

<p>via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co Excmo. Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia</p>	<p>via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira Attorney General of Colombia</p>
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April 24, 2018

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed by the murders of two social leaders, **Maria Magdalena Cruz Rojas** and **Belisario Benavidez Ordoñez**, in two separate attacks on Good Friday, March 30.

Maria Magdalena Cruz worked in defense of campesinos cultivating coca crops and helped with the implementation of government programs meant to substitute coca crops with alternative ones in Mapiripán municipality, Meta Department. Unidentified hooded hitmen assassinated her at home in front of her husband and her son.

In a separate attack, unknown men murdered Belisario Benavidez Ordoñez, age 35, as he was leaving his home in Rosas municipality, Cauca Department, at 7:00p.m. He was accompanied by his three-year-old son and a 12-year-old nephew; he was shot four times and died instantly. In addition to his three-year-old son, he leaves his wife and two other children, ages 7 and 14. The police arrested one suspect found with a gun but released him hours later.

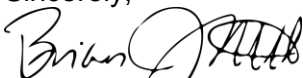
Benavidez came to Rosas municipality five years ago after being displaced from his birth city of Patia. He later became a member of the local Victims' Board, which took care of the region's victims of violence, and was in charge of organizing the International Victims Day event.

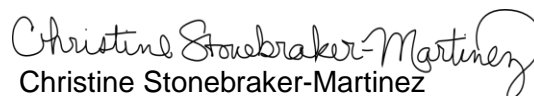
In a report at the end of March, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated that "...since the implementation of the peace agreements, the murders of human rights defenders have increased persistently. According to an Ombudsperson's report, between January 2017 and February 2018, there have been 121 murders of human rights defenders." The Commission observes with concern that the victims...carried out actions aimed at implementing the peace agreements related to land distribution.

We **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the murders of Maria Magdalena Cruz Rojas and Belisario Benavidez Ordoñez, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate steps to implement and strengthen the state's protective policies in the areas especially weakened by the armed conflict.

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 ~ via email
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: