

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

13 August 2018

Dear Minister Duncan,

ABColumbia members would like to thank the UK Government for its active engagement, along with the important recommendations that it made to Colombia, in the Universal Periodic Review in May 2018. Given the key role that the UK is playing in supporting the Peace Process as pen holder for the UN Verification Mission to Colombia, we want to draw your attention to some key human rights and humanitarian issues that threaten this process and suggest recommendations on actions that the UK can take.

ABColumbia is profoundly concerned regarding the situation our partners are confronting in Colombia, especially in Chocó on the Pacific Coast, where they are experiencing a humanitarian crisis. The *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) guerilla in recent months has increased its activities there, including: exercising territorial control, planting landmines and extorting local businesses. We have also seen an increased presence of the neo-paramilitary groups. As a result, communities are caught in the middle of a conflict between the different armed actors fighting to control territory and the resources from illegal economies that were abandoned by the FARC when they demobilised. In addition to this, the temporary presence of the Joint Military Forces Titan in some of the more remote rural communities without taking specific measures to protect civilians, is putting them in jeopardy. Consequently, once the Joint Forces leave these areas, ELN activities intensify. The Army's use of civilians as informants further adds to, and exacerbates, the situation of insecurity, as well as being contrary to International Humanitarian Law. **Local government institutions in Chocó are very fragile; these institutions would be strengthened, and their reach expanded, if the provision of security went hand in hand with the delivery of goods and services by civilian agencies and local government.**

In addition to the humanitarian crisis in Chocó there has been a spike in violence against HRDs, with the UN OHCHR reporting 90 HRDs killed in the first seven months of 2018. This new spike in violence occurred after President Ivan Duque's victory in the recent elections in June. In July, the neo-paramilitary network *Aguilas Negras* declared as military targets several key Colombian human rights organisations (NGOs) and opposition politicians. Many of these NGOs are partners of ABColumbia members and **receive funding from the UK Government**, including Somos Defensores, Sisma Mujer and the journalist Jineth Bedoya. **Colombia's Inspector General has now opened an investigation into allegations that state officials are working with criminal organisations to assassinate social leaders.** In light of this continuously deteriorating situation, it is particularly concerning that 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 eight years.

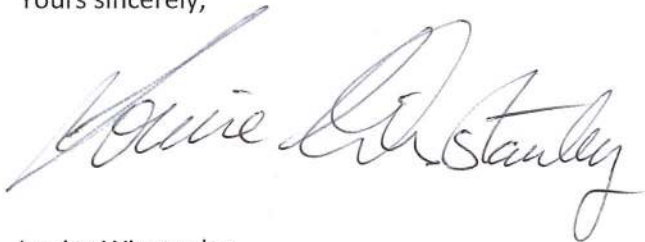
Notably, the Peace Accord contains a chapter on "security guarantees", which also covers protection of HRDs. As pen holder for the UN Security Council's Verification Mission to Colombia, the UK Government, at the next review of the Mission's mandate, could propose the inclusion of an official visit to Colombia by the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs as part of the Verification Mission.

ABColumbia would ask the UK Government to:

- **Ask that the UN Mission in Colombia presents a report to the UN Security Council, which specifically reviews the implementation of the Peace Accord in Chocó, addressing the issues of the Humanitarian Crisis and compliance with international humanitarian law.**
- **Support, both politically and financially, the implementation of the Ethnic Agenda for Peace in Chocó, consisting of the ethnic chapter in the Peace Accord, the *Humanitarian Accord Now for Chocó!* and Constitutional Court Sentence T-622 of 2016 on the River Atrato.**
- **Propose a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs to Colombia as part of the Verification Mission's mandate.**

The situation requires immediate action on the part of all those who support the peace process in Colombia. We are therefore asking that the UK Government also raises these issues directly with the new Colombian Government. 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, ABColumbia**

On Behalf of:

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

cc: Peter Tibber, Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia; Tom Newton, British Embassy, Kate Holliday, 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.