

Good Afternoon,

I am infinitely thankful for the opportunity to address you all today.

I have come from Colombia in search of human solidarity, with much hope that you will comprehend the difficult situation my country is going through.

We are a society submerged in violence, political and social violence, the violence of immense inequality.

But the worse violence, the most shocking and unexpected, that is an attack on human dignity because it is systematic and carried out with sinister aims, is the violence committed by the Colombian State against certain social sectors.

This is what happened in the case of my father, JORGE DARIO HOYOS FRANCO, one of the 2,704 trade unionists assassinated, by official state bullets on 3rd March 2001.

And just as in 98% of murders of trade unionists, impunity appeared from the very same night as this horrendous murder. Impunity that persists, although they have tried to show otherwise, by pointing out that a member of the national police has been convicted of the crime, that perhaps would have been an advance if I had not discovered that the convicted policeman was killed himself a year before, that is to say they convicted a dead man.

But it is not only my father who has been a victim of crimes of the State. More than 1,700 people have been executed extra-judicially, more than 4 million people have been displaced, and thousands of people have been threatened and persecuted by the State.

This situation has increased substantially in the two periods of government of the current president Alvaro Uribe Vélez, who has systematically discredited us, accusing us of being “Terrorists” or “helpers” to the Guerrillas.

Recently it has come to light that the Administrative Department for Security-DAS-the State intelligence agency that answers directly to the President of the Republic, carried out, in the full knowledge of its management, an immense intelligence operation against human rights organisations and their members. The “JOSE ALVEAR RESTREPO” Lawyers Collective, of which I am a member, was the human rights NGO most affected by the illegal and illegitimate activity of this State agency.

This agency carried out interceptions of all the communications between the human rights defenders, and innumerable activities that reached alarming proportions. For example: they developed detailed reports, they compiled details of their private life, identified their homes and offices, phones, relatives, friends, migratory movements, psychological profiles, among other things.

They developed permanent surveillance¹ and following¹, they got hold of the keys to at least one human rights defender’s house, took video and photographic evidence of people and places, carried out threatening actions, among other things.

¹ They even gave orders to rent apartments with views of the human rights defenders homes, as occurred in the cases of Gustavo Gallon Giraldo of the Colombian Commission of Jurists and Alirio Uribe Muñoz of the “José Alvear Restrepo” Lawyers Collective.

This shows us that, lamentably, the State security agency has been converted into a criminal enterprise and an instrument of terror. In fact, the ex-director of DAS, JORGE NOGUERA COTES is on trial in the Colombian justice system for passing to paramilitaries a list of trade unionists, several of whom were then assassinated.

NOGUERA is on trial not because of the political will of the government, but thanks to the heroic work of the Colombian Supreme Court, that is also investigating 133 parliamentarians who appear to have links with paramilitary groups, a task which has meant that the Supreme Court magistrates have also been the victim of threats and interceptions.

However, despite the proof, the State does not recognise its responsibility in the violation of human rights and the impunity that allows it to happen; the State favours the perpetrators of the most serious crimes against humanity; and in contrast, it discredits and vilifies the victims, their relatives and of course the legitimate aspirations to construct a new Colombia.

Colombia is one of the States that has signed the most Human Rights conventions, but at the same time, sadly I have to say that it is one of the countries in the world that most violates them. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights' rulings and the many UN and ILO recommendations that the government should improve the situation of the systematic violation of human rights, have been disregarded.

For this reason, before you all, part of a community that historically has struggled for the Rights of Man, I ask that you speak out against the signing of the proposed EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. It is not right that the EU should sign such an Agreement with a government that violates human rights, and I ask that you continue to demand respect for human rights in Colombia, as the United States Congress has stopped the ratification of a Free Trade Agreement with Colombia, and the Canadian Parliament has done the same, precisely because they have proved that in my country human rights are not respected or guaranteed.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the MEPs that represent the Republic of Ireland as this is the first country in Europe in which all of the MEPs have publicly united against the proposed Agreement.

We need Europe, we need the world, we need solidarity, but we don't need more initiatives and resources for the war, or support for disgraceful governments. The only way forward is the search for peace, which we will be able to achieve with solidarity from you.

I hope that you will help us to make sure that Europe does not put commercial interests before the lives of thousands of men and women, and that you will not allow any more young people to suffer the pain of seeing how their mothers and fathers are assassinated, as I had to see.

Thank you.