

Press Release – For immediate release

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Lords insist killing of human rights defenders and trade unionists stop before UK deepens trading relations with the Pacific Alliance

This week during a debate in the House of Lords of the British Parliament several members of the House spoke out against the ongoing violence in Colombia emphasising the importance of Britain's role in ensuring the implementation of the peace agreement. The questions arose in the context of a debate examining Britain's post-Brexit relationship to the Pacific Alliance.

Despite Colombia signing a peace accord in 2016, the human rights situation is worsening. Violence against human rights defenders, former combatants and trade unionists has escalated. The UN report that 120 human rights defenders were killed in 2020 and since the signing of the Peace Accord 244 former combatants had been killed, generalised violence increase in 2020, with 66 massacres. According to the Colombian ministry of defence, in 2020 the number of victims of massacres quadrupled compared with the last year of the peace negotiations and combats increased by 65%. Military intelligence was also found to be spying on human rights defenders, journalists, high court magistrates and members of the opposition, and to be selling information to neo-paramilitaries.

According to Lord Collins of Highbury

“2020 was the most violent year since the peace agreement was signed in 2016, with the police and the armed forces being linked to indiscriminate violence against rights activists, as confirmed by Colombia's Supreme Court.”

Lord Browne highlighted that the spying on human rights defenders by military intelligence

“might well have used equipment we [the UK] sold to [Colombia] it to do this.”

Baroness Blower highlighted that

“as the penholder for the Security Council Verification Mission in Colombia the UK has a particular responsibility to play an active role in ensuring that the Colombian Government uphold their commitment to end violence against human rights defenders and trade unionists”

Lord Hain asked Lord Ahmad Minister of State,

“what the UK Government was doing to ensure that the Colombian Government uphold their commitments to end violence against human rights defenders and trade unionists.”

Lord Browne said:

“Upholding human rights and ensuring sustainable peace is essential before deepening trading relationships with Colombia, as some of the worst human rights abuses involving business occur amid conflict over the control of territory and resources. In this difficult context, businesses, both wittingly and unwittingly contribute to human rights harm”.

ABColumbia and Justice for Colombia are two organisations based in the UK working to support human rights issues in Colombia.

“The situation in Colombia of killings of human rights defenders, trade unionist and former combatants has reached a critical state, so much so, that the Security Council should appoint a group of experts in organised crime to examine and report on the situation of neo-paramilitary and criminal organisation in Colombia” **says Louise Winstanley, Programme and Advocacy Officer, ABColumbia**

Meanwhile Hasan Dodwell, Director of Justice for Colombia said:

“The violence in Colombia is out of control. The Colombian government's current failure to sufficiently implement the peace agreement and the ongoing abuses committed by state security forces are exacerbating this terrible situation. The British government must not ignore this as it establishes its new post-Brexit trade arrangements.”

To see the video of the debate in the House of Lords click [here](#) [in Spanish [here](#)]

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Notes

Debate took place in the House of Lords on: International Relations Committee Report: the UK's Relationship with the Pacific Alliance see here for the [recorded debate](#)

The Pacific Alliance is an initiative of regional integration comprised by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, officially established on 28 April 2011

- **Louise Winstanley** is ABColombia Programme and Advocacy Manager. She has worked on Colombia since 2003, initially in Colombia as an international observer with PBI and for the last ten years with ABColombia.
- **ABColombia** 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. ABColombia members have over 100 partner organisations in Colombia. Since 1997, ABColombia has been working on promoting the voice of the most marginalised grass-roots groups in Colombia, mainly, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, Peasant Farmers and women to the attention of the UK and Irish Governments and the European Union. We have accompanied our Colombian partners through some of the most intense moments of the conflict.
- **Justice For Colombia** is an organisation founded in 2002 by the British and Irish trade Union movements to support Colombian Civil Society in its struggle for human rights, labour rights, peace and social justice