

via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co
Excmo. Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
President of the Republic of Colombia

via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gob.co
Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira
Attorney General of Colombia

November 23, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely disturbed to learn of the assassination of social movement leader **Ramón Alcides García Zapata**, who was coordinating crop substitution programs in northern Antioquia Department. On October 27 unknown assailants killed him as he was returning from the town of San Andres de Cuerquia to his home in the village of Alto de Chirí in Briceño, after receiving a monthly stipend for removing coca and other illicit plants and replacing them with legal crops. He is the second social organizer of crop substitution programs to be murdered in Antioquia in one week, following the murder of Miguel Pérez on October 22 (cf our letter of Oct 26).

Ramón Alcides García Zapata was an active and leading member of the North Antioquia Committee of Boat Operators (ASOCBARE). He was also active in the Patriotic March, a social and political movement of over 2000 political organizations representing the voice of civil society. Founded in 2012, the Patriotic March brings together trade unions, peasant organizations, indigenous activists, women's rights groups, Afro-descendant Colombians, victims' groups, political parties, and student organizations. Since its founding, 139 Patriotic March members have been assassinated.

Despite the peace agreement signed between the Colombia government and FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), political violence—including assassinations—has risen considerably. In 2017 alone, 133 social movement leaders and human rights defenders have been killed. Twenty-five of the killings occurred in October. Carlos Alfonso Negret Mosquera, the Colombian Ombudsman, has stated that "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main causes of this phenomenon is the attempt by illegal armed groups to occupy the territory from which the FARC have withdrawn."

As part of the 2016 peace agreement, farmers who cultivate coca are to be given the opportunity, through a national program, to substitute their coca with alternative, legal crops. However, some communities are reluctant to participate because of the retaliatory violence they face from armed groups. In northern and western Antioquia, right-wing paramilitaries and criminal gangs are trying to seize territories abandoned by the FARC, eager to cash in on the lucrative illegal economy of cocaine production. Such groups are often deployed to advance the interests of powerful landlords and cartels. Local farmers are coerced into growing coca for the drug trade.

Because of this violence and danger to leaders in rural communities who are participating in the government's crop substitution program, we **strongly urge** that you

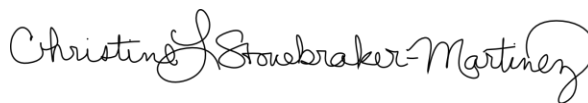
- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of **Ramón Alcides García Zapata**, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take proper measures to guarantee the physical, psychological and social safety of Antioquia's rural communities;
- take all necessary steps to eliminate death threats from criminal organizations against those who participate in crop substitution and who resist pressure to participate in the anti-eradication protests.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators

and



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Camilo Reyes, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email
Ryan Reid, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via email
Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia-human rights affairs, US State Dept ~ via email
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia and for Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, 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: