

Press Release

National Working Group on Guarantees¹ is suspended:

Due to persistent attacks against human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia

Bogotá, June 13, 2011

Afro Colombian and indigenous organisations, as well as the four main Colombian Coordination Groups for Human Rights, Peace and Development (*Plataformas de Derechos Humanos, Paz y Desarrollo*), and representatives from different social sectors, have suspended the implementation of the thematic working group on “differential focus”, demanding that the government and state control agencies fulfil the commitments made during this process to protect the life and physical integrity of human rights defenders and community leaders.

According to these organisations, the government is responsible for the death of Ana Fabricia Cordoba murdered in Medellin just 6 days ago, because they did not consult with her nor implement the appropriate protection measures which could have saved her life. So far in 2011, more than 20 human rights defenders have been killed and nearly 100 threatened.

The organisations have therefore suspended National Working Group on Guarantees, a process of dialogue with the government which began in 2009, until the agreed collective and individual protective measures have been implemented for defenders, social leaders, afro Colombian communities, indigenous peoples, rural communities, urban neighbourhood committees, women’s organisations and others.

This decision was made taking the following situations into account:

1. After nearly two years of working group discussions, human rights defenders and social leaders continue to be murdered, threatened, attacked, judicially harassed and disappeared without effective and concrete measures by the colombian government to ensure the legal and work to defend human rights.
2. Although organisations have asked the government to make progress in cases of officials involved in the illegal intelligence carried out by the DAS, investigations have not advanced in identifying and prosecuting those responsible for these crimes at the highest level. A number of DAS officials under investigation for participating in this scandal, are still in office, such as the current director of the agency.
3. The national government is not clear in the way it carries out dialogue with civil society and human rights organisations. Each government agency has its own policy for dialogue with civil society and this dynamic means that its actions are diffused and fragmented.
4. The Colombian State has not yet delivered results in investigations of threats and other crimes against human rights defenders and social leaders. Impunity levels continue to rise. On the other hand, many advocates are still victims of unfounded criminal proceedings.

¹ In Spanish, *Mesa Nacional de Garantías*

5. A year ago, the Alvaro Uribe government, in Decree 1740 issued by the Ministry of the Interior and Justice, modified the Protection Programme and substantially reduced protective measures that were being implemented for social leaders and human rights defenders, trade unionists, indigenous peoples, Afro Colombians, forcibly displaced people, women and other at-risk sectors of the population.

Since the main aim of the National Working Group process was to provide the sufficient protection necessary to fully guarantee the work of defending human rights, and given that the multiple attacks have repeatedly brought to the Working Group discussions, without concrete results:

We demand an immediate audience with President Juan Manuel Santos, in his capacity as head of state, to insist on a rapid response with effective measures to protect the lives of social leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia.

We value highly the role played by the OHCHR and UNDP as Technical Secretaries of the process and the strong involvement of the members of the international community, and we call upon their good will to continue accompanying the struggle for life and the full respect of human rights in Colombia.

Human Rights, Peace and Development Coordination Groups
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