



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan KCMG MP
Minister of State for Europe and the Americas
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Our Ref: PG12077

14 June 2019

Dear Minister of State

Last August we visited Colombia at the invitation of ABColombia, the joint advocacy platform of Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, SCIAF and Trócaire. We visited various communities in the departments of Vichada, Meta and Tolima in order to hear about human rights violations in relation to business and human rights and land rights, as well as environmental issues.

We were therefore very concerned to learn that some of the leaders that we met from El Porvenir, Meta, and in Cajamarca, Tolima have been receiving death threats due to their work as human rights defenders (HRDs).

As we are sure you are aware, the situation in Colombia in recent months has seen a major deterioration in terms of human rights violations, forced displacement and confinement of communities in the rural areas. Particularly concerning has been the situation of HRDs; according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in 2018 at least 110 HRDs were killed; NGOs and Colombian institutes have recorded up to 172 HRDs killed in 2018. We were pleased to see that Ambassador Karen Pierce highlighted this at the Security Council.

In El Porvenir, Meta the Colombian Constitutional Court ordered the restitution of land belonging to the peasant farmers we visited. This land had been grabbed by a well-known AUC (*Auto-Defensas Unidas de Colombia*) paramilitary commander and owner of the emerald mines, the late Victor Carranza; his relatives continue to occupy this land. Ahead of a meeting organised on 15 May 2019 in relation to land restoration, two of the leaders, Luz Marina Arteaga y Omar Elkin Salgado received death threats. They were warned not to attend the meeting and to give up all claims to this land.

These threats were analysed and considered so serious that the two leaders had to relocate to Bogota and were only able to return for the meeting with international accompaniment.

In May 2019, leaders in Cajamarca, Tolima also received a death threat (annexed). The environmental and human rights organisation Cosajuca supported a popular consultation on the exploration and exploitation by AngloGold Ashanti of an open-pit gold mine, in which **97.2% voted** against the mine.

The local community consider that, not only would the mine destroy the environment, but it would also impact on their water resources and prime agricultural land, on which their livelihoods depend.

President Juan Manuel Santos on his first visit to the UK was asked to issue a Joint Human Rights Statement with the UK. This served both countries well, jointly outlining the human rights issues that both would address. This seems to be an appropriate moment to do something similar with President Duque given the recent signing of the UK-Andean trade continuity agreement.

We would also ask that you specifically raise the situation of HRDs and the aforementioned threats.

We consider it important that UK INGOs including ABColombia, have the opportunity of meeting with the Colombian President when he next visits the UK and hope that the UK Government will encourage this on his next visit.

We look forward to hearing from you on these matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Grady', written in a cursive style.

Patrick Grady
Member of Parliament for Glasgow North

Chris Bryant
Member of Parliament for Rhondda