

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 23, 2017

Dear Sirs,

We are deeply distressed over recent death threats and cyber attacks directed at staff members of the news agency **Análisis Urbano** (Urban Analysis) and members of one of their sources, **Corpades** (Corporation for Peace and Social Development).

The latest wave of cyber attacks against their webpage, computers and profiles on social media started on July 11, shortly after Análisis Urbano reported on the operations of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) in the region of San José de Apartadó in Antioquia Department. In an apparent attempt to gain access to the organization's official Facebook page, Luis Fernando Quijano, director of Análisis Urbano, received more than 60 Facebook friendship requests. Severe cyber attacks occurred between July 14 and 15 when some computers were infected and attackers almost succeeded in gaining control of the news agency's webpage.

On July 24, at 2:20am, an unidentified person made a phone call to the house of the family of one of the agency's sources and threatened to kill them if the source continued to provide information to Análisis Urbano. Police traced the origin of the call from a public phone but were unable to identify the author. These threats follow a series of Análisis Urbano articles denouncing alliances between paramilitary groups and politicians, particularly in various regions of Medellín, namely Bajo Cauca and Nordeste Department. The threats were directed mainly at the investigative team that uncovered corruption involving the former mayor of Zaragoza, Antioquia Department.

Although the Colombian government signed a peace deal in November 2016, Carlos Alfonso Negret Mosquera, the Colombian Ombudsman, reports that 156 social leaders and human rights defenders have been killed between January 2016 and March 2017. In addition, there have been reports of five disappearances, 33 attacks and over 500 threats. He says "one of the main causes of this phenomenon is the attempt by illegal armed groups to occupy the territory from which the FARC have withdrawn." Despite evidence to the contrary, the government of Colombia continues to maintain that these killings are neither systematic nor linked to paramilitary activity.

Therefore we **urgently call upon you to**

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and cyber attacks against Análisis Urbano, Corpades and their sources, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the staff of Análisis Urbano, Corpades, and their sources;
- investigate the pattern of killings and harassment of human rights defenders, identify the root causes and the authors, and take determined action to prevent them.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators

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

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