

President of the Republic of Colombia

Iván Duque Márquez

31 March 2020

Dear President Duque

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having a major global impact. Whilst the impacts vary from country to country, all governments are having to take immediate action in order to specifically address the impact on the most vulnerable communities. In addition, in Colombia, the killing of human rights defenders and community leaders has both persisted and accelerated. ABColombia is therefore writing to you to raise our profound concerns for our partners in Colombia that are suffering human rights violations and are further impacted by COVID-19.

Our partners have alerted us to how *Decreto 457 del 22 de Marzo del 2020*, declaring that 'preventative self-isolation is obligatory' has increased the vulnerability of social leaders and human rights defenders, as they are easier to find in their homes, where they are being killed.

ABColombia is profoundly concerned about the killing on 24 March 2020 of Carlota Isabel Salina Perez, member of the Popular Women's Organization (Organización Femenina Popular-OFP). Armed men arrived at her home, forced her out of her house and shot her. Since then her partner has disappeared. On the same day indigenous leaders Omar and Ernesto Guasiruma were killed in their homes, they were complying with quarantine measures in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, as well as, Julio Sandoval Chía (Norte de Santander) and Ángel Ovidio Quintero (Antioquia).

Furthermore, last week an assassination plan was revealed to kill Jani Silva, community leader of the Peasant Farmer Reserve Perla Amazónica (ZRCPA), Putumayo. Illegal armed groups have been moving around freely in the region of Perla Amazónica and the Putumayo river. These illegal armed structures are present in the same areas of operation as the *27ª Brigada de la Selva* (27th Jungle Brigade) and the *Fuerza Naval del Sur* (Southern Navy Force). Three other leaders from Perla Amazónica have also received multiple death threats over the last year and a half. They are still waiting for a response to the collective protection measures that they have continually requested.

COVID-19 has particularly impacted the communities. Pre-existing structural gaps in public policies mean that there is no system in place for communities in rural territories who depend on the informal economy, to access clean water, health and food. The Wayúu Indigenous Peoples in La Guajira are seriously affected by these gaps, in spite of the precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2015 and the Constitutional Court order T-302 in 2017 declaring that water, health and food, fundamental rights of the Wayúu Peoples, were being violated. The Wayúu peoples live in a situation which requires the implementation of public policies to bring about the structural changes ordered by the Constitutional Court. The national emergency due to the COVID-19 has now compounded this situation.

ABColombia has many partners in Choco including the three dioceses of Istmina, Apartadó and Quibdó. They report that the humanitarian situation in the region has dramatically deteriorated, especially in Alto Baudó. The challenges which confront Colombia as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic are causing the pre-existent humanitarian crisis to deepen in its complexity, the precarious health system and fragile economy is putting the life of the inhabitants of the department at high risk. The ongoing conflict in their territories between the *Ejército Nacional de Liberación (ELN)*, *las Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC)* and the Colombian Armed Forces is

further complicating the situation. We hope that the ELN's recent commitment to initiate a unilateral humanitarian ceasefire due to the pandemic crisis COVID-19 could help alleviate this situation.

We therefore respectfully recommend that during this COVID-19 pandemic in order to guarantee the humanitarian assistance and effective protection of the Wayúu People the Colombian Government takes immediate action to:

- guarantee the application of special protection measures for the life of the Wayúu indigenous people, access to water, health and food;
- continues with the provision of the School Feeding Plan with the necessary health measures to contain possible contact at the time of the deliveries;
- Guarantee enough food is provided to the Wayúu, which considers their cultural diet;
- Guarantee permanent access to drinking water for all the Wayúu people, ensure the effective supply urgently needed by members of the Wayúu communities.

In Choco we respectfully recommend that both immediate actions and long-term structural changes are implemented:

- immediate humanitarian attention is provided with a differentiated ethnic, territorial and gendered approach in its implementation until the food crisis suffered by communities in Choco is resolved;
- measures to ensure continuous access to drinking water and health;
- Local State Institutions attend to the crisis through the judicial instruments provided by the Colombian Constitution, in the Municipality of Alto Baudó and in the different municipalities where the humanitarian situation has deteriorated; this includes a call to the mayors of Alto, Medio and Bajo Baudó to develop a strategy and Action Plan to guarantee rights;
- A call to the judicial and control bodies to continue to investigate the violent phenomena which is hitting Chocó and in particular Baudó.

In the case of human rights defenders and communities we respectfully recommend that both immediate actions and long-term structural changes are implemented:

- Implement an emergency plan for the protection of those who defend human rights, including an immediate attention scheme in case of attacks;
- The establishment, in consultation with Jani Silva, adequate collective protection measures which have been continuously requested by the Peasant Farmer Reserve of Perla Amazónica
- to continue investigating the killings and attacks against Human Rights Defenders so that they do not remain in impunity;
- to make progress with a comprehensive implementation of the agreements in the Peace Accord, thereby, contributing to the guarantees for Human Rights Defenders and those who undertake social leadership in support of the implementation of the Accord;
- Move forward with the work of the National Commission for Security Guarantees (point 3.4.3 of the Peace Accord) in the development of effective public policies to dismantle and prosecute paramilitary successor groups and their backers; Ambassador
- We call on the Colombian government to move in the same direction as the cease fire declaration made by the ELN, so that other armed organisations legal and illegal respect the lives of the communities.

Yours sincerely,



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CC:Colin Martin-Reynolds CMG, UK Ambassador; Alison Milton, Irish Ambassador ; Karen Pierce DCMGUK Ambassador, USA & Permanent Representative UN Security Council; Antonio José Ardila, Colombian Ambassador to UK & Ireland; Michael Gaffey, Irish Ambassador & Permanent Representative UN Geneva; Julian Braithwaite, UK Ambassador & Permanent Representative UN Geneva Elizabeth Davies, FCO, Richard Moreno, Procuraduría General de la Nación para Derechos Ethnicas, Martha Victoria Sáchica, Corte Constitucional.