

International civil society organisations warn of the severe risks posed by government intelligence systems on peace and democracy in Colombia.



The international civil society organisations signatories to this Statement, express their solidarity with the over 130 people – including, journalists, members of political parties, NGOs, defenders of human rights, and trade unionists – who, according to investigations undertaken by the magazine, *Semana*, have been victims of illegal surveillance. This has been implemented through a computer tracking programme and carried out by various units of the Colombian Army. This surveillance, which even includes senior officials from the Iván Duque government, calls into question Colombian constitutional guarantees and democratic principles.

Worryingly, according to the results of the journalistic investigation these incidences of surveillance were in response to the New York Times publications in early 2019, regarding the recurrence of the extrajudicial executions, and the investigation by the *Liga contra el Silencio* and the *Rutas del Conflicto* regarding agreements between extractive companies and the Ministry of Defence in July 2019.

Freedom of expression is recognised by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Colombia it is a constitutional right (article 20), and it is essential in the development of democracy and for the full exercise of human rights – as affirmed in chapter VIII of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. As highlighted by the Colombian Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, government intelligence systems should be utilised for the protection, and not the violation of human rights. In this regard, we urge the Colombian State to take concrete measures to regulate the intelligence systems.¹

¹ <https://www.hchr.org.co/files/comunicados/2020/inteligencia-debe-usarse-para-proteger-DDHH-HC.pdf>

It is urgent that the Colombian government, in an exercise of transparency with Colombian citizens and with the international community, progress the pertinent investigations to clarify the origins of these actions and bring to account before the competent authorities the people responsible for this very serious attack on the work of the defence of human rights, freedom of the press, and guarantees for political opposition in Colombia.

Furthermore, the Colombian government must provide sufficient guarantees: to life and integrity, the right to defend human rights, to human rights defenders and human rights organisations in general, and in particular, for those who remain exposed due to this illegal practice.

As international civil society organisations, we want to emphasise the serious risk to the sustainability of the Colombian peace process, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic due to this type of persecution of the political opposition, coupled with the increase in killings of human rights defenders and ex-FARC combatants, which amount to over 100 cases so far in 2020, according to INDEPAZ figures.

Intelligence systems must respect human rights and be subjected to strict civil and legal control.

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More information

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