

PRESS RELEASE

Which peace? While the UK prepares for Colombia President Duque's visit, violence against Human Rights Defenders and communities exacerbates

London – 7 June 2019 *A week ahead of Colombia President Duque's visit to the UK, the prominent Colombian Human Rights Defender and peace activist Danilo Rueda from the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace will be in London to discuss the impact of the ongoing armed conflict on grassroots communities.*

Communities in rural areas in Colombia have experienced an exacerbating humanitarian crisis in recent months. Since the beginning of the year, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre has registered over [11,000 forced displacements](#) due to hostilities between armed groups. Although the International Committee of the Red Cross concludes that [an internal armed conflict persists](#) in Colombia, the Colombian Government denied before the United Nations Human Rights Council (session 41, March 2019) the existence of this conflict.

“It is concerning to see that the ground-breaking Colombian Peace Accord is in jeopardy. A Peace Accord never offers to any one party everything they want; however, once an Accord is signed, subsequent governments have a responsibility to implement it. We have grave concerns about President Duque's attempt to undermine the legal security of the Accord by attacking the Transitional Justice Law,” said Louise Winstanley, Programme and Advocacy Manager at ABColumbia.

Next week, Danilo Rueda, a well-known and experienced human rights defender and peace activist who works with grassroots Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities on the Pacific Coast, will be in London. Combats between neo-paramilitary groups and the ELN guerrilla have intensified dramatically since February 2019.

Danilo Rueda has exposed human rights violations at the national and international level. This work is extremely dangerous in Colombia: Danilo Rueda has received several death threats due to his work on peace and human rights. And he is not the only one: Human Rights Defenders are under attack in Colombia. Since the signing of the Peace Accord, general homicide rates have been reduced in Colombia, but the number of targeted killings of activists has increased dramatically. At least [155 Human Rights Defenders](#) were killed in 2018 alone. Since the beginning of this year, on average one Human Rights Defender has been killed [every 2.5 days](#).

“The humanitarian crisis in Bajo Atrato, Chocó is exacerbated by the armed conflict as well as economic interests. Forced displacement and territorial dispossession of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities continue today, with agribusiness, particularly palm oil, cattle farming and mining projects in the area. Uncontrolled deforestation in one of the top 10 biodiverse regions of the world is destroying people's livelihoods: In Pedeguita and Mancilla, La Larga y Tumarado, Urada and Jiguaminadó river basins 3,287 hectares of cloud forest were lost between 2014 and 2017 alone,” explained Danilo Rueda.

Due to the serious threats against him, Danilo Rueda was named in [Early Day Motion #2232](#), which was tabled in the UK Parliament in March. As of 7 June 2019, 78 parliamentarians have signed this motion, which calls for the effective implementation of the Colombian Peace Accord and security for Human Rights Defenders.

“Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders worldwide. EDM #2232 is a welcome sign of solidarity by British politicians. It shows that people here in the UK are vigilant and that the international community won't ignore the ongoing violence in Colombia,” said Susi Bascon, Director of Peacebrigades International, a UK-based organisation that supports and protects Human Rights Defenders in Colombia.

For any press inquiries or interviews, please contact Communications Coordinator Irina Muñoz at assistant@abcolombia.org.uk; or on Mobile number: 07920886874; or office phone: 0207 870 2217.

Danilo Rueda, Louise Winstanley and Susi Bascon are available for press interviews from Monday 10th June to Wednesday 13 June 2019.

Notes

Danilo Rueda is the Executive Secretary of the Colombian NGO Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP), a church-based human rights organisation working to expose human rights violations committed in the conflict regions of Colombia. The CIJP has defended human rights in Colombia for over **31 years**. Danilo Rueda has special protection measures granted by the state due to the high level of death threats he experiences because of his work in defending the rights of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities.

Louise Winstanley is the Programme and Advocacy Manager at ABColumbia in London. She has worked on Colombia for the last 16 years, initially in-country with PBI and for the last nine years with ABColumbia. ABColumbia is the advocacy project of a group of five leading UK and Irish organisations with programmes in Colombia: CAFOD, Christian Aid UKI, Oxfam GB, SCIAF and Trócaire. Amnesty International and PBI are observers. ABColumbia members have over 100 partner organisations in Colombia. Since 1997, ABColumbia has been working on promoting the voice of the most marginalised grass-roots groups in Colombia, mainly, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, Peasant Farmers and women to the attention of the UK and Irish Governments, the European Union and the United Nations.

Susi Bascon is the director of the human rights NGO Peace Brigades International UK. She worked for a year in Mexico as an international observer for PBI and learnt first-hand about the threats and intimidation that Human Rights Defenders and journalists face as a result of their commitment to building more democratic societies. She has been the director of the UK section of Peace Brigades International since 1998 an organisation that currently provides live saving support and protection to over 800 Human Rights Defenders at risk around the world. In 2018 she led the global campaign in support of the nomination of the global community of Human Rights Defenders for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Bajo Atrato and Chocó are situated between the Darién Gap on the border with Panama and the departments of Antioquia and Valle de Cauca. It is one of the planet's hidden tropical treasures, classified as a Forest Reserve. According to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, approximately 56 per cent of Colombian bird species and 11 per cent of all known bird species in the world are in Chocó. Unlike any other Colombian Department, 95 per cent of the population is Indigenous and Afro-descendant, living on collectively owned land. Since February 2019, increased neo-paramilitary operations in the Bajo Atrato and Choco region are causing communities to be confined in their territory.

EDM #2232: Early Day Motion for inclusive peace and protection of defenders in Colombia, tabled in the UK Parliament on 26 March 2019. As of 7 June 2019, 78 Members of Parliament from seven political parties have signed the EDM. The full text of the EDM and list of signatories can be accessed [here](#).

ABColumbia and PBI are hosting a public event with Danilo Rueda on Tuesday. Reservations [via Eventbrite](#).

Event: Colombia: Grassroots Perspectives on what makes for Peace

When: Tuesday, 11 June | 19:30-21:00

Where: G06 Sir Ambrose Fleming LT, Roberts Building, Malet Place, London WC1E 7JE