

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

February 25, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply saddened and concerned to hear of another assassination of a human rights defender, **Yoryanis Isabel Bernal Varela** of the Wiwa tribe in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta who was murdered on January 26. She was an indigenous leader and activist who fought to protect indigenous and women's rights in her community.

Eyewitnesses in Valledupar in Cesar Department said several people on a motorcycle threatened her with a gun and then shot her in the head. They suspect that the assassins are paramilitaries.

This assassination is a further example of threats and attacks on indigenous people since the Colombian government signed the peace accords with the FARC. On January 6 indigenous rights activist Olmedo Pito García, who organized with the Landless Movement of Manuel Quintín's Grandchildren, was stabbed as he was walking home in Cauca Department. On January 17 the bodies of prominent Afro-Colombian peace activist Eilsen Manyoma and her husband Joe Javier Rodallega were found murdered (cf our letter of Jan 26). At least 123 human rights defenders have been killed in Colombia since the signing of the peace accords. Paramilitary presence seems to be emboldened by the retreat of the FARC through the peace accords. However, officials continue to deny the presence of paramilitaries.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), an independent body of the Organization of American States, warned in November that the increase in killings of human rights defenders in Colombia is "alarming" and also noted that many activists face reprisals, harassment and threats. IACHR reported that at least 50 human rights defenders were killed in Colombia in 2016 alone.

In light of these facts we **strongly urge** that you

- quickly and efficiently investigate, identify, and charge those responsible for the assassination of Yoryanis Isabel Bernal Varela;
- demand that paramilitary groups are completely dismantled throughout Colombia;
- demand that military forces throughout Colombia cut any ties with criminal or paramilitary organizations to guarantee peace and security in the country;
- guarantee the security of family members of those who have been assassinated as well as other community leaders, members and residents of these areas.

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  
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email DaleyRS@state.gov  
Colombia Desk, US State Department (attention: Ian Arzeni and Gail Morgado) ~ 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  
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur for the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email rcelorio@oas.org  
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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