed by paramilitary groups. Since the beginning of 2016, at least 26 threats against the Colombian social movement have been denounced.

These serious facts, linked to an increase in reports of presence and territorial control by paramilitary groups in several regions of the country, and to an increase of “social cleansing” operations by these groups¹², show the lack of guarantees to exercise the defence of human and land rights in Colombia. Also, this situation compromises the viability of the implementation of the peace agreement that the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian government could reach¹³.

In this context, and considering a 99.96% of impunity in cases of attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia, we urge the Colombian authorities to:

- Take all necessary measures to guarantee the right to life and the right to personal integrity of human rights defenders in Colombia;
- Take all necessary measures to conduct thorough investigations, prosecute and sanction those responsible for committing and masterminding these crimes;
- Establish and implement guarantees for non-repetition, aimed at effectively and permanently dismantling paramilitary and criminal groups in all regions of Colombia, as well as the political and economic structures that support them. Ensure the depuration of the armed forces and the implementation of institutional reforms, in particular of the armed forces and of the administration of Justice.
- Publicly reject physical attacks, threats, slander and accusations against human rights defenders, as well as support and promote their fundamental role in building a stable and long-lasting peace.

⁹ National Movement for Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), *Acción urgente: En riesgo seguridad de defensora de derechos humanos Ingrid Vergara*, MOVICE Sucre, March 3, 2016

¹⁰ National Movement for Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), *Amenazas contra defensorxs de derechos humanos en el Atlántico*, MOVICE Atlántico, March 7, 2016

¹¹ “Jose Alvear Restrepo” Lawyers Collective Corporation (CCAJAR), *Amenazas de muerte contra líderes de las organizaciones de víctimas de Mapiripán*, March 11, 2016

¹² National Movement for Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), *Ante ola de asesinatos, exigimos creación de Comisión de Alto Nivel de Garantías de No Repetición*, March 15, 2016

¹³ According to the last report of the *Somos Defensores* programme, attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia have increased by 9% between 2014 and 2015, to reach a total of 682 attacks in 2015, among which 63 murders. This represents a 13% increase in comparison to the previous year, for a total of 346 human rights defenders killed between 2010 and 2015, that is to say, one human rights defender has been killed every five days during the government of President Juan Manuel Santos.

We also request the international community, and in particular the European Union - in accordance with the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders - as well as the European Union Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process, to maintain its advocacy and monitoring work on the situation of human rights defenders in Colombia, both during the negotiations and after the signing of a final peace agreement.

FURTHER INFORMATION
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Signing organisations:

