

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 31, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply troubled at the killing, on August 18, of miner **Alexis Gregorio Acevedo** as he participated in a prayer vigil with other small-scale artisanal miners who are organizing resistance to the expansion plans of multinational mining companies. We were glad to learn today that a 42-day strike has apparently ended after an agreement was reached between the government and the miners. We hope that the violence will end and that miners' demands will be met.

Over 10,000 artisanal and ancestral miners in northeastern Antioquia Department have been protesting government policies that favor large foreign companies over local small- and medium-scale miners. Miners in Segovia and Remedios began a strike on July 21, predicated on the government's implementation of Decree 1102; the decree limits the amount of gold that small-scale miners can sell each month, making it difficult to stay in business. The government's recent laws are tailored to close all small mining operations in the region, paving the way for the Canada-based multinational Gran Colombia Gold Corporation. The Ministry of Mines recently allowed Gran Colombia Gold to purchase titles to much of the land being mined in the area by small-scale artisanal miners, who say the sale was illegal.

With the pretense of now holding titles to land parcels, Gran Colombia Gold, with the help of the government and the police, is trying to illegally evacuate around 120 mines in Segovia and Remedios, with the end goal of opening a large-scale open-pit mine. Over the next ten years it would extract the amount of rock and gold that, if left to traditional methods of artisanal miners, would take 100 years. The negative impact on the environment is expected to be severe.

Police and Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) have been using unwarranted force against the miners and their supporters. They have been using hospitals, schools and even childcare facilities as bases of their attacks. ESMAD arrived on July 31, wounding 11 people in Segovia and 16 in Remedios. On August 14, as 3,000 people were gathered in a worship service for healing (Catholic mass), ESMAD attacked. On August 16, **Brando Stid Ochoa**, an 18 year-old passerby, was killed when a bullet from a police sniper hit him in the chest. On August 18, as the community held a vigil for Brando Stid Ochoa, ESMAD entered and opened fire. The crowd dispersed screaming, crying, and praying amidst the gunshots and explosions. Alexis Gregorio Acevedo was killed.

We are disturbed by the unwarranted use of force by police and ESMAD units to retaliate against civilian protest.

We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of **Alexis Gregorio Acevedo** and **Brandon Stid Ochoa**, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- instruct police and ESMAD to stop using lethal force on peaceful protesters
- craft mining laws in consultation with small-scale artisanal miners so that they can continue to make a living through their traditional mining methods
- implement and monitor agreements made today with the striking miners

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
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Frontline 8/4/2017_Colombia

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