

<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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July 2, 2019

Dear Sirs,

We continue to be aghast at yet another death threat against a prominent human rights leader, **Yirley Velasco**, in El Salado Village, Carmen de Bolívar municipality, in Bolívar Department.

On June 30 the paramilitary organization AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) sent Yirley Velasco a white envelope tied with a black ribbon which contained the death threat to her and her family: "you're a rat, a guerrilla...we will do the same or worse as what they did to Maria del Pilar Hurtado. . . The police are our allies. They are the ones keeping us informed about you." Maria del Pilar Hurtado is the community leader whose assassination on June 21 triggered national indignation (cf our letter of June 25).

In 2000 members of the AUC raped Yirley Velasco when she was 14 years old as part of a brutal six-day massacre in El Salado that left more than 100 people slaughtered. Many of the residents who left the town after the massacre, including Yirley, have since returned and have formed the El Salado Victims Roundtable. The Roundtable sued the state for its complicity in the massacre; in retaliation, residents have been receiving death threats since January.

Last month, the victims were awarded a judicial victory. The Administrative Tribunal of San Andrés found that the Defense Ministry, the Navy and the National Police had failed to act to either prevent or stop the massacre. The Tribunal ordered the state to pay almost \$7 million to the survivors and family members of victims and to build a commemorative statue honor of the dead. The National Center for Historical Memory was ordered to make a documentary on the massacre. The Defense Ministry, the National Police and the Navy were ordered to publish the court sentence on their websites, and were ordered to provide additional education to their forces on human rights and international humanitarian law.

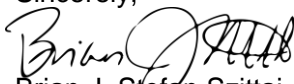
Yirley Velasco is also active defending and empowering women. Together with twelve other survivors, Yirley founded *Mujeres Sembrando Vida* (Women Sowing Life). She travels throughout El Salado and other rural towns teaching women about their rights and assisting victims of sexual violence in reporting their attacks.

Yirley Velasco has requested protection from the National Protection Unit (UNP), but so far has received only a bulletproof vest and a cell phone. Fearing for her life, she said she's at "extraordinary risk" and needs actual protection if she wants to live and continue helping victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence.

We **strongly urge** that you immediately

- take all steps necessary to guarantee the security of Yirley Velasco, her family and colleagues, in strict accordance with their wishes
- implement effective actions which address all actions of paramilitary groups that continue to function and threaten lives throughout the country

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


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
Christine Russell, Desk Officer 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
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, 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

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