

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 Sr. Eduardo Montealegre Attorney General of Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 General Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo Advisory Minister for Post Conflict, Human Rights and Security	

September 25, 2014

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned about escalating death threats throughout the country to human rights defenders including trade unionists, community leaders, and the staffs of legislators who have campaigned on human rights issues.

On September 8, 80 human rights defenders received an email stating: “we are going to finish you off one by one” and “we know where each one of you and your families are, prepare to die.” On September 9, Human Rights Day, two emails signed by the paramilitary group Black Eagles-Capital Bloc, threatened dozens of human rights defenders. One threat gave the victims an ultimatum to stop their work within 15 days. The other threat included “invitations to the funeral” of three Afro-descendant human rights defenders which would take place on September 18. All three death threats accused the human rights defenders of being guerrilla fighters.

Threats were also sent to representatives of victims of human rights abuses who have traveled to Havana, Cuba, where the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are negotiating a peace agreement. Thirty staff members at the Office of the High Counselor for Human Rights at the Bogotá Mayor’s Office received a separate threat “inviting them to their own funeral,” also on September 18.

Human rights defenders operate in a dangerous climate in Colombia. According to the non-governmental organization Somos Defensores, at least 70 human rights defenders were killed in Colombia in 2013 and 30 killed so far in 2014. Although the Colombian government has a protection program for human rights defenders, the perpetrators of human rights crimes operate mostly with impunity. As long as they are confident that they will not be brought to justice, they will continue to commit human rights crimes.

We commend the Colombian government’s statement denouncing these threats and the recognition of the work of human rights defenders. We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the death threats described above, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide immediate, effective protection to those threatened, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- take action against paramilitary forces and break any links between them and the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Luis Carlos Villegas, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 Kevin Whitaker, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
 Eric Falls, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

UA229/14_Colombia

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: