

International Civil Society Organisations reject the assassinations of and attacks against social leaders and demand the Colombian government to investigate the facts and punish those responsible



The international civil society organisations endorsing this public statement express their deepest concerns with regard to the upsurge of threats and attacks against the lives of social leaders in Colombia and urge the Colombian Government to respond effectively to stop this bloodbath and provide guarantees for the legitimate nature of their work.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the records of the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacements (Codhes) 9 social leaders have been assassinated and another 140 have received threats since the beginning of 2018. See <https://www.elspectador.com/noticias/nacional/consultoria-para-los-derechos-humanos-alerta-sobre-etnocidio-en-colombia-articulo-736165>

On Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, in Bogota, two men questioned human rights defender Blanca Nubia Diaz, according to a statement by Movice. The men called her “snitch guerrilla in a political campaign”, kidnapped, sedated, and threatened her and in a clear act of gender-based violence cut her hair<sup>2</sup>.

On Thursday January 25<sup>th</sup>, in the district of la Guaripa in the department of Sucre the land claimant brothers **Humberto Manuel Escobar Mercado, Prisciliano Manuel Mercado García and Manuel Eusebio Osorio Escobar** were assassinated while attempting to demarcate the limits of their farm “La Concepción”<sup>3</sup>.

On Friday January 26<sup>th</sup>, in the city of Quibdó, **Eleazar Tequía Vitucay**, an indigenous leader, and coordinator of the indigenous guard of the Embera Katío el Dieciocho reserve, was assassinated by members of the national army<sup>4</sup>. According to the public statement from the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the homicide occurred following a communal education initiative that demanded rights to education for the boys, girls and adolescents of the reserve.

On Saturday January 27<sup>th</sup>, in the city of Buenaventura, the social leader, member of the Black Communities' Process, **Temístocles Machado**, was assassinated. Mr. Machado had been the victim of threats for over 10 years for his work defending the rights of one hundred families from the Isla de Paz neighbourhood, who were at risk of being displaced as a result of the actions carried out by businessmen and armed groups from the port aspiring to acquire the land in order to construct stores and parking spaces as part of the expansion plan.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.movimientodevictimas.org/?q=content/denuncia-p%C3%BAblica-blanca-nubia-d%C3%ADaz-fue-secuestrada-en-bogot%C3%A1>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.movimientodevictimas.org/?q=content/denuncia-p%C3%BAblica-asesinados-tres-hermanos-reclamantes-de-tierra-en-sucre>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/ejercito-ofrecio-disculpas-comunidad-indigena-por-asesinato-de-lider-en-choco-articulo-736454>

<sup>5</sup> See [http://lasillavacia.com/silla-pacifico/don-temis-otra-voz-de-buenaventura-que-se-silencia-64397?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=El%2520tarjet%25C3%25B3n%2520de%2520La%2520U%2520para%2520seguir%2520siendo%2520fuerte%2520en%2520el%2520Senado](http://lasillavacia.com/silla-pacifico/don-temis-otra-voz-de-buenaventura-que-se-silencia-64397?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=El%2520tarjet%25C3%25B3n%2520de%2520La%2520U%2520para%2520seguir%2520siendo%2520fuerte%2520en%2520el%2520Senado)

That same day, on January 27<sup>th</sup>, in the evening the leader **María Cecilia Lozano**, survivor of the Mapiripán massacre, Coordinator of the Women's Network of Displacement Victims in Meta, member of the Departmental Victims Round Table, which is working on land restitution, collective return and the rights of victims organised under the Association of Displaced Women in Meta (Asomudem), was robbed of her belongings and attacked with a knife by a man on a motorcycle.

According to the statement issued by Humanidad Vigente and Asomudem, on the afternoon of Sunday January 28<sup>th</sup>, when a human rights defender called the social leader's mobile phone number, a man answered and, referring to Mrs. Lozano said: "she is sucking on gladioli and we are going to kick her ass (ella está chupando gladiolo y le vamos a partir el culo)".<sup>6</sup>

On Monday January 30<sup>th</sup>, according to information shared by the human rights defenders' organisation Credhos<sup>7</sup> in Cantagallo, South Bolivar, the communal leader and human rights defender **Nixon Mutis** was found dead.

On Monday January 30<sup>th</sup>, in the municipality of San Calixto, North Santander, **Leidy Amaya**, who was working as health promoter, was assassinated<sup>8</sup>.

These new incidents can be added to a long and painful list of assassination, threats, information theft<sup>9</sup> and disappearances of social leaders.<sup>10</sup> They are despairing messages for victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, who are currently promoting peacebuilding in the territories.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://humanidadvigente.net/>

<sup>7</sup> [@Credhos\\_Paz](#)

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/asesinan-dos-lideres-comunitarios-mas-uno-en-el-sur-de-bolivar-y-otro-en-el-catatumbo-articulo-736241>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.movimientodevictimas.org/?q=content/denuncia-p%C3%BAblica-hurto-y-sustracci%C3%B3n-de-informaci%C3%B3n-sensible-defensores-de-derechos-humanos>

<sup>10</sup> Between January and June 2017, We are Defenders' Information System on Aggressions Against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia (SIADDHH), recorded a total of **335 individual aggressions against defenders**. See <https://somosdefensores.org/index.php/publicaciones/informes-siaddhh/146-aguzate>

In addition to the situation faced by social leaders, we as international organisations committed to peace in Colombia, also wish to draw attention to the assassinations of members of the FARC, which according to the report from the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, rose to 34 in December of 2017. The assassination of a further 13 relatives of members of the FARC should be added to this number<sup>11</sup>. In January 2018, an additional four members were assassinated, including one minor<sup>12</sup>. Protecting the lives of ex-combatants is one of the Government's main commitments according to the peace agreement.

We urge the Colombian government, in its role as human rights guarantor, to put in place the means to protect the lives and work of social leaders, to adopt all necessary measures to ensure that such crimes do not reoccur and to effectively investigate the material and intellectual authors of these crimes and to punish them to the full extent of the law.

We call on the accredited diplomatic bodies in Colombia and the international community to condemn these acts and to monitor the judicial processes so that these crimes are not left unpunished.

**Bogota, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

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<sup>11</sup> See

[https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/informe\\_trimestral\\_sec\\_gnal\\_mision\\_de\\_verificacion\\_de\\_la\\_onu\\_en\\_colombia\\_0.pdf](https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/informe_trimestral_sec_gnal_mision_de_verificacion_de_la_onu_en_colombia_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/paz/farc-denuncia-asesinato-de-tres-de-sus-militantes-en-narino-articulo-736608>