

<p>via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez 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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March 22, 2019

Dear Sirs:

We, are deeply distressed about the assassination of LGBTI rights defender **Liliana Holguín**, age 40, and **her nephew** (unnamed), on February 26 as they were traveling by motorbike from Guáramo to Cauca in the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia Department. Persons on another motorbike approached them and fired several gunshots, killing them both.

Liliana was a member of the LGBTI Committee of Cauca, which campaigns against discrimination and in defense of equal rights. In addition to organizing empowerment and equality workshops, she also coordinated support for victims of forced displacement, which has affected many communities in Bajo Cauca.

Despite the signing of the 2016 peace agreements, paramilitaries and other armed groups remain highly active in the Bajo Cauca region, particularly in drug trafficking. Criminal organizations (*bandas criminales* such as Los Urabeños, El Clan del Golfo, and Los Paisas) often coerce members of vulnerable communities to handle illicit drugs for them or risk being killed. When LGBTI leaders are assassinated, authorities too often ignore or overlook the political nature of their killings. Instead, they attempt to link the murders to involvement in illicit activity. Putting forth this narrative (“they must have been smuggling drugs for the *bandas criminales*”) serves the interest of the assassins by providing them with a cover.


Since 2016 approximately 500 social activists have been murdered throughout Colombia, including LGBTI advocates, trade unionists, environmental defenders, and community leaders. In the majority of cases, nobody has been arrested or charged. LGBTI activists in Bajo Cauca are particularly at risk; they have been repeatedly named in threats circulated in pamphlets by paramilitaries.

Liliana Holguín was a visible member of the LGBTI activist community in Bajo Cauca. Therefore, her death should be treated as a political assassination. Liliana became the eighth LGBTI rights leader killed in Cauca municipality since 2018.

We **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a prompt, independent, effective and impartial investigation into the murders of Lilian Holguin and her nephew
- work to dismantle paramilitaries and other *bandas criminales* organizations operating in the Bajo Cauca
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders, including LGBTI activists, are able carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan
 Co-Coordinators


 Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, 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 and Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
 Margarete May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
 Flávia Piovesan, Rapporteur on the Rights of LGBTI Persons, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

JFC_2/28/19_Colombia

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