

via fax: 011 571 596 0631

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

via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876

Sr. Ministro Juan Fernando Cristo
Minister of Interior of Colombia

April 25, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the continuing death threats against trade unionists and human rights defenders in the Valle del Cauca Department.

On April 11, a written death threat, signed by the paramilitary group Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, was left in Cali at two human rights organizations and a trade union: Trade Union Confederation (CUT), Political Prisoners Solidarity (CSSP), and the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE). The threat was addressed to **Martha Giraldo** of MOVICE-Valle del Cauca, **José Milciades Sánchez** from the SINTRAUNICOL trade union; **Walter Agredo** from CSPP, and **Wilson Sánchez** from CUT. It named 15 individuals from CSPP, CUT, MOVICE, trade unions, and the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights.

The threat stated, "We are exterminating all those left-wing, activist, human rights and peace process defenders, indigenous leaders, People's Congress activists, trade unionists, guerrilla collaborators, sons-of-bitches gonorrhoea rats, we know how you camouflage yourselves. We declare as military targets all those who disguise themselves as defenders of the workers grouped together in different trade union organizations...We also recommend that the community stays away from these people, since those that accompany them will also be shot."

These threats are evidence that paramilitary groups continue to operate in Colombia despite their supposed demobilization in a government-sponsored process that began in 2005. According to the Colombian NGO Somos Defensores, "We Are Defenders," 19 human rights defenders have been murdered in the first three months of 2016. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, paramilitary groups continue to represent the principal public security challenge in the country.

In the light of this evidence, we **strongly urge** that you take the following actions:

- thoroughly and impartially investigate the threats described above, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- take all measures deemed appropriate by those threatened to guarantee their safety;
- take decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups and their connections to national security forces;
- fulfill your obligations to protect human rights defenders pursuant to the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinator

copies: MOVICE via US mail
Luis Carlos Villegas, 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 for 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

UA 88/16_Colombia

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