

via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co Excmo. Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira Attorney General of Colombia
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August 22, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply troubled to learn about new threats against documentary filmmaker **Bladimir Sánchez Espitia**. The filmmaker believes the escalating threats could be related to the human rights subjects he investigates in his documentary work, which include mining companies, local police, or political figures that may have interests in those companies or their development projects.

At 2:30am on July 30 a man with a gun came looking for him at a building that he often visits in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Bogotá. He was not there at the time, but multiple witnesses, including the building's security guard, told Sánchez the man had a gun and asked for him by name. The visit was the latest in a series of threats dating back to at least 2012.

In 2012 the filmmaker fled his home in Huila Department, south of Bogotá, after he received death threats related to a video he posted on You Tube which showed anti-riot police forcibly removing protesters from the construction site of a hydroelectric dam in Huila. After posting the video, he received phone calls from several unidentified callers whom he believed to be police officers in Huila.

On April 15, 2016, unidentified individuals broke into Sánchez's apartment in Bogotá and stole a computer, video camera, a storage disk, and other hardware. The stolen equipment contained material alleging that mining companies participated in human rights violations, which he planned to use in future documentary films. The thieves did not take any other valuable items. Sánchez and the legal support organization José Alvear Restepo Lawyers Collective requested that the Attorney General's office conduct a full investigation into the burglary, but Sánchez, who returned to Huila not long after, said he is not aware of any progress in the case.

In late May after his family was threatened, Sánchez again relocated to Bogotá. At the time he was working as co-director and executive producer of a documentary for the Discovery Channel about the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group.

Because of our serious concern about the extreme violence and threats towards journalists, we **strongly urge you to**

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Bladimir Sánchez Espitia, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Sánchez Espitia, in strict accordance with his wishes
- guarantee in all circumstances that all journalists in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Camilo Reyes, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email
Colombia Desk, US State Department (attention: Ian Arzeni and Gail Morgado) ~ via email
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
Edison Lanza, Rapporteur for the Rights of Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
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: