

Minister Simon Coveney

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Tánaiste

Iveagh House

80 St Stephen's Green

Dublin 2

D02 VY53

08 August 2018

Dear Minister Coveney,

ABColumbia members would like to thank the Irish Government for its active engagement with, and important recommendations made to Colombia in the Universal Periodic Review in May 2018. Given the increased commitment that Ireland is making to engage with Colombia by opening an Irish Embassy in Bogota, along with the key role that you play in supporting the Peace Process we want to draw your attention to key human rights and humanitarian issues that are a threat to this process.

ABColumbia is profoundly concerned that our partners on the Pacific Coast of Colombia are experiencing an escalating humanitarian crisis. Illegal armed actors, both neo-paramilitary and ELN guerrilla, have increased their activities in Chocó. The power vacuum left in areas previously controlled by the FARC, which the government failed to recuperate following the signing of the Peace Accord, have left communities caught in the middle of illegal armed actors fighting for control of the territory and the illegal economies. In addition, State Security Forces are temporarily in the communities to carry out community projects without taking the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the civilian population. The ongoing conflict in this region means that ELN activities intensifying in these areas after the security forces have left. The use by the Army of civilians as informants, only reinforces the ELN's belief that these communities are cooperating with the Security Forces. In addition to increasing insecurity, this is contrary to International Humanitarian Law. In order to combat this dynamic, it is essential to strengthen civil government institutions in Chocó. The expansion of the State's presence would be considerably strengthened, if the provision of security went hand in hand with **the delivery of community projects, goods and services by civilian agencies.**

Compounding this situation is the killing of community leaders in ever increasing numbers. In July 2018, the neo-paramilitary network *Aguilas Negras* declared as military targets several community leaders, human rights organisations (CSOs) and opposition politicians. Many of these CSOs are partners of ABColumbia members and **receive funding from Christian Aid's Irish Aid work, including Sisma Mujer and the Ccajar lawyers.** To give you a clearer vision of the dimension of the problem, in 2017, every third human rights defender (HRD) killed globally was Colombian. Actions against HRDs allegedly by state officials have intensified the risks; Colombia's Inspector General has opened an investigation into state officials that are allegedly working with criminal organisations to assassinate social leaders. The UN OHCHR recently expressed its grave concern, putting on record that 90 HRDs had been killed in the first seven months of 2018; this number of killings in this space of time is unprecedented. Furthermore, since the recent presidential elections there has been yet another spike in violence against HRDs.

Despite Colombia having an open invitation to UN Special Rapporteurs, not one of the several requests for an official visit has been accepted by Colombia in the last 8 years.

ABColumbia therefore asks the Irish Government to request of the in-coming Administration that they:

- Invite the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs to Colombia. His recommendations could help to reverse the year-on-year deterioration.
- Fully support the implementation of the Ethnic Agenda for Peace in Chocó, this consists of the ethnic chapter in the Peace Accord, *Humanitarian Accord Now for Chocó!* and Constitutional Court Sentence T-622 of 2016 on the River Atrato.
- Continue the Peace Talks with the ELN and seek promptly to achieve a bi-lateral ceasefire.

The situation requires immediate action on the part of all those who support the peace process in 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,



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Programme and Advocacy Manager, ABColumbia

On Behalf of:

Clare Dixon	Head of Region for Latin America Caribbean Section, CAFOD
Thomas Mortensen	Country Representative Colombia, CHRISTIAN AID
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cc. H.E. Alison Milton, Irish Ambassador to Colombia