

Foreign &
Commonwealth
OfficeKing Charles Street
London SW1A 2AHMinister of State for
Europe and the Americas

4 September 2018

Louise Winstanley
Programme and Advocacy Manager,
ABColumbia
55 Westminster Bridge Road
London
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Dear Ms Winstanley,

Thank you for your letter of 13 August about the situation in Colombia, I am grateful for your thoughts about the UK's support to human rights in the country.

I share your concern about the situation in Choco. Over 6000 people were displaced by violence in the Pacific Coast region during 2017. This is a tragic addition to the seven million people displaced during Colombia's 52 year internal conflict. The situation in Choco is also worrying due to the targeting of its minority Afro-Caribbean and indigenous communities. The British Ambassador raised the situation in Choco, and other parts of the country where violence continues, in discussions with the new Colombian Minister for Defence. The UK is also supporting implementation of the ethnic and indigenous chapters of the Peace Agreement through the UN Trust Fund and a project with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

I also share your concern about reports of increasing violence against human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia. Illegal armed groups, including the ELN and criminal 'bacrim' groups are responsible for the majority of these attacks and must be brought to justice. Human rights defenders and social leaders play a vital role in promoting the rights of local communities and minority groups in Colombia, and in helping to realise the benefits of the historic peace agreement. You may be interested to know the UK raised these concerns in the intervention at the UN Security Council consultations in New York on 26 July. I attach a copy of the statement.

The FCO supports the important work of human rights defenders globally, including through our advocacy and project work. As you know, through the British Embassy in Bogota the UK has delivered human rights projects worth £1m from the Human Rights Fund in 2018/19. Some of those projects have supported training in individual and collective protection measures for human rights defenders. The UK has also supported the work of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Colombia, which monitors the human rights situation and works closely with the civil society.

We are aware of the list of 'military targets' announced by the group that calls itself the Aguilas Negras 'Black Eagles'. The British Embassy in Bogota has publicly denounced the threat and is in close contact with project delivery and civil society partners about specific threats.

I am grateful for your support to the FCO's consultation with NGOs ahead of Colombia's review at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of human rights in Geneva in May. During the review, Colombia accepted UK recommendations to improve protective measures for human rights defenders, including a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders. The British Ambassador in Bogota has also encouraged the new Foreign Minister, Carlos Holmes to support a visit by the Special Rapporteur.

During a call with President Duque on 9 August, the Prime Minister confirmed the UK's full support to Colombia's peace process, including at the UN Security Council. I am proud that the UK has been able to show leadership at the Security Council on this issue, and that the UK is the largest donor to the UN Trust Fund. We are working closely with all parties, including the new Government to ensure the UN continue to play a key role in leading international support to the peace process.

We believe human rights and humanitarian concerns are currently sufficiently reported in the regular 90 day report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) who last reported to the UN Security Council in July. Also in the annual report of the UN Office for Human Rights.

I would encourage you to continue to work closely with the Americas Directorate at the FCO and the British Embassy in Bogota. I also appreciate the significant work you do to inform Parliamentarians of the situation in Colombia, such as the recent visit you hosted for two MPs in August.

*Yours sincerely,
Alan Duncan*

RT HON SIR ALAN DUNCAN MP