

ABColumbia

CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB, SCIAF, Trócaire
Working for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia

55 Westminster Bridge Road
London, SE1 7JB
+44 (0) 207 870 2216
lwinstanley@abcolombia.org.uk
www.abcolombia.org.uk

The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP
Minister of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

21 March 2018

Dear Minister Duncan,

ABColumbia is the advocacy project of five leading UK and Irish organisations with programmes in Colombia: CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, SCIAF and Trócaire. We are writing to you today to raise concerning news regarding the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Colombia.

The UK Government, we are pleased to say, has always supported the UN OHCHR. According to your statement last December UK funding to this office has increased. Therefore, I am sure you will be concerned to learn that the Colombian Foreign Affairs Ministry has refused to accredit the new Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, stating that they want to await the inauguration of the new government. If this happens, the UN Office will be without a head and without a public spokesperson for at least five months. ABColumbia considers this to be especially worrying since we understand that the UN Office presented a candidate to the Colombian Government in October 2017, who was rejected.

Civil society organisations in the UK and Colombia have been concerned for a few years that the Colombian Government wants to shut the UN OHCHR in Colombia. These delays, the rejection of the previous candidate, combined with their refusal to accredit the newly appointed High Commissioner, suggest the Colombian government does not consider the UN OHCHR a priority, at a time when it is needed more than ever. In addition, despite the critical human rights situation that the country continues to experience, and requests for official visits from various UN Rapporteurs, including the UN Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, no official invitation has been extended to any UN Rapporteur in the last eight years.

Colombia is facing a critical situation in respect to the violations of human rights and the increase in attacks and killings of human rights defenders. In 2017, the UN OHCHR registered a total of 441 attacks including 121 killings of human rights defenders, which includes 84 human rights defenders with leadership roles, 23 members of social and political movements, and 14 people killed during social protests. OHCHR also recorded 41 attempted killings; 213 threats; four forced disappearances; and the rape of a female activist. This is therefore the worst possible moment for the UN OHCHR to be weakened.

The situation requires immediate action on the part of all those who support human rights in Colombia. We are therefore asking that the UK Government raises this directly with the Colombian Government.

Working for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia
Trabajando por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos en Colombia

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Winstanley
Programme and Advocacy Manager, ABColombia

On Behalf of:

Thomas Mortensen	Country Representative Colombia, CHRISTIAN AID (UK/ Ireland)
Lorraine Currie	Head of International Programmes Department, SCIAF
Tom Crowley	Head of Region Latin America, Trócaire
Clare Dixon	Head of Region Latin America & Caribbean, CAFOD
Aida Pesquera	Country Director Colombia, OXFAM

cc: Peter Tibber, Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia; Tom Newton, British Embassy, Kate Halliday, Head Andean Team, South America Department, FCO; Chris Moden, Colombia Desk Officer & Deputy Head Andean Team, FCO; Jeremy Hobbs, Americas Research Group, FCO Nigel Baker, Head of South America Department & Deputy Director of the Americas.