

via fax: 011 571 596 0631

Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos
President of the Republic of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000

Sr. Fiscal General Eduardo Montealegre
Attorney General of Colombia

January 23, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely saddened by the assassination of **Aldemar Parra Garcia**, a community leader and a land rights defender in El Hatillo in Bolívar Department, where he advocated against the community's forced displacement from environmental destruction and pollution caused by coal mining companies. On January 7 two unknown men riding a red motorcycle killed Aldemar Parra García with three shots to the back.

He was the nephew of community leaders Alfonso Martínez, Yolima Parra and Diana Fonseca, all of whom have been constantly threatened and harassed because of their advocacy for the residents of El Hatillo. Agriculture and fishing have been compromised and residents displaced as a result of the operation of five mines that surround the community: Calenturitas, owned by Grupo Prodeco, a Colombian subsidiary of the Swiss company Glencore; Descanso Norte and Pribbenow, owned by the US company Drummond; and El Hatillo and La Francia, owned by the Murray Energy Corporation, the largest coal mining company in the US.

For many years, mining companies have been suspected of being responsible for attacks against community residents who protest the environmental destruction caused by large-scale industrial mining, as well as against mining union leaders. In 2009, a civil lawsuit was filed in the US against Drummond for its conspiracy with paramilitary groups. A similar lawsuit is pending in Colombian courts. In February 2013 Drummond contractor Jaime Blanco was sentenced to 38 years in prison for organizing the 2001 murder of two union leaders: Valmore Locarno and Victor Hugo Orcasita, were, respectively, the president and vice president of the Sintramienergetica trade union. In May 2015, Alfredo Araujo, a Colombian executive with Drummond, was arrested for ordering those assassinations.

We are greatly concerned about the high number of killings of human rights defenders in Colombia. In 2016 at least 85 persons were killed as a direct result of their human rights work. This number exceeds the number killed in any country in 2016. In a ruling of January 10, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights found the State of Colombia responsible for failing to prevent the murder of human rights defender Ana Teresa Yarce in 2004 because the State did not provide the necessary protective measures to safeguard her life. The Court reiterated that States must adopt protection measures for human rights defenders that are appropriate to their human rights work and that can be modified in accordance with the level of risk they face, which should be determined by risk assessments.

We **strongly urge you to**

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Aldemar Parra Garcia, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- investigate reports of death threats and other forms of intimidation against human rights defenders and adopt immediate measures to ensure their protection

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
Andy O'Neal, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email onealRA@state.gov
John Brandt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via email
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia and Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline Defenders 1/12/2017_Colombia

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: