

Rt Hon Dominic Raab
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

30 July 2019

Dear Foreign Secretary,

As signatories of EDM 2232 "*Inclusive Peace and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Colombia*", we are writing to you to raise our concerns regarding the repeated threats against members of the Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (CIJP), the church-based human rights organisation directly referred to in EDM 2232; the increasing violence in the Chocó region, specifically in Bajo Atrato and in the collective territories of the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities in Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó.

The CIJP is a beneficiary of special protection measures from both the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the Colombian State. The Executive Secretary of the CIJP, renowned human rights defender Danilo Rueda, recently spoke in the UK Parliament (12 June 2019) regarding the human rights situation in Colombia. A few days after his return, serious threats were made against him and other members of the CIJP.

On 25 June, Rueda was harassed by neo-paramilitary groups and whilst he escaped unscathed, the seriousness of his situation is underlined by previous death threats he has received this year. A colleague of Rueda, Carlos Fernandez, received a death threat on 26 June 2019, the latest in a series of warnings linked to his work protecting the Nasa Indigenous Peoples rights in Putumayo. Additionally, on 19 May 2019, soldiers threatened to shoot Fernandez and his bodyguard provided by the State's National Protection Unit.

In the Chocó region:

- On 25 June 2019, the CIJP and the Hoyos family from Caño Manso Humanitarian Zone were threatened. The death threats were aimed at forcing the family to abandon their land, in order to deforest it, in preparation for agro-industrial projects. Linking human rights violations with environmental destruction in Chocó, which is one of the top 10 biodiversity hotspots in the world.
- On 5 July 2019, in the Afro-Colombian collective territory of Curvaradó, a neo-paramilitary group entered, threatening the population; and
- On 6 July 2019, the 20-year-old son of an Emberá Indigenous leader from Alto Guayabal in Jiguamiandó was tortured and killed by the neo-paramilitary group *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (AGC). He was tied-up, beaten and, after death, beheaded. It should be noted that there was a recent visit to this area by an international delegation, which included the UK Embassy.

On 10 May 2019, Rupert Colville, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the UN was "...alarmed by the strikingly high number of human rights defenders being killed, harassed and threatened in Colombia, and by the fact that this terrible trend seems to be worsening... [and

called on the authorities] to take all necessary measures to tackle the endemic impunity...” At least 116 Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) were killed in 2018, according to the UN.

We are aware that President Duque met with your predecessor and other members of the UK Government on his recent visit to the UK, and that general concerns regarding HRDs were raised with him. However, the lack of protection and intensity in the threats, attacks and killings of human rights defenders is undermining the peace process and democracy in Colombia. We would therefore ask that you specifically raise each of these threats, attacks and killings with the Colombian Government, asking them to request the:

- Public Prosecutor’s Office to investigate, identify and punish both the material and intellectual authors; and that the Special Investigation Unit in the Public Prosecutor’s Office advances in the investigation and dismantling of the neo-paramilitary groups and their support structures;
- Ministry of the Interior to act in accordance with the provisions dictated in several Constitutional Court Orders for land restitution in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

Lastly, the UK should insist that the Colombian Government renews the full mandate of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, which would reaffirm a mutual commitment to ensuring safety and security for human rights defenders.

Yours sincerely,

Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Chris Bryant MP

Jim Cunningham MP

Ann Clywd MP (Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group)

Martyn Day MP

Clive Efford MP

Paul Farrelly MP

Rt Hon Frank Field MP

Roger Godsiff MP

Patrick Grady MP

John Grogan MP

Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP

Ruth Jones MP

Chris Law MP

David Linden MP

Stephen Lloyd MP

Layla Moran MP

Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP

Teresa Pearce MP

Virendra Sharma MP

Rt Hon Dame Caroline Spelman MP

Jamie Stone MP

Catherine West MP