

International Civil Society Organizations Reject Stigmatizing Claims against the Humanitarian Caravan to Cañón del Micay in Argelia, Cauca department



Bogotá, November 5, 2020. The international civil society organizations signed onto this statement denounce and warn of the life-threatening risks against the social leaders and human rights defenders that organized the Humanitarian Caravan to Cañón del Micay. The work of these social movements and the lives of these individuals are at risk due to the stigmatizing declarations of Emilio Archila, Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization and Consolidation, in which he refers to their actions as "pure politicking" from sectors that "use violent acts to continue dividing Colombians."¹

The Humanitarian Caravan, which took place between October 29 and November 2, is a legitimate civil society activity. According to its organizers, the Humanitarian Caravan seeks to raise awareness of and reject the violence experienced by Campesino, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities from Cañón del Micay, a region located between the municipalities of Argelia and El Tambo in the Cauca department. In April 2020, there was a massive forced displacement of Black and Campesino communities from Cañón del Micay, a consequence of threats to social leaders and the assassination of several members of the social organization Afrorenace, which forms part of the National Agrarian Coordinator (*Coordinador Nacional Agrario*, CNA). Among the many assassinations was the renowned social leader Teodomiro Sotelo Anacaona.²

Days prior to the launch of the Caravan, multiple attacks occurred in its planned trajectory. Carlos Navia, a member and founder of the social organization Asocomunal, which promoted the Humanitarian Caravan from the Argelia municipality, was murdered on October 26.³ The day before the Caravan left, a traditional doctor⁴ was murdered in the village of El Plateado, Argelia, a site the Caravan visited along its route, and where clashes between two armed groups took place.⁵

¹ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/cali/organizaciones-sociales-rechazan-declaraciones-de-consejero-presidencial-546669>

² <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/colombia-25445>

³ <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/colombia-asesinato-del-sr-carlos-navia-en-el-departamento-del-cauca>

⁴ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/cali/banda-armada-asesina-a-medico-invidente-en-argelia-cauca-546206>

⁵ <https://www.wradio.com.co/noticias/regionales/fuertes-combates-generan-temor-en-zona-rural-de-argelia-cauca/20201029/nota/4081998.aspx>

The stigmatization of human rights defenders, based on their advocacy work, increases the risk of attacks and violations targeted against them. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted the effects of this stigmatization in his Colombia report⁶ and international human rights organizations have denounced these stigmatizing behaviors and actions on several occasions.⁷

According to the OHCHR, in 2019, 65% of the assassinations registered against human rights defenders in Colombia were ethnic leaders and 50% were in four departments including Cauca.⁸ This has been an increasing trend since 2016. According to records from the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace⁹, so far in 2020, of the 250 human rights defenders murdered, 81 have been in Cauca. As of September 2020, 9 massacres have been registered.¹⁰

It is crucial that the Colombian State provide adequate guarantees for the life and work of human rights defenders and social leaders. These guarantees cannot simply amount to militarizing the territory. The State needs to assume measures to investigate these cases and bring the intellectual and material authors of the incidents, denounced by the Campesino, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous organizations and populations in the region, to justice.

We ask the international community and the diplomatic corps present in Colombia to accompany the communities on the ground and use their diplomatic channels to urge the Colombian government to take urgent, comprehensive measures in coordination with the communities to address the structural causes of the humanitarian crisis in the Cauca department. We also ask the international community to urge Colombian government officials to refrain from making defamatory statements that increase the risk of attacks against human rights defenders, social leaders and members of communities and sectors in mobilization.

Cooperation Space for Peace¹¹

⁶ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/354/05/PDF/G1935405.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷ <http://www.oidhaco.org/?cat=1081&lang=es>

⁸ <https://undocs.org/es/A/HRC/43/3/Add.3>

⁹ <http://www.indepaz.org.co/lideres/>

¹⁰ <http://www.indepaz.org.co/masacres-los-tapabocas-mas-usados/>

¹¹ ABColombia, Act Iglesia Sueca, Broederlijk Delen, Caritas Suiza, Christian Aid, Colombia Human Rights Network (Washington, New York, New Jersey), Comité Noruego de Solidaridad con América Latina, Comundo, Fastenopfer, Federación Mundial Luterana, Fokus, Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina, Forum Civ, Fundación Sueca por los Derechos Humanos, Grupo de Trabajo Suiza Colombia -ASK!-, Heks-Eper, ICCO, , International Action for Peace (observer), kolkol - Menschenrechte für Kolumbien, Latin American Working Group, Mundubat, Movimiento por la Paz -MPDL-en Colombia, ODHACO, Oxfam, Paz con Dignidad, Peace Brigades International -PBI- (observadora), Protection International, SweFOR (observer), Swissaid, Terre des Hommes Suisse, WOLA.