

<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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May 26, 2018

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely saddened and disturbed by the disastrous effects that continual flooding related to the construction of the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project is having on the communities along the Cauca River in the municipality of Valdivia in Antioquia Department. The \$5 billion project has received funding from IDB Invest, the private-sector branch of the Inter-American Development Bank.

Poor ecological management practices on the part of Public Enterprises of Medellín (EPM), the company responsible for the project construction, have caused major issues. Between April 28 and May 7 three landslides occurred which residents claim were caused by EPM's failure to collect enormous amounts of plant material left from excavation. These were washed away by the river and blocked the flow of water through a tunnel intended to keep the reservoir from filling to unsafe levels. The tunnel filled much more quickly than expected. On May 10, EPM attempted to drain the reservoir, causing damage to the power generating infrastructure. On May 12, the landslide blockage cleared naturally, unblocking the tunnel but also releasing a rush of water that caused extensive flooding downstream and forced evacuations.

As of May 22, at least 25,000 people have been evacuated due to flooding which has razed a village, two bridges, a school, and a clinic. Many evacuees spent days in tent shelters without adequate living conditions. Jorge Londoño, director of EPM, said it is "difficult to answer if the Hidroituango [dam] will be saved." If the damages to the dam cannot be repaired in time, and if the reservoir continues filling at the current rate, the dam could burst entirely, and ensuing flooding would affect 100,000 people in 12 municipalities downstream.

Local residents and environmentalists have opposed the construction of the dam since it began in 2009 because it is doing untold damage to the riverbed and has disrupted agriculture and fishing. They also maintain that the area contains mass graves where hundreds of victims of Colombia's armed conflict are buried. Armed groups also operate in the region, extracting wealth from illegal gold mines and cocaine trafficking routes. Opponents of the dam continue to be murdered and threatened. Hugo Albeiro George Perez and his nephew Domar Egidio Zapata George were assassinated May 2, and at least two more local activists have been shot dead by unknown assailants since (cf our letter of May 11).

Because of the imminent danger of the dam totally collapsing we **strongly urge** that you

- halt the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project so that the Cauca River can flow freely;
- include representatives of the affected communities in the Unified Control Post that is attempting to manage the crisis and provide effective communication of important updates;
- provide immediate humanitarian assistance to residents being displaced by the flooding.

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai


 Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

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

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