

via email: [contacto@presidencia.gov.co](mailto:contacto@presidencia.gov.co)  
**Excmo. Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos**  
President of the Republic of Colombia

via email: [despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co](mailto:despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co)  
**Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira**  
Attorney General of Colombia

March 30, 2018

Dear Sirs:

We urge you to use all appropriate resources to locate campesino leader **José Herrera**, who was disappeared March 20 in the north of Antioquia Department. We ask that you immediately activate urgent measures, hoping that he be found alive.

José Herrera is a well-known and respected community leader. He is President of the Association of Peasants of Toledo (ASCAT-NA) and a member of the Organization of Valdivia. He is a founding member of the Patriotic March Movement-Antioquia Movement and of ASOCBAC (Rural Association of Bajo Cauca). He serves as president of the Community Action Board of the Vereda Mesetas of Puerto Valdivia, and is one of the municipal spokespersons for the Comprehensive National Crop Substitution Program.

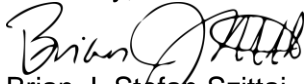
José Herrera works as a motorcycle taxi driver in Puerto Valdivia on the Cauca River. He was last seen riding his motorcycle at 11am on March 20, heading to the village of Filadelfia de Ituango, Antioquia Department. It was mistakenly reported on March 22 that his body had been discovered by the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the National Army. But it was later announced by Brigadier General Juan Carlos Ramírez, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, that his body was not found; he is still reported missing.

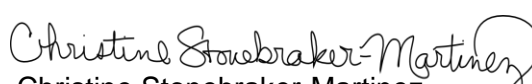
The disappearance of José Herrera is indicative of the disturbing trend of attacks on farmers involved in the crop substitution program (cf our letters of October 26, November 23, and December 25, 2017). As part of the 2016 peace agreement, farmers who cultivate coca are to be given the opportunity, 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.

We strongly urge that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough search for José Herrera
- provide protection measures for the members of the ASOCBAC and the leaders that promote the National Comprehensive Crop Substitution Program, in strict accordance with their wishes
- 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-Coordinator

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Camilo Reyes, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643 and email  
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email  
Ryan Reid and Christine Russell, Desk Officers for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via email  
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for Colombia, 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:**